

**Being Teachers, Being Women, Being Human:  
Critically Re-storying Teacher *Praxis* in Selected DEIS Schools in  
Ireland, 2013-2015.**

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## Abstract

Being Teachers, Being Women, Being Human: Critically Re-storying Teacher *Praxis* in Selected DEIS Schools in Ireland, 2013-2015.

A growing body of recent literature on teaching has developed a focus on teachers' perspectives and on life in schools, (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin and Connelly, 1995; Freeman and Schmidt, 2000; Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995; Kubler LaBoskey, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lyons, 2010; Nias, 1989; and Nieto, 2003, 2005). These studies take teachers' accounts of teaching as the focal point and investigate teacher knowledge in order to help us understand how teachers think and understand what they do. Within some studies tensions between the 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses of schooling are troubled (Burke, 2007; Deegan 2007; Keating, 1998; Nieto, 2005). These studies demonstrate the privileging of 'structural matters' over 'reflectivity, constructivism and diversity' (Deegan, 2007:185). This body of scholarship exposes a gap in our current knowledge about the 'ideological, moral and emotional dimensions of teaching and teacher education' (ibid: 185, 186). This gap relates to 'substantive attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, assumptions, [and] ways of doing things' (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992:219). This study contributes to addressing those gaps by critically re-storying teachers lives in selected DEIS<sup>1</sup> schools in Ireland.

Two classical epistemological pillars support the study, one Interpretive, drawing on Pragmatism and Phenomenology, the other Critical. Feminist, Critical and Post-Critical perspectives on pedagogy create the contemporary theoretical platform. The study adopts a Feminist Emancipatory and Narrative Inquiry stance. The Narrative Inquiry methodology supports the critical investigation of teacher *praxis* troubling how teachers story their lives. Nine teachers, engaged in the inquiry over a seventeen-month period between 2013 and 2015, five secondary teachers and four primary teachers. The study inquires into the '*contextual relationality*' of being teachers in DEIS schools through constructions of self, students, school and pedagogy.

The thesis contributes epistemological insights into the ideological, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of teaching. It demonstrates how inscriptions of gender identity, biography, culture and experience intersect with the contextual realities of teaching in DEIS schools. It also demonstrates the humanity of teachers, the demands and challenges teaching poses for them and the implications of these demands for teacher and student wellbeing. The study demonstrates the '*contextual relationality*' of being teachers, women, and human. Consequently, it contributes to understanding the complexity of the relationship between teacher awareness and the possibilities for transformative pedagogical practice in DEIS schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Schools designated as DEIS are supported by the DEIS programme which has been the main vehicle for interventions to address educational disadvantage in schools in Ireland since 2005 (Weir, 2011).



## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed:

Date:



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My sincere thanks to Jim Deegan, my supervisor, for his professional guidance and support. His supervision of the work has been enabling, encouraging, inspiring and undertaken with the generosity of spirit of a great teacher.

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To my precious children, Aoife and Dara, my thanks for your love, loyalty and support. In learning to be your mother, you have been challenging teachers and you have improved me enormously.

***I dedicate this work in loving memory of my father Bob Kelly***

***and in honour of my 92 year old mother Sheila,***

***my first teachers, both true believers in the transformative power of education.***





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## List of Abbreviations

AFL	Assessment for Learning
BTC	Breaking the Cycle
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DAS	Disadvantaged Areas Scheme
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
EPV	Extra Personal Vacation
ERC	Educational Research Centre
ESP	Early Start Programme
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FER	Feminist Emancipatory Research
FIDUROD	Formal, Intractable, Decontextualised, Universalistic, Reductionistic, One-Dimensional
FSA	Family Support Agency
GUI	<i>Growing Up in Ireland Study</i>
GCEB	Giving Children an Even Break
H. Dip.	Higher Diploma
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison Scheme
HSE	Health Services Executive

ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IYP	Incredible Years Programme
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
MIC	Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland
MBSR	Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
MiSP	Mindfulness in Schools Programme
NCAD	National College of Art and Design
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Education Welfare Board
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PSE	Personal Social Education (UK)
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
RP	Restorative Practice
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEN	Special Education Needs
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Political and Health Education (IRL)
SSP	School Support Programme (DEIS)
STP	Support Teacher Project
UCD	University College Dublin

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# **1 Chapter One: Setting the Stage for Her Stories**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This research study sets out to critically engage with how teachers story being teachers in schools serving communities experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage in Ireland. These schools are designated DEIS in status, because they are supported under a programme called Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. It is in these grounded DEIS school contexts that teachers, participating in this research study, teach. The challenges inequality poses for students and for the possibilities for critical pedagogies are best tested in DEIS schools. This study will critically inquire into the fit between teacher awareness, reflected in their storied lives, and teachers' capacity to serve the needs of students in DEIS schools. The study will engage a critical narrative inquiry to trouble the stories we currently tell as educators, about ourselves and others. In doing so it challenges us to expand our stories to better serve the needs of our students and ourselves. Teachers' stories articulate their perspectives on the 'relational contextuality' of teaching in DEIS schools. The term 'relational contextuality' captures my interchangeable use of relational and contextual lenses to explore teachers' storied lives in DEIS schools, (Jim Deegan, Personal Communication, 22.3.2016).

## **1.2 Participating teachers**

Nine teachers participated in the narrative inquiry underpinning this study. They shared their storied lives inside and outside DEIS schools, over a seventeen month period from May 2013 to January 2015. Teachers had at least ten years experience in the classroom, at the start of the fieldwork. Some have spent long careers in DEIS schools. I am, de facto, the tenth participating teacher, turned researcher. I began my primary teaching career in the nineteen eighties in what are now designated DEIS schools. My commitments have been shaped by what I learned in those contexts about the effects of inequalities on the learning opportunities, learning outcomes and lives of students. They have also been shaped by my own experiences of attending both primary and secondary school in what are now designated as DEIS schools.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

My objective was to critically inquire into how teachers story being teachers in DEIS schools. Their stories, and mine, are inscribed with our values, beliefs, dispositions, commitments, visions, missions, cultures and communities. By troubling our stories we were able to challenge the fixed frames of reference we might use to story ourselves, or others, to the world, as teachers, women and human beings. The literature reviewed supported the critical inquiry providing lenses through which we could examine *praxis*, educators' reflections, actions and critical theorizing (Freire, 1972:60). The research story we created became a critical narrative itself challenging the possibilities of critical pedagogies against the 'contextual relationality' of teachers' storied lives in DEIS schools.

The purpose in creating it was to test the limits of our current understandings about being teachers in DEIS schools and challenge, encourage and empower us as educators to better support students and ourselves. In designing this study my goal has been to create a safe, reflective, narrative inquiry space for teachers to explore their own stories. I have been committed to respecting teachers, encouraging them to speak, listening attentively to what they say, challenging them, and faithfully recording and representing their stories and re-storying their stories back to them.

### **1.4 The implications of our stories**

The heartbeat of this research study is in the stories we tell to represent our lives as teachers, women and human beings. The stories we tell and how we tell them, can make us aware of how we perceive others, our contexts and ourselves. The stories we choose not to tell, the ones hovering at the edge of the told stories, can also increase our awareness. This critical narrative inquiry offers teachers support to articulate their stories. It seeks to raise our awareness about the fit between how we story our lives and the limitations or possibilities we set for becoming our best selves. Our stories matter because we use them to represent ourselves to others, even to ourselves. However, as we will see the literature challenges us to see the self we present as fluid, emergent and multilayered rather than as a fixed and forever formed identity. Our stories also have consequences. They are inscribed with the hallmarks of our identities, cultures, class, gender, sexual preferences, dispositions, commitments, inherited and learned values, beliefs and

behaviours. These inscriptions shape our perceptions. Our perceptions in turn shape how we act. Therefore we cannot take our own stories for granted. We have to test the assumptions on which they are founded in the interests of supporting students and developing ourselves.

## **1.5 Narrative Inquiry stance**

The study adopts a narrative inquiry stance. In doing so it recognises that we communicate our knowledge of the world, to each other, through stories. Stories convey our current perspectives and reflections on our lived experiences. By listening, hearing, and critically inquiring into our stories we can explore and alter the limits we place on what, and how, we tell stories about our own lives, and about the lives of others. This makes it possible for us, and for our students, to create better 'stories to live by' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998). Herein lie endless possibilities for learning to expand the 'horizons' of both our own 'understandings' and our mutual understandings, as teachers, as women, and as human beings, (Gadamer, 1975). The narrative inquiry stance adopted in this study is a critical one. It is directed at increasing our awareness of the taken-for-granted assumptions with which our stories are inscribed. The hope is that once we become aware of the assumptions, inherited and learned, on which some of our values, beliefs and behaviours are based, we can take responsibility for them and act to alter them where they fail to serve us and our students.

## **1.6 Turning points**

The study is interested in transitions in teachers' understandings of themselves, their students, pedagogy and the culture and community of their schools. The transition can be seen as the 'turning point' (Strauss, 1959) or the 'epiphany' (Denzin, 2001). Transitions are points where our understanding shifts, our perspective changes, we see things differently as a consequence. Teachers' stories may provide us with an understanding of when transitions occur in their awareness, possibly opening up or closing down perspectives on students, teaching, school culture and pedagogy. Denzin distinguishes between epiphanies arising from 'troubles' and epiphanies arising from 'issues'. Epiphanies arising from 'troubles' relate to problematic interactional situations where 'the individual confronts and experiences a crisis' and in response meets a turning point in which perception is altered, (ibid: 37). Epiphanies arising from 'issues' relate to 'public matters and institutional structures'. Denzin's framework for epiphanies reminds us look out for

moments of transition in our own stories as teachers marking changes in our awareness. These are potential turning points where our learning may expand. It may also contract.

## **1.7 Core research question**

The core question, at the heart of this study is:

What implications does teacher awareness have for teacher *praxis* and consequently for serving the needs of students in DEIS schools?

The core research question seeks to test two assumptions:

The first assumption is that that ‘good teaching requires self-knowledge’ (Palmer, 2007:3). The second assumption is, that the foundations of good teaching are in *praxis*, in other words teaching as the product of ‘reflection, action and critical theorizing’ (Friere, 2007: vii.). The focus of the current study, on how teachers story being teachers, differentiates it from other studies tending to:

‘focus on the development of teachers with respect to professional practice as they age and mature [ ] but rarely on their changes in self-concept’ (Ducharme and Ducharme, 1996:1042).

## **1.8 Embedded research questions**

The core research question is underpinned by four embedded research questions as follows. These questions relate to self, students, school and pedagogy.

### **1.8.1 Embedded question one: Teacher self-awareness**

What can we learn from the storied lives of teachers about the correlation between self-awareness, awareness of students and capacity to support their learning needs?

This question focuses the research study on teachers’ self-awareness. In doing so it seeks to trouble the proposition that ‘how one teaches and what one teaches is a product of who one is, and what one believes to be true’ (Austin and Senese, 2004:1234-1235). In troubling this proposition, by exploring our self-awareness through the versions of



ourselves we present in our stories, we can begin to uncover the fact that the self we may present as a stable and fixed identity is in fact fluid, emergent and subject to change.

### **1.8.2 Embedded question two: Awareness of students.**

How do our perceptions of students, communicated through our storied lives, expand or contract the possibilities for how we relate to our students?

The ability of teachers to become better aware of how they perceive students, particularly students exhibiting challenging behaviours, may effect how teachers respond to students' needs. Increasing awareness by teachers of how they themselves construct student identity, may enable teachers to better empathise with students. If teachers can adopt the 'role of the generalised other' (Mead, 1934:9), expanding their awareness to imagine themselves in their students' shoes, they may significantly improve possibilities for relationships with their students.

### **1.8.3 Embedded question three: Pedagogical awareness**

How does teacher awareness about the possibilities and challenges of pedagogy influence how they teach?

The third question directs our attention towards the inscriptions of our pedagogy and their implications for our practice. The purpose of the question is to unpack the beliefs, values and experiences shaping our interpretations of what is pedagogically possible. This study hopes to support teachers to identify, claim, interpret and engage their pedagogical knowledge critically. The study will provide a reflective space in which teachers can explore the obstacles and opportunities for developing their pedagogical practice.

### **1.8.4 Embedded question four: Understanding school culture and community**

How do teachers' perceptions of the culture and community within their schools shape their possibilities for being and becoming their best selves?

This question directs attention at DEIS schools as social environments exhibiting cultural features. Sociologists define culture in terms of the values held by members of a given group, the norms or rules followed by the group and the material goods or products they

create (Giddens, 1989; Boccock and Thompson, 1992; Bilton et al, 1996;). Schools transmit values and communicate norms through the explicit priorities of the taught curriculum of specific subjects and implicitly through the hidden curriculum (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 1982; Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1983; Anyon, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986). The hidden curriculum, through school rules and rituals, dress codes, time tabling, management of events, production of educational products, distribution of resources etc., communicates implicitly the values and norms which underpin school culture. Inquiring narratively will provide a space for teachers to critically interpret the messages the culture of their school communicates to them about what is valued in their school. The study troubles the fit between the values embedded in the school culture, teachers' values and students' values.

### **1.9 Teachers trouble the meaning of teachers' stories**

Participating teachers troubled me to explain what I meant by 'teachers' stories'. My responses were an attempt to explore their question without shaping their answers, in advance of the fieldwork. I explained that I was interested in what was significant to them, what has shaped and continues to shape their stories. Pushed further by their questions I suggested they might reflect on what enables them to be the teachers they want to be and what obstructs them from being or becoming their best selves. Thinking narratively about their questions I became aware of two things. One, I reflected that were I a teacher approached to participate in a study such as this one, the approach would need to inspire my trust. Secondly, I reflected as a teacher and researcher, that my approach should model the process of engagement I aspired to support in the narrative inquiry. A means emerged as I explored these questions more deeply myself. Consequently, I began to reflect on and record stories representing transitions in my own understanding as a girl, and as teacher, about being a teacher. I presented these stories, orally, to those teachers willing to meet me to discuss possible participation in the study. In doing so I was directing teachers' attention to transitions in my awareness conveyed through my stories. I was also disclosing myself to teachers. I was experiencing for myself part of the challenge I was asking them to take on, by participating in the narrative inquiry. Nine teachers took up the challenge. Five of them are secondary teachers. Four are primary teachers. All currently teach in DEIS schools in Ireland.

## **1.10 Research design for this study**

I have built this study on a theoretical base supported by two pillars, one Interpretive the other Critical. The interpretive pillar is built from Pragmatic and Phenomenological perspectives. The Critical pillar draws heavily on Friere's work (1921-1997). I have built a contemporary Critical Pedagogy platform on top of the twin pillars. This platform combines the creative tensions between critical and post-critical cultural and feminist perspectives. The study combines a feminist emancipatory research perspective with a critical narrative inquiry stance.

## **1.11 Originality of this study**

The uniqueness of this study can best be demonstrated with reference to the:

- originality of the epistemological framework;
- originality of the research focus;
- originality of the feminist emancipatory research perspective
- criticality of the contemporary analytic framework;
- innovativeness and creativity of the narrative approach;
- originality of the overall research design;
- unique focus on women DEIS primary teachers;
- contribution to the unofficial discourses on teaching and teacher education;
- unique timing.

### **1.11.1 Originality of the epistemological framework**

Bredo (2006) identifies three distinct, but interrelated, epistemological strands informing educational research. These strands are external relations, internal relations and dialectical/transactional relations (figure 1-3:26). Each of these approaches to educational research provides a unique lens for inquiry. Bredo signals the danger that 'each of these concerns leads to dysfunction when exaggerated and taken independently' (2006:26). Foucault has made us mindful that all discourses are implicated in relations of power, (1966). Consequently, the epistemological framework designed to underpin this study triangulates the analytic strengths of Interpretive and Critical theories in a classical analytic framework. In doing so it seeks to safeguard against the weaknesses of any one of

these perspectives if used alone, or uncritically. Furthermore the creative tensions between these perspectives create a reflexive, dialogical, reflective and critical research inquiry space. Bredo reflects that 'if cognition is king, who is taking care of affect? And if the thinkers are on top, who is taking care of practice?' (2006:27). The combination of pragmatic, phenomenological and critical perspectives is inclusive of concerns about cognition, affectivity, practice, critical action and reflection.

### **1.11.2 Originality of the research focus**

A growing body of recent research literature on teaching increasingly demonstrates it to be a complex and problematic activity. This complexity, and its implications for teachers and for schooling, is explored in the work of a number of recent studies (Burke, 2007; Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin and Connelly, 1995; Deegan, 2007; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Freeman and Schmidt, 2000; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Goodson, 2003; Gore, 1993; Goswami and Stillman, 1986; Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Kanpol, 1999; Ladson-Billings 2009; Lieberman and Miller, 2001; Loughran, 2006; Lynch, 1989; Lyons, 2010; McLaren, 1995; Nias, 1989; Nieto, 2005; Olson, 2009; Palmer,1993; Russell and Loughran, 2007; Senese, 2004, 2007; Weiler, 1988; Woods, 2007;).

Some of this scholarship specifically focuses on teachers' perspectives on teaching, and on being teachers in classrooms, (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin and Connelly 1995; Freeman and Schmidt, 2000; Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995; Kozol, 1981; Ladson-Billings 2009; Lyons, 2010; Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey, 2002; Nieto, 2003, 2005;). These studies adopt teachers' perspectives, rely on teachers' accounts, investigate teacher knowledge and contribute to our current understanding of teachers and their work in classrooms.

The unique focus of this study is on teacher awareness including: self-awareness; relational awareness; contextual awareness, pedagogical awareness; and awareness of school culture and the culture of the community the school serves. By adopting this focus the study seeks to understand how teachers' insights into self, students, pedagogy and school culture shape their perceptions of the possibilities and challenges of being teachers. A feature of the uniqueness of this study is the attention directed at changes in teachers' awareness, turning points where understanding alters. This emphasis on shifts in teachers' 'horizons of understanding' (Gadamer, 1960) provides a unique perspective for the study.

### **1.11.3 Originality of the Feminist Emancipatory Research perspectives**

This study draws on feminist emancipatory research (FER) perspectives, (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Holland and Blair, 1995; Lather, 1991; Maynard and Purvis 1995; Reinharz, 1992;), and participatory action research (PAR) perspectives, (Altrichter et al, 1993; Atweh, et al, 1998; Halsall, 1998; Keating et al, 1998; Kemmis and Wilkinsin, 1998; Moskovic and Hoop, 2006; Reason, 1994;). In drawing on these perspectives it declares its interest in teacher agency and in supporting teachers' increasingly meaningful participation in schools. It commits to advocating for the interests they identify and the needs they articulate during the inquiry process, and to faithfully represent these in the research text as a reflection of that advocacy. The particular emphasis on participation in FER approaches draws unique attention to the ethics of participation in research studies and to maximising the engagement of teachers in this inquiry.

### **1.11.4 Critical stance of the research approach**

Scholarship on conducting research frequently distinguishes between descriptive research and problem posing research (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Eisner, 1998; Flick, 2009; Harvey and MacDonald, 1993; Reinharz, 1992;). Problem posing research surpasses description, though it uses descriptive data and seeks to understand the implications of what is described for relations of power between human beings and for the organisation of social life. Critical theory forms one of the two pillars underpinning the classical theoretical framework for this research inquiry. However, it also provides the contemporary analytic platform for troubling the research question. The originality of this contemporary critical framework lies in the depth and breadth of its analysis of both critical and post critical cultural and feminist perspectives on pedagogy.

### **1.11.5 Innovativeness and creativity of the narrative approach adopted**

Narrative inquiry is the approach offering the best possibilities for investigating the research question. The rationale for this choice is fully outlined in Chapter Five, Narrative inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum. In this approach narratives are seen as

the medium through which we communicate our knowledge of the world. Arguably, from the narrative perspective, our storied lives communicate our perceptions and perspectives on our world. Consequently teachers' stories become the rich reservoirs with potential for us to critically learn about being and becoming the best teachers we can be. Previous studies have undertaken this kind of use of teacher narratives, (Clandinin, 1986; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005; Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995; Nias 1989; Nieto 2003, 2005;). However, by seeking to trouble the 'contextual relationality' of how we story being teachers this study will challenge us to expand our stories to better represent our lives and the lives of others, especially our students.

Davies and Gannon (2006) identify this process as follows:

we open up spaces in which our stories become not merely autobiographical, but are the means to make visible the discursive processes in which we each have been collectively caught up. The stories no longer primarily signify individuals' identities, but in their similarities and differences we become visible as constituted and constitutive beings, (10).

#### **1.11.6 Originality of the overall research design**

The research design has already been presented in section 1.10 above. It demonstrates how the classical theoretical framework, built on two theoretical pillars, Interpretive and Critical, forms the basis of the research structure. It in turn supports the secondary contemporary critical framework. This secondary layer achieves rigor by balancing the similarities and differences between critical and post critical cultural and feminist perspectives on pedagogy. The critical theoretical perspectives are in turn balanced by research by teachers on teaching, communicating teacher research as a counterbalance to critical theory. The research design adopts the advocacy/participatory paradigm and a narrative inquiry approach to the methodology. This design has been carefully developed following Creswell (2007) relating to the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research (see section 5.3).

#### **1.11.7 Unique focus on women teachers**

Many scholarly works on teachers and teaching have been already cited in this chapter. Several of these focus on teachers' perspectives but few adopt a gender perspective

investigating women's experiences as teachers. Scholarship on teachers and teaching is evidenced in the work of: Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, (1995), Kozol, (1981), Nias, (1989), Nieto, (2003, 2005). Some scholarly work focuses on women as teachers such as Freeman and Schmidt, 2000. However, this work investigates women teaching in the academy. Weiler also focuses on women teachers but the investigation is centered on the urban American secondary school sector (1998). My study uniquely combines a focus on being teachers, being women and being human, in schools serving students experiencing multiple disadvantages. In doing so it brings the scholarship of feminist and critical educators to bear on the storied lives of selected women teachers in DEIS schools in Ireland. By critically investigating their stories, we may learn to critique our own stories, recognising their current limits, with possibilities for expanding the horizons of our understanding.

#### **1.11.8 Contribution to unofficial discourses on teaching and teacher education**

Recent Irish research in initial primary teacher education (Burke, 2007; Deegan, 2007), echoes tensions, highlighted by Nieto in relation to public schooling in America, between official and unofficial discourses on schooling. Nieto identifies the tensions between the 'official discourse' with a focus on accountability, standards, credentials and testing and the 'unofficial discourse' with a 'focus on the positive and uplifting work teachers do and the championing of teachers.' (Nieto, 2005:5). Deegan echoes these tensions positing that 'the official discourse continues to privilege structural matters related to teacher quality, demand and supply' over the unofficial discourses relating to 'reflectivity, constructivism and diversity' (Deegan, 2007:185). There is a reported dearth of research on 'the ideological, moral and emotional dimensions of teaching and teacher education' (ibid:185-186). One of the existing knowledge gaps identified in the teaching literature relates to teachers' 'substantive attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, assumptions [and] ways of doing things' (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992:219). The store of knowledge gathered is also problematic, with an over emphasis on the 'measured results' of teaching and 'insufficient attention to the integrated and rounded development of the whole, searching and self-creating human beings' (Burke, 2007:69). This study aims to contribute to the unofficial discourses of teachers and teaching, giving voice to perspectives that create a counter-narrative to the master narratives of official discourses. Keating (2009:211) refers to official discourses as 'status quo stories' those that 'deny the possibility of change' and

unofficial discourses as 'non status quo stories' that shift the focus from 'me consciousness' to 'we consciousness' (ibid: 2012). Inquiring into teachers' storied lives should reveal the extent to which official discourses shape their stories. The study also addresses the recognised gap in our knowledge about the ideological, moral, and emotional dimensions of teaching cited by Deegan (2007:185). By doing so it hopes to add some unique insights, to what we already understand about being teachers and teaching. It also hopes to contribute to redressing the reported imbalance between 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses shaping life in schools.

#### **1.11.9 Unique timing: Social and economic change**

This study is being conducted at a time of demographic, social and economic change in Ireland and globally. Economically, the global recession and national recession in Ireland, are having serious implications for the funding of public education and for teachers conditions of work. The fiscal global crisis has already led to drastic cuts in the funding to schools in Ireland, including DEIS schools. These cuts are affecting the lives of individuals, families, communities, schools, and teachers. However, the implications of these cuts, for the quality of the delivery of education services to all children in public schools, but especially to children experiencing educational disadvantage, has yet to be calculated. The implications for teachers have also yet to be calculated. This research will be alert to how teachers story the effects of these cutbacks on supports to DEIS schools.

Florio-Ruane highlights the inverse relationship between the growing diversity of the student population, in American public schools, and the shrinking proportion of teachers from diverse backgrounds (Florio-Ruane, 2001:xiv). Coolahan, highlighting the current challenges for teacher education at OECD and EU level, highlights the implications of 'declining birth rates in many developed countries and the wide scale migratory patterns which follow' (Coolahan, 2007:7). These demographic changes in the developed world pose challenges for interculturalism in our societies and in our schools 'with greater variety of languages, religion, cultures and skin colours among populations and communities' (Coolahan, 2007:7). In the current context of global economic recession, poverty is also on the increase and especially so among people of colour and others with unequal access to resources. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) identify those on the 'lower



rungs of the middle and working classes', in America, as suffering the worst effects of the credit crunch, where 'as their real incomes fell they borrowed more and more money on increasingly risky terms to make ends meet' (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009: ix).

The turnover of teachers in schools located within high poverty areas [in the U.S.A. ] is as high as 50% in some schools, posing a serious threat to sustaining high quality teaching, with consequent implications for students in those schools (Nieto, 2005:6). Research by Schan stresses the importance of workplace conditions in explaining teacher attrition and retention (Darling-Hammond & Schan, 1993:85).

Ireland is 'marked by one of the most unequal distribution of income in Europe, massive class inequalities in educational participation and entrenched intolerance towards minorities such as travellers' (Baker, 1998:21). The poverty risk, as a consequence of economic recession, puts the education of children from families 'on the lower rungs' and welfare dependent families, at high risk.

The DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science) defines 'educational disadvantage' in the terms set out in the Education Act (1998) as:

The impediments to education arising from social and economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools' (2005:7).

The economic changes heralding the Celtic Tiger<sup>2</sup> era reveal that 'the distribution of benefits among the population in that period has been quiet unequal' (ADM, 2003:17). More recently a comparative study of the quality of children's lives in different types of communities in Limerick, which explored the key components of effective service delivery in regeneration areas, highlighted that 'services need to have the capacity to meet the levels of need within neighbourhoods', these needs include staffing and physical resources (IKOS with MIC, 2011:36). This report identifies 'the scale of young people's needs' was not matched by the level of resources provided to schools, and that as a consequence staff in schools 'felt like they were 'playing God' selecting some young people to avail of services, over others, though the others needed those services just as badly as those selected' (ibid: 33).

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<sup>2</sup> The Celtic Tiger took place between 1994 and 2007 was a period of high economic growth.

The economic cutbacks effecting schools in terms of staffing and other resources are matched by cutbacks to existing teacher pay, and the introduction of a new lower pay scale for newly qualified primary teachers now entering the profession. This raises particular concerns about the impact of reductions in pay on teacher retention and teacher morale. Already there is evidence that reveals ‘a tendency for more disadvantaged schools to have higher turnover [of teachers] and more unqualified teachers’ (Educational Research Centre, 2004: 172).

The combination of current demographic, social and economic changes, affecting education internationally and nationally, present a unique challenge to public schools and to those who teach in them, especially those public schools in communities living with the challenges of poverty and marginalisation. These circumstances provide a unique moment in time in which to investigate the implications of these changes for teachers in selected DEIS schools in Ireland.

## **1.12 Thesis overview**

In this thesis I draw on the creative synergies and tensions between diverse theoretical perspectives on the meaning and construction of knowledge, teaching and learning. I do so on the basis that together they create a critical and coherent research base within which to engage the research question. However, at the heart’s core of this narrative inquiry is a willingness to both listen to and challenge teachers’ perspectives in a critical stance committed to progressive change, by supporting and challenging teachers to be and become their best selves in order to better serve the learning needs of students in DEIS schools. The remainder of Chapter One outlines the structure of the following chapters supporting this critical narrative inquiry.

In **Chapter Two** ‘The DEIS Programme and the Context of DEIS Schools’ I provide a programmatic overview of the goals underpinning the DEIS programme. This Chapter drew on a number of reports which review the DEIS programme and cognate reports relevant to other programmes integrated into work under DEIS.

In **Chapter Three** 'Classical Literature Review: Interpretive and Critical Pillars' I create a theoretical base built on Interpretive and Critical perspectives. I use Pragmatic philosophy, communicated through the ideas of Dewey (1859-1952) and Mead (1863-1931) to focus on the social construction of the self and of knowledge. I engage Phenomenological perspectives to help trace the workings of human consciousness. I use Critical or Conflict theory, exposing the construction and effects of social structures, including ideological structures.

In **Chapter Four** 'Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life' I construct a feminist and critical cultural scaffold combining feminist, critical cultural, post-critical, post-modern, post-structural and post colonial perspectives on pedagogy. These perspectives critique the ideological and structural inscriptions of inequality embedded in education systems and particularly in public schools.

In **Chapter Five** 'Narrative Inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum' I outline the characteristics of qualitative research providing a rationale for adopting this perspective in the current study. Secondly, I adopt an advocacy and participatory paradigm guided by Feminist Emancipatory Research approaches, (FER). I identify the methodology for the research study with feminist interpretive communities. Thirdly, I outline various perspectives exploring feminist epistemologies, methodologies and methods. Finally, I present an overview of narrative inquiry approaches to qualitative research and I present a design for engaging a narrative inquiry to specifically support this study.

In **Chapter Six** 'Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play, in Three Acts' I present and distill the learning embodied in teachers' storied lives, tracing the narrative threads reflecting their significant insights. The play begins with a prologue, presenting teacher's backstories entitled 'Long long ago, when we were girls'. The play develops across three acts. These acts explore teachers': passions and pathways to teaching; relational insights; contextual insights. The play concludes with an Epilogue representing teachers storied lives visually through artefacts they and I choose to represent us as teachers or to represent how we see teaching.

In **Chapter Seven**, 'Creating a New Critical Conversation', educators engage in a critical conversation weaving insights stretching across the study findings. Critical conversations engage with three narrative themes. The first conversation troubles voice as a pedagogical category. The second conversation troubles teachers' relational engagements and insights. The third conversation troubles teachers' contextual insights. These conversations are explored tracing three narrative threads: Leadership in context; Culture and community of DEIS schools; and Teaching in DEIS contexts.

In **Chapter Eight**, 'Listening, Learning and Learning towards Possible Future Re-storyings', I identify the significance of teachers' stories and their 'turning points' or 'epiphanies'. I revisit the research objectives and provide an overview of the thesis. I then present the learning from the study by engaging with learning emerging from each of the five sections presented in Chapter Six.

## **1.13 Conclusion**

This chapter has set the stage for the research study. It began by providing an introduction to the study and went on to outline its main objectives. The primary objective was identified in testing the fit between teacher *praxis* and their capacity to support the needs of students in DEIS schools. The primary objective was linked to a number of secondary objectives relating to understanding self, students and others, pedagogy and school culture. The primary and secondary objectives were presented in the form of a core research question and four embedded questions to guide the study.

A unique research design was presented, built on a classical analytic theoretical framework combining Interpretive and Critical perspectives. A secondary analytic framework based on Critical Cultural and Feminist perspectives provided the contemporary analytic structure. A rationale was provided for selecting a FER approach to the study and for adopting an advocacy/participatory paradigm as a guiding worldview to support it. The rationale for adopting a narrative inquiry approach was established.

The originality of the study was illustrated in relation to a number of unique features in the study including: the epistemological framework; the research focus; FER approaches; the critical stance of the contemporary analytic framework; the overall research design; the focus on women teachers; and the potential contribution of the study to our knowledge about teaching; and the unique timing of the study.

Finally an overview of the work was presented clearly specifying the thesis structure and providing a brief overview of the focus of each of the eight chapters.

## **2 Chapter Two: The DEIS Programme and the Context of DEIS Schools**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In 2005 the Department of Education and Science<sup>3</sup>(DES) published the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Action Plan outlining a programme for educational inclusion which was targeted at schools in communities experiencing disadvantage. The DEIS programme focused in particular on three areas: literacy and numeracy in schools; developing teachers' professional skills and mandating and supporting school planning processes (Weir, 2011). The DEIS programme has been the main vehicle for interventions to address educational disadvantage in schools in Ireland since 2005.

### **2.2 Schools supported by the DEIS programme**

In the school year, 2015/ 2016, eight hundred and thirty six schools are being supported by the DEIS programme. This includes six hundred and forty six primary schools and one hundred and ninety secondary schools. The primary school figure comprises three hundred and thirty urban/town schools (Band 1 and Band 2) and three hundred and sixteen rural primary schools. (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/05/07/2016>)

### **2.3 Relevance of the DEIS Action Plan and review of DEIS evaluations for this study**

Teachers participating in this narrative inquiry study are drawn exclusively from DEIS schools. The four primary teachers teach in three primary Urban Band 1 schools. The DEIS classification 'Urban Band 1' identifies schools serving students identified as experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage at primary level. The five secondary teachers are drawn from a single DEIS secondary school which is ranked amongst the one hundred and ninety second-level schools identified as having the highest levels of disadvantage amongst students, in Ireland. Below, I provide an overview of both the DEIS Action Plan (2005) and the review of DEIS evaluations by the ESRI (2015). These overviews are intended to

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<sup>3</sup> The Department of Education and Science is now called the Department of Education and Skills

provide the reader with a context for understanding how educational disadvantage has been addressed through the implementation of the DEIS programme since 2005. As each of the four schools participating in this research study have been supported by the measures implemented under that DEIS Action Plan, it is therefore a logical starting point.

## **2.4 DEIS Action Plan (2005)**

The DEIS Action Plan focused on the educational needs of students in disadvantaged communities. The planned interventions targeted students from pre-school to upper secondary, (3 to 18 years), (DES, 2005). These interventions were predicated on the definition of 'educational disadvantage' as outlined in the Education Act (1998):

'...the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools' (DES, 2005:7).

The development of the DEIS Action Plan was informed by the strengths and weaknesses of measures to promote social inclusion, along with the identified gaps yet needing to be addressed, which pre dated the DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2005:22-23, see Appendix 1). The fundamental aims of the DEIS Action Plan were to develop a standardised system for identifying, and regularly reviewing, levels of disadvantage along with a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP), (DES, 2005:9).

## **2.5 Integration of existing schemes and programmes**

The DEIS Action Plan proposed to integrate a number of existing schemes into the SSP on a phased basis over the first five years. The pre-existing programmes included: Early Start; Giving Children an Even Break; the Support Teacher Project (primary level); Aspects of the Early Literacy Initiative; the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme; the School Completion Programme; and the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DES, 2005:10).

## 2.6 DEIS Action Plan: Key measures

A number of key measures were identified as priorities for implementation during the initial five years of the plan. They included the following:

- The development of a new initiative on early education provision for the most disadvantaged urban/town communities
  - The integration and streamlining the existing measures (2.5 above)
  - The targeting 150 urban/town primary schools, with the highest concentrations of disadvantage, to benefit from maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes (infants through second-class) and 24:1 in senior classes (third through sixth-class)
  - The provision of a teacher/co ordinator to clusters of rural schools participating in the SSP where such supports were not already in place through the *Giving Children an even Break* programme. Where not feasible, other rural primary schools to be supported through financial support.
  - The implementation of targeted measures to address problems of literacy and numeracy, with particular reference to family literacy, early education, primary and second-level education and the role of the local authority library system, extension of school library and librarian support to the 50 second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
  - The implementation of measures to enhance student attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment. Enhancing guidance counselling provision targeted at supporting junior cycle students to secondary schools with highest concentrations of disadvantage
  - The provision of greater curricular choice
  - The expansion of the role of information and communication technologies (ICT's)
  - The increase in access to third-level programmes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in co-operation with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education
  - The development of measures to support the recruitment and retention of principals and teaching staff in schools serving disadvantaged communities
- (adapted from the Key Measures to be Implemented, DES, 2005:10-11).



## **2.7 Implementation of the DEIS Action Plan**

The DEIS Action Plan plan was designed to be implemented in three phases. The first phase was to run during the 2005-2006 school year, followed by a second phase during the 2006-2007 school year. The third and final phase was designed to run from the 2007-2008 school year onwards.

The DEIS Action Plan provided an overview of specific measures to be in place on full implementation of the School Support Programme (SSP). These measures recognised the diversity of contextual needs and are outlined with specific reference to supports for urban/town primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP; rural primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP and secondary-schools and school/clusters in SSP (see Appendix C).

## **2.8 DEIS Action Plan: Research and Evaluation**

A range of measures were put in place in the action plan for conducting an ‘in-depth programme of research and evaluation to inform policy formation’ in relation to tackling educational disadvantage, (DES, 2005:73). Among these measures was an evaluation programme to support the implementation of the DEIS Action Plan. The evaluations have been carried out on the DEIS programme since it began to roll out in 2006, and include eight evaluations at Primary level, three evaluations at Post-Primary level, one report on the DEIS Dormant Accounts programme and four evaluations of the Early Start Programme (see Appendix B).

The learning provided by these evaluations and other sources has been brought together in a meta-analysis of the impact of the DEIS programme, *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*. (2015) conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The section below draws on this report to build an understanding of the measures that have had a positive impact and the measures that as yet have not delivered the desired impact to support students experiencing most disadvantage in terms of their educational needs.

## 2.9 Review of the DEIS evaluations

The ESRI report *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (2015) draws on pre-existing reports in order to review the impact of the DEIS programme to date. The purpose, as outlined in the report is focused on three specific areas including:

- assessing the extent to which the stated aim of the DEIS programme has been achieved
- identifying elements that have worked well and those that have worked less well
- identifying the key lessons emerging relating to future policy on educational disadvantage and education in schools (ESRI, 2015: vi).

### 2.9.1 Changes identified in the ESRI report

A variety of changes in student outcomes, student attendance and retention and school organisation practices were identified in the ESRI report *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*, some positive in nature and others needing to be addressed.

The ESRI report identified a number of positive changes in school organisation and process and student achievement. These included positive changes in planning for teaching and learning and in setting targets for achievement (ESRI, 2015: vii). In reviewing student outcomes the report found significant improvements over time in the literacy and numeracy scores of students in DEIS schools with greater increases for literacy than numeracy. However, the report found that the most disadvantaged schools (urban Band 1, primary schools) showed evidence of much lower reading and mathematics scores on average, and also showed higher concentrations of students with very low test scores, (ESRI, 2015: viii).

Positive changes in student outcomes within DEIS second-level schools were evident in the slight but significant narrowing of the gap in average Junior Certificate grades as well as in English grades between DEIS and non-DEIS schools between from 2003 to 2011. However, Junior Certificate mathematics reflected no such improvement (ESRI, 2015: viii).

Student outcomes in relation to attendance and retention revealed improvements in attendance rates in urban Band I primary schools. However, less clear cut results relating to attendance were evident in second-level DEIS schools, with some improvement in the most recent years. According to the ESRI report DEIS Post-Primary schools have much lower rates of completion of junior and senior cycle<sup>4</sup> than non-DEIS schools as 92.5 per cent of students in non-DEIS schools in comparison to 82 per cent of students in DEIS schools complete senior cycle. The ESRI report found that the gap in retention rates between has narrowed significantly over time from 22% at senior cycle in 1995 school entrants, to 10.5% for the 2008 cohort. (ESRI, 2015: viii)

## **2.9.2 ESRI independent research on disadvantaged schools: Challenges**

Independent research by the ESRI on DEIS schools reveals some significant differences in the organisation of DEIS as distinct from non –DEIS schools. They found that there is more evidence in DEIS schools of ‘rigid forms of ability grouping’ (ESRI, 2015: viii). The implications of this rigid form of ability grouping of students has been shown to contribute to disengagement, underperformance and early school leaving by those in lower stream classes. Further differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools as reported by ESRI research include more challenging disciplinary climates and greater prevalence of negative interaction between teachers and students (ESRI, 2015:ix).

## **2.9.3 Looking towards the future**

*Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (2015) identifies a number of implications for policy and for practice on the basis of DEIS evaluations to date and on current research on educational disadvantage in Irish schools.

### **2.9.3.1 Implications for policy**

The ESRI highlighted a number of issues in relation to informing and developing policy into the future. Firstly they identified a variety of data gaps in, including the absence of a control group which makes it difficult to ascertain whether gains are a result of the DEIS

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<sup>4</sup> Junior Cycle pertains to the first three years of secondary education and Senior Cycle to the final two or three years. Traditionally the Senior Cycle is a two year programme but students may extend the Senior Cycle by opting to undertake a one year Transition Year Programme after Junior Certificate.

programme or to improvements across all schools. Secondly, the absence of data on the social profile of individual students makes it difficult to measure the achievement gap for students living with the challenges of multiple disadvantages. Finally, the absence of data on the social profile of individual students make it difficult to measure the effects of the concentration of disadvantage on achievement. The ESRI identified a number of possibilities for further research including using the Growing Up in Ireland<sup>5</sup> study data to enable the analysis of differences in the social profile background of DEIS and non-DEIS students. Secondly, they propose conducting case-study research to account for variation in outcomes amongst students in DEIS schools. Finally, they advocate for an assessing systematically the engagement and achievement of students across the whole curriculum, as analysis to date has focused on reading and mathematics only (ESRI, 2015: ix).

### ***2.9.3.2 Implications for practice***

Drawing on their meta analysis research findings, the ESRI report identified a number of practice-related issues which need to be addressed in order to address equity of outcome for students in DEIS contexts (ESRI, 2015).

The report advocated for the continuation of supports to DEIS schools due to the continuing high concentrations of disadvantage experienced by students, especially within urban Band 1 schools. They also proposed a review of funding for DEIS schools, specifically to decipher whether the current level of funding is sufficient to bridge the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, cognisant of the reality that DEIS schools are less likely to

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Growing Up in Ireland is a Government-funded study of children being carried out jointly by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. The study takes place over seven years and follows the progress of two groups of children: 8,000 9-year-olds and 10,000 9-month-olds. The second visit to 9-year-olds took place when they were 13 years old, and the infants when they were 3 years old with a third visit at age 5 years. In 2015, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced a second phase of Growing Up in Ireland that will include further visits to the Child Cohort at 17 and 20 years; and a postal questionnaire to the Infant Cohort at age 7 years with a further interview when they are 9 years old. The main aim of the study is to paint a full picture of children in Ireland and how they are developing in the current social, economic and cultural environment. This information will be used to assist in policy formation and in the provision of services which will ensure all children will have the best possible start in life’. (<http://www.growingup.ie/index.php?id=9> accessed 05/07/2016).

receive 'voluntary contributions' from parents. The ESRI also recommended a renewed focus on numeracy in future provision. In relation to enhancing practices in schools, the ESRI proposed a move away from rigid forms of ability grouping, a concerted effort to improve school climate, specifically the quality of day-to-day interaction between a teachers and students and a commitment to fostering high expectations for all students (ESRI, 2015:x).

## **2.10 Current review of the DEIS Programme**

A review of the DEIS programme is being undertaken by the DES. As part of that process submissions were invited from the end May of 2015. The template for stakeholder consultation provided opportunities for interested parties to respond under three headings:

- Part A-ESRI Report 'Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS
- Part 2- Observations on DEIS-Current Provision
- Part 3- Suggestions for interventions to Combat Educational Disadvantage into the future

By June 2016 submissions from fifteen stakeholder groups were provided in the DEIS section of the DES website. These submissions will contribute to the consultation process on the DEIS programme. On completion, the findings of this review will contribute to shaping the implementation of the next stage of the DEIS programme.

## **2.11 Education Welfare Services**

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the Irish State body with responsibility for children's wellbeing. Tusla, since its inception in January 2014, incorporates the services of a number of State agencies, with responsibilities for different aspects of children's wellbeing, care and protection. These include: the Health Services Executive (HSE); Children and Family Services; the Family Support Agency (FSA); and the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, sets out the legal remit of the NEWB of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. This remit includes responsibility for school attendance, retention and engagement. In schools supported by the DEIS programme, the NEWB has

responsibility for managing two support services based in schools. These are the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL). A brief explanation of the work of these services is provided below because they provide significant support to DEIS schools.

(adapted from <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/>)

### **2.11.1 School Completion Programme (SCP)**

According to the *Review of the School Completion Programme* 'the SCP is widely regarded as being an effective means through which to co-ordinate both in-and out-of-school supports for the benefit of children and young people who are at risk of disengagement and early school leaving' (ESRI, 2015: ix). The four pillars of SCP programmes include in-school, after-school, holiday and out-of-school supports. (ESRI, 2015: ix)

The SCP operates in 'clusters', 24 in total across Ireland. The cluster refers to 'a group of primary and secondary schools within a local area' (ESRI, 2015: viii). The SCP initiative employs a co-ordinator for each cluster. Each individual SCP is managed by a Local Management Committee and a co ordiantor is employed for each SCP.

The interventions provided by the SCP can be identified in three strands of support including, monitoring of attendance through in-school and after-school supports; promoting socio-economic well-being through in-school support and therapeutic interventions and providing learning support through in-school interventions and supports such as homework clubs. (ESRI, 2015: x).

The ESRI SCP report identifies a number of issues arising in relation to the provision of the SCP service. It notes the current 'bulk of provision in SCP clusters relates to in-school provision', (ESRI, 2015:176). While in-school provision is one of the four pillars of the work, co-ordinators identify the benefits of strengthening the other three pillars, specifically after-school, holiday and out-of-school provision. One of the strengths in current provision is seen in the flexibility evident at local level in the delivery of SCP supports. Activities are reportedly decided by school principals, working with SCP 'cluster'

co-ordinators. The review recommends that ‘the potential for local flexibility be retained by SCP’ (ESRI, 2015:177).

The focus of current SCP reporting mechanisms is strongly oriented towards ‘outcomes’. The ESRI SCP review (2015) highlights the distinction between generalised outcomes and highlights the need for ‘a rigorous measure of impact’ (ESRI, 2015:179). The report recognises the complexity of assessing the ‘impact of multi-faceted programmes such as SCP’, a complexity they posit is reflected in a number of factors including the fact that softer measures of engagement are more difficult to measure than for example attendance and retention but critically are the important drivers of those behaviours. The report also recognises that different activities are offered across different clusters and among different schools. Additionally, specific activities target different groups of children, making them difficult to compare. Indeed, students may participate in multiple activities over time rendering a cumulative impact thus making specific interventions hard to evaluate. Finally, students who engage with the SCP are provided with a range of supports within (through DEIS, learning support etc) and outside of school (community based and area-based interventions) making hard to attribute individual programme impacts (ESRI, 2015:179).

The ESRI report recommends that the SCP be included in evaluations of DEIS conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the inspectorate of the DES (ESRI, 2015: 180). In concluding the review points to the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) to communicate best practice to SCP co-ordinators and principal teachers, (ESRI, 2015: 181).

### **2.11.2 Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)**

The second service provided by the NEWB with direct links to DEIS schools is the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme. This scheme pre-dated the DEIS initiative and was integrated into it from 2005 onwards. The scheme, adopts an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in that it recognises the interdependent roles of home, school and community and the importance of nurturing these elements in efforts to support children

experiencing educational disadvantage. The scheme is operationalized in schools by HSCL coordinators. They are teachers released from all teaching responsibilities in order to specialise in full-time liaison work between home, school and community.

The focus of the scheme is captured in five specific goals:

- supporting marginalised pupils
- promoting cooperation between home, school and community
- empowering parents
- retaining young people in the education system
- disseminating best practice

(From Vision to Best Practice, DES, 2005-2006: 8)

Twelve basic principles shape the operation of the HSCL scheme. They set the priorities for implementing measures to strengthen relationships and skills between home, school and community in order to support children's learning in communities living with the challenges of poverty and marginalisation.

These principles, founded on respect and empowerment include:

- The promotion of partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers
- The adoption of a unified and integrated approach at both primary and post-primary level
- An emphasis on prevention rather than cure
- A focus on the key adults in the child's life in recognition that the attitudes and behavior of parents, teachers and community personnel impinge on the lives of children
- The consultative development of a programme of activities that meet the needs of parents and others including leisure activities, curricular activities, personal development courses and developing parents capacities as a resource to their children



- The development of positive teacher and staff attitudes in the areas of partnership and the whole-school approach
- The fostering of self-help and independence and active engagement in children's learning
- The establishment of bonds of trust with families through home visits
- Networking with and promoting the co-ordination of the work of the voluntary and statutory agencies responsible for delivering services to marginalised children and their families
- Undertaking HSCL co-ordination as a full-time role
- Activating change in the role of HSCL co-ordinators
- Promoting community ownership of the scheme through the development of the Local Committee

(HSCL Scheme in Ireland, DES 2005-2006: adapted from Chapter 1)

## **2.12 Conclusion**

This study is located within DEIS band 1 primary schools and one DEIS post-primary school. DEIS schools serve the needs of children who experience the highest levels of disadvantage in Ireland. Specifically, primary DEIS band 1 schools, and DEIS post-primary schools serve the needs of children experiencing the highest levels of marginalization and lowest levels of achievement. The DEIS Action Plan, established in 2005 was informed by pre-existing programmes to address educational disadvantage. It is currently under review.

In order to address educational disadvantage and ensure equity of outcome with consequent implications not only at individual level but at community and societal level, schools serving the needs of children experiencing educational disadvantage need to be adequately and strategically resourced and supported. A multi-layered approach is required which would build on the ecological approach espoused by the HSCL scheme, and involve supporting parents, teachers, schools and community.



## **3 Chapter Three: Classical Literature Review, Interpretive and Critical Perspectives**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The literature, reviewed over the next two chapters, has been chosen to illustrate selected epistemologies of knowledge and their implications for critical consciousness, social action and their potential to guide social and educational change. This chapter presents an overview of cognate classical philosophical perspectives. It provides a robust theoretical base for this study built primarily on Critical perspectives and supplemented by Pragmatic and Phenomenological perspectives. It explores how we understand knowledge construction including: the nature of consciousness; the relationship of the self to others; individual and collective human agency; the prospects for social and cultural change; the nature of knowledge; the validity of knowledge; the communication of knowledge and the nature of teaching for the promotion of knowledge. These perspectives help us to trouble teacher *praxis*, understood as the synthesis of teacher action and reflection (Freire, 1972: 60). Chapter Four, Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life, builds on critically exploring *praxis*, engaging contemporary discourses on teaching, schooling, social agency and system change. Presenting the literature reviewed in these chapters, prepares us to engage with critically inquiring into teacher *praxis* through learning from teachers' storied lives in the findings presented in Chapter Six, Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play, in Three Acts.

### **3.2 Structure of the literature review**

The reviewed literature draws on two lines of descent, Interpretive and Critical perspectives. Each of these perspectives provides a lens guiding our inquiry into teachers' storied lives through engaging with: the nature of consciousness; the link between consciousness and social action; and the role of education in relation to both. Each of these perspectives has unique potential to describe social reality. Each perspective also has specific limitations in doing so. I interweave these perspectives thereby strengthening the literature base for this research study. The structural approach of Critical theory is counterbalanced by the Interpretive approaches of both Pragmatism and .

Pragmatism explores meaning and the construction of knowledge. Pragmatism can be identified with interpretive perspectives. This perspective will be presented principally through the work of Dewey (1859-1952) and to a lesser extent Mead (1863-1931). Dewey and Mead were centrally involved in developments associated with the University of Chicago School, and with creating the academic legacy of American pragmatism.

Phenomenology explores the workings of human consciousness. The Phenomenological perspective will be presented through the works of Husserl (1859-1938) and Heidegger (1889-1976).

Critical perspectives critique the ideological and material inequalities shaping social life. Critical Theory is a structural perspective. This perspective will be explored principally through the work of Freire (1921-1997) and also Habermas (1929- ).

### **3.3 Introduction to Pragmatic philosophy**

Pragmatism developed initially as a theory of meaning. It identified the meaning of ideas with practical consequences experienced in the social world. It was also, from the beginning, a theory of knowledge. Pragmatists held the view, attributed to William James that ‘the acquisition of knowledge [w]as an active and exploratory process’ (Quinton, 1977:2). Pragmatists see an organic relationship between organisms and their environment, reflected in humans and their environments. As a consequence their approach to examining social life is focused on investigating the ‘*situational uniqueness*’ of social interactions between humans and the social and natural environment (Bredo, 2009: 25).

#### **3.3.1 Features of Pragmatism**

Pragmatists see reality as accessible here and now in the natural world. They argue that knowledge requires directed interactive reflective inquiry. They reject the notion that true reality exists in the mind as a ‘self-thinking idea’ (Hegel, 1830:313). Pragmatism can be identified by a number of key characteristics including: social interactionism, instrumentalism and the social consequences of interaction.

### **3.3.1.1 Social interactionism**

Pragmatists believe that reality is created through our interaction in the world. They place the human subject at the centre of both social action and perception located in the material world. Pragmatists therefore see human beings as creative agents of social reality, shaping and in turn being shaped by interaction. They argue that we can learn about being human by inquiring into how we act. Pragmatists regard the relationship between the disposition of the observer, the observer's perception of phenomena, the processes of interaction, the products of interaction and reflection on all these elements, as necessary prerequisites for the production of reliable knowledge. Consequently, Pragmatism resonates with critically inquiring into teachers' storied lives in order to understand their dispositions, perspectives, interactions, reflections and the knowledge they produce.

### **3.3.1.2 Instrumentalism**

Pragmatists contend that people gather knowledge about what is useful, and works well, by reflecting on accumulated experiences. Arguably, people also modify knowledge on the basis of observing what fails. From this perspective knowledge is constantly changing. Consequently, Pragmatism defines 'objects' in the social world in terms of their use value for humans (Ritzer, 2000:338). This central feature of pragmatism is called instrumentalism.

### **3.3.1.3 Social consequences of Interaction**

Pragmatism shifts inquiry about the social world from the level of 'macrostructures and processes' to the study of the 'processes of social interaction and their consequences for the individual and the society' (Turner, 1991:369). Seidman identifies the appeal of American Pragmatism in how 'it approached ideas with an eye to their social consequences rather than exclusively focusing on their absolute truth' (1998:173). This capacity to investigate social consequences promotes moral criticism. It also shifts the focus of social inquiry to the micro-level of social interaction. It places human agency at the centre of examining social actions and social structures. Pragmatism therefore resonates with the purpose of this research study to critically investigate the social consequences of teacher *praxis* through inquiring into their storied lives and ours.

### **3.3.2 Dewey's Philosophy: Instrumentalism**

Dewey's Pragmatic philosophy is significant for this study because it focused on the epistemology of knowledge and particularly on the concept of reflective thinking or consciousness. Dewey linked his epistemology of knowledge directly to the practice of pedagogy. He saw the goal of pedagogy as training the mind to think reflectively. Dewey saw the product of reflective inquiry as wisdom, providing reliable guidance for acting in the world. He clearly distinguished between information and wisdom. He defined information as 'knowledge which is merely acquired and stored up' (Dewey, 1910:52). He defined wisdom as 'knowledge operating in the direction of powers to the better living of life' (ibid:2). Dewey's philosophy explicitly sees the development of knowledge and its uses, as having social consequences, because knowledge influences how we act in the world. Pragmatism therefore provides an epistemic, pedagogic and social perspective on knowledge. Dewey's Philosophy will be presented below under the following headings: epistemic constructivism, philosophy of education, perspective on truth, rejection of idealism, metaphysics and physics, practical action and cognitive beliefs, universal truth claims and particular truth claims, reason and intelligence, democracy and education.

#### ***3.3.2.1 Epistemic Constructivism***

Dewey's epistemic constructivism is clear in his assertion that 'knowledge is related to inquiry as a product to the operations by which it is produced' (2008:23). For Dewey, knowledge does not exist prior to our inquiry into it. Consequently, knowledge is a product of inquiry. Human beings are the catalysts in the process of inquiry and in creating the products of inquiry. Human understanding also alters during the process of inquiring. This perspective infers that knowledge production is conditional on the combined assumptions of the subjects involved, on the operations used to produce it, on the outcomes of inquiry, and on reflecting on all of these elements. Knowledge is consequently evolutionary, a product of evolving inquiries, always emergent, never absolute. Dewey's epistemic constructivism allows us to identify the classroom as a place for shared inquiry and students and teachers as agents shaping the perception, production and emergence of products of inquiry.

### **3.3.2.2 Construction of knowledge**

Dewey sees the task of education as training the mind to think. He identifies 'Education, in its broadest sense, is the means to the social continuity of life' (Dewey, 1916:7). Therefore, Dewey sees education as serving shared social life by 'bringing some of our dispositions to consciousness with a view to straightening out a perplexity, by conceiving the connection between ourselves and the world in which we live' (ibid:251). He sees this engagement as a reflective and fluid process, moving between action in the world, reflection and renewed action. It is motivated by the desire to solve problems about how to act. It resonates with this inquiry into teachers' storied lives, helping us trouble how they and we perceive our world, consequently act, and later reflect on our actions.

Dewey defines reflective thought as '*active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends*' (Dewey, 1910:6). The primary function of education is, according to Dewey, training the mind to make it fit for reflective thinking. Of particular interest to this study is the fact that Dewey saw the goal of education as 'self-realization', an organic assimilation process 'starting from within' (Dewey, 1916:9). Dewey's identification of 'self-realization' as the purpose of education resonates with the focus of this study designed to critically examine teacher's storied lives for constructions of self and how these constructions might shape perceptions of others and interactions with others, in selected DEIS school in Ireland.

### **3.3.2.3 Perspective on truth**

Dewey saw truth as 'a dynamic series of ideas, beliefs and other processes which were the instruments by means of which the purpose of life can be achieved' (Dewey, 1929:220). He identified two specific qualities with truth. The first quality was its dynamic nature, actively fusing ideas, beliefs and processes. The second quality was its instrumentalism, its usefulness in action. Reflective knowledge therefore leads us away from essentialist ideas about human nature, social life or education. According to Dewey 'nature is intelligible and understandable' (ibid:210). Dewey's instrumentalism does not exclude belief as one of the 'instruments' by which reflective knowledge might be advanced. However, unlike idealist perspectives, Dewey's pragmatism understands beliefs to be socially constructed and intelligible in their social contexts. This perspective holds promise for our inquiry into

teachers' storied lives suggesting teachers' beliefs are socially constructed. Consequently these beliefs are both intelligible, in social contexts such as DEIS schools, and capable of expanding.

#### ***3.3.2.4 Rejection of idealism***

Dewey vehemently rejects the dominant classical philosophical conception of thought as 'a purely inner activity, intrinsic to mind alone' and mind as 'complete and self-sufficient in itself' (ibid:6-7). This perspective on thought supports a dualistic separation between mind and matter, between thought and action. Consequently, it deems the realm of mind and ideas as superior to the realm of nature and human actions. This dualism is conventionally understood as the mind/matter split. Consequently, according to Dewey the natural sciences and the knowledge produced by them are denigrated in the dominant classical traditions of philosophy. He totally rejects the idealisation of intrinsic properties of the mind. His philosophy is forged in the physical world.

#### ***3.3.2.5 Synthesis of practical beliefs and cognitive beliefs***

Dewey argues that we must develop a way to harness our 'authentic and dependable cognitive beliefs' for use to direct our practical beliefs in the world' (ibid:18). Dewey's philosophy replaces the quest for certainty with the quest for synthesis between dependable cognitive beliefs and practical beliefs and actions. He argues that 'we are so accustomed to the separation of knowledge from doing and making that we fail to recognise how it controls our conceptions of mind, of consciousness and of reflective inquiry' (ibid:2). From Dewey's perspective 'what is known is seen to be a product in which the act of observation plays a necessary role' (ibid:204). Therefore, the act of observing and the subjectivity of the observer must factor into the process of engaging with and making sense of phenomena.

#### ***3.3.2.6 Universal 'Truth Claims' and Particular 'truth claims'***

Dewey argues that phenomena cannot be objectively known, therefore reason can no longer provide the certainty assumed necessary to make universal truth claims. He draws on the Heisenberg Principle to provide a rationale where 'the individually observed case becomes the measure of knowledge' (ibid:205). This directs the production of knowledge



away from efforts to generate universal laws. Dewey saw the pursuit of universal truths as having 'sacrificed the individual to the general and the concrete to the relational' (ibid: 209). Dewey's pragmatism returns the focus to the individual and the concrete.

### ***3.3.2.7 Reason and intelligence***

Dewey supports a move away from reason, with its hallmarks of necessity, universality and immunity to change. Instead his philosophy moves towards intelligence, with its hallmarks of particularity and flux. His rationale for this shift is captured in his view that 'intelligence is associated with judgment: that is the selection and arrangement of means to effect consequences and with choice of what we take as our ends' (ibid:213). Hidden in the loss of certainty, for Dewey, is the possibility for change. He sees knowledge as an active, mutable, changing construct. Dewey contends that 'a certain method of directed participation is a precondition of [ ] having any genuine understanding' (ibid: 212). Dewey calls this method of directed participation 'reflective knowledge' (ibid:219). The focus of this research study resonates with Dewey's reflective knowledge and points us in the direction of teacher's storied lives in order to better understand their perceptions, actions, reflections, and our own.

### ***3.3.2.8 Democracy***

For Dewey democratic societies facilitate change and embrace change as a desired value, and therefore shape their social systems and educational systems to reflect those ideals. He argues, societies that resist social change and wish to perpetuate their own customs and values, create social and educational systems resisting democratic ideals (Dewey, 1916:64). Dewey asserts that, within societies, the development of shared values is facilitated when 'all members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and take from others' (ibid:66). This aspiration to equality of opportunity is a hallmark of democracy. Dewey defines democracy as 'more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (ibid:68). Dewey identifies two qualities prerequisite to the development of a democratic society. The first is the increasing 'reliance upon the recognition of mutual interest as a factor in social control' (ibid: 67). Accordingly, mutual interests form the social glue that binds individuals and provides social stability. The second quality is the acceptance of changes in 'social habits' in democratic social systems (ibid:67). Dewey rejects the view that societies should

merely reproduce norms, values and habits through systems of socialisation. This tendency is, in his view, protectionist, resistant to change and thwarts progress in society by constraining social relationships and social development. Inequality therefore runs counter to the aims of democracy because it destroys opportunities to develop shared values and experiences. Consequently, DEIS schools, serving communities experiencing the highest level of disadvantages, provide appropriate sites to inquire into challenges for creating shared values and experiences.

### **3.3.2.9 Internal Control Mechanisms**

According to Dewey social stability and cooperation should be nurtured by developing individuals' internal control mechanisms. He identified voluntary disposition and interest as the best means to promote internal control. Dewey rejected the notion that external control mechanisms imposed on individuals, by the organs of the state or by private institutions, through coercion or force, would lead to social justice and social progress. Dewey identified the promotion of voluntary participation and positive social and personal interest as the means to create the life force of democratic societies. Dewey asserts these dispositions '*can be created only by education*' (ibid:68).

### **3.3.2.10 Democratic education**

Dewey's philosophy is driven by the desire to develop thinking that promotes shared values, social responsibility and cooperative social interaction. Such thinking requires, according to Dewey, that 'critical mind would be directed against the domination exercised by prejudice, narrow interests, routine customs and the authority which issues from institutions apart from the human ends they serve' (Dewey, 1929:311-312). Dewey identifies democratic education as moral, to the extent that it can serve human needs, asserting that 'all education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral' (ibid:263). Dewey's perspective on education for critical thinking supports us to inquire into how teaching in DEIS schools promotes, or fails to promote, shared values and cooperative social interaction. Consequently we could ask, how does education in DEIS schools serve students' needs and does it promote domination due to: prejudice, narrow interests, routine customs and oppressive use of power and control.

### **3.3.2.11 Dewey's relationship with Mead**

Dewey and Mead, amongst others, were identified as the Chicago Pragmatists. Dewey's conception of mind as an active process of adjustment to practical problems rather than as an entity in itself 'was to be critical in shaping Mead's thought' according to Turner (1991:372). The development of Interactionism, centred on the University of Chicago around the 1920's, drew on a number of academic influences. Most important amongst those influences were: the American philosophy of Pragmatism; a sociological interpretation of ecology; and methods developed in the fieldwork of anthropology (Craib, 1992:85). Turner (1991) and Craib (1992), regard early interactionism as indebted to the contribution of Mead who they credit with developing '*the conceptual core of modern interactionism*' (Turner, 1991:369).

### **3.3.3 Mead's Philosophy: Interactionism**

Interactionism is a humanist approach examining social life with a focus on the meanings individuals derive from social situations. This tradition 'highlights the importance of understanding and interpretation' (Macionis and Plummer, 1997:36). Meanings are seen as negotiated and renegotiated in the context of social interactions between people. The focus is on 'how people make sense of their immediate social world' (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:12). The emphasis on interaction is with 'the construction of meanings in terms of which preferences might be expressed' by individuals (Craib, 1992:86). Individuals are seen as exercising agency by interpreting and managing social encounters and by making choices. Humanistic epistemology is based on a theory of persons and social action. Interpretative or interactionist perspectives, seek to provide an epistemology and a methodology for examining social life through the lens of human agency. Within this tradition the individual is at the centre of social inquiry. The focus is on small-scale interaction and on individuals making sense of their own interpretations, and those of others, in social contexts.

#### **3.3.3.1 Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic Interactionism is one form of interpretative sociology. The underlying assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism, can be reduced to three: people act on the basis of the meanings things have for them; meanings are the product of social interaction;

meanings are filtered through an interpretative process used by individuals to make sense of social interaction (Blumer, 1969:56). The 'Symbolic' label attached to interactionism derives from a focus on the significant symbols, which allow human beings to modify and share meanings through interpretative processes adopted in social situations.

Mead's Pragmatism, acquired through his relationship with Dewey, saw successful social interaction as the highest form of human achievement. He viewed humans as pragmatically adapting behaviors, providing better opportunities for coping with practical conditions of human life thus enabling successful social interaction.

### ***3.3.3.2 Philosophy of the present***

For Mead reality exists in the present, here and now. Mead posits that the past 'must be set over against a present within which the emergent appears' (Mead, 1932:36). This emergent present is the filter through which we interpret the past. Therefore it changes the past. Mead contends that 'it is idle to insist upon universal or eternal characters by which past events may be identified irrespective of any emergent' (ibid:36). Clearly Mead's perspective on making sense of reality is through developing a philosophy rooted in the present. Applying Mead's philosophy of the present to teachers' storied lives frees us to critically engage with our stories of the past through the emergent present telling. This offers us the potential to re-author stories that no longer serve our present needs as educators.

### ***3.3.3.3 Conscious intelligence involves reconstruction***

For Mead 'reconstruction is essential to the conduct of an intelligent being in the universe' (ibid:37). Successful human adaptation to our present social environment requires that we reconstruct the present. This means that change, flux and continuing adaptation are features of reality. Mead defines intelligence as 'a change that involves a mutual reorganisation, an adjustment in the organism and a reconstitution of the environment' (ibid:37). Within this process of reorganisation conscious intelligence develops. Mead refers to the emerging differences in the environment, as a result of changes emerging in the individual human organism, as the development of 'meaning' (ibid:38) Shared meanings are communicated through language. For Mead it is this ability to share meaning that makes social life possible. Knowledge relates to 'a process in conduct' (ibid:

91). Knowledge, in Mead's view, does not relate to the 'content of experience' (Mead, 1932:91). The knowledge accruing from the process of engagement allows us to organise reality by delaying and inhibiting our responses to it. This conscious intelligence, which is capable of pausing, making sense of the environment and delaying action, provides the space for ideas. Mead's philosophy of the present has strong resonances with Mindfulness, which also advocates the capacity to be present, to pause and delay action, so that ultimately action arises out of awareness.

#### ***3.3.3.4 Significance of the social***

In writing about the social self, Mead stresses the 'relativity of the living individual and its environment' (Mead, 2007:185). Mead views society as 'prior to' the individual mind. 'A thinking self-conscious individual is [ ] logically impossible in Mead's theory without a social group' (Ritzer, 2000:343.) This emphasis on society leads Mead's pragmatism in the direction of social realism as identified by Lewis and Smith (1980).

Mead identifies the present as social in nature in a very specific sense. He ascribes the social as 'the process of readjustment' arising out of the emergence of the present (Mead, 2002:73). For Mead, the potential for sociability is not in the social system itself but in our ability as humans to be conscious of it and to share our consciousness of it. Mead clarifies the difference in identifying that 'the process is not identical with the consciousness of it, for that is an awareness of the situation' (Ibid, 2002:74). It is our potential ability to be conscious of a situation and to share the meanings, values and ideas we develop in the situation, through communication with others, that signals our capacity to be social and to effect change. This capacity to share meanings as a social group suggests we have the potential to make sense of the world together and transform the emerging present, as well as reconstruct the past and re-author the future. Mead is not interested in phenomena. He is interested in the development of shared consciousness of phenomena.

#### ***3.3.3.5 Communicating shared consciousness***

According to Mead shared consciousness results from our capacity to share meanings and values through communication. Our responses to objects are built up out of habit. These habits form our ideas about objects. The definitions or ideas we attach to objects over time 'are the sure signs by which we can arouse identical or like attitudes in others'

(Mead, 1932:97). Therefore, when we can communicate our ideas about objects to each other, we can as a consequence, according to Mead, accomplish sociability. This allows us to get past our own ideas and personal images of the world, images that reflect 'the perspective of the individual' (Mead, 1932:96). It potentially increases the range of our awareness of others but it also impacts on our own awareness. Communicating allows us to reconsider our emerging ideas in relation to those of others. It also increases the range of our possible responses to phenomena and thus opens up the potential for social change, social action and critical thinking.

### **3.3.3.6 *Consciousness***

Mead attributes two dimensions of meaning to consciousness. The first meaning is entirely subjective. This subjective dimension of consciousness is only accessible to the individual, the 'I'. The second meaning is concerned with a socially functional and communicable consciousness, the 'Me'. 'The 'Me' represents myself as others see me, the 'I' is the part that looks at myself' (Craib, 1992:88). Mead views the 'I' as the creative aspect of the self. For Mead, the synthesis of the 'I' and the 'me' constitutes reflective intelligence. Ritzer presents four reasons used by Mead to support his argument for the importance of the 'I'. These are, the 'I' as the key source of creativity in the social process, the locus of our most important values, the area with potential for self realization, the part of the self capable of more expression in modern societies, (2000:354). The 'me' part of the self is manifested through social consciousness. In Mead's view 'we are in possession of selves in so far as we can and do take the attitudes of others towards ourselves and respond to those attitudes' (Mead, 2002:194). Mead defined this ability as taking the role of the 'generalized other' (ibid:191). It is this socially conscious 'me' phase of the self that is credited with allowing the individual to live comfortably in the social world. The 'I' phase of the self is attributed with making social change possible. For Mead 'consciousness is a development within experience' (Mead, 2002:13). Mead views reflexivity as a capacity for action, not just an aspect of cognition. Reflexivity is therefore the capacity for consciousness with potential to influence action, including reinforcing or modifying behavior.

### ***3.3.3.7 Links from Mead's philosophy to the current study***

This study is focused on inquiring into teachers' storied lives to increase our understanding of how teachers perceive being teachers in DEIS schools, and consequently how they act. Mead's work is relevant to this study because he troubles the nature of conscious intelligence and makes the link between reflexivity and action. This study inquires narratively into teacher *praxis* and its implications, in particular for students in DEIS schools. It questions the extent to which teachers' stories reflect awareness of the homogeneity of their social and cultural identities and experiences. It inquires into whether, and if so how, teachers take responsibility for the implications of their social and cultural identities in teaching students, especially students whose social and cultural background and experiences differ from theirs. Reflecting on this responsibility challenges us as educators to 'remove our own cultural blinkers in order to see the ways of life of different people in an unbiased light' (Giddens, 1982:39). The possibilities for delivering equality of opportunity in education, particularly in DEIS schools, require that we, as educators, 'remove our cultural blinkers' and enact a reconstructive pedagogy that supports equality. These challenges will be addressed in Chapter Four, Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and life.

## **3.4 Introduction to Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a method of inquiry, also developed in the interpretive tradition. It provides a specific and singular focus on the 'structures and workings of human consciousness' (Craib, 1992:98). It identifies the world as having meaning by virtue of our consciousness of it. In a similar way to Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenology sees 'meanings in terms of norms, values and beliefs' as the key to making sense of the world (Ibid:98). Phenomenology is so called because it accepts that what appear as the phenomena of consciousness provide valid data for the purposes of scientific and philosophical inquiry. Since our research is interested in troubling teacher consciousness and how it might shape pedagogical practice in DEIS schools, Phenomenology provides a relevant theoretical perspective with potential to assist our inquiry. I will refer briefly to the work of Husserl and Heidegger to inquire into how phenomenology might support this research inquiry.

### **3.4.1 Philosophy of Husserl**

Husserl sought to understand the fundamental processes of consciousness. He understood that, in order to access these essences of consciousness, taken-for-granted assumptions we develop about the world would need to be suspended. The attempt at suspending our assumptions is known as 'bracketing'. A term coined by Husserl 'bracketing involves the suspension of any thesis, as a temporary and intentional device intended to clear the conscious space to facilitate the pathway of the mind to grasping what is essential about being' (Husserl 1969:108). According to Husserl when we set a familiar thesis 'out of action', we 'disconnect it' or 'bracket it' (ibid:108). Arguably, what remains are the phenomenal data with potential to deliver essential knowledge about the processes of intentional consciousness. Turner explicitly distinguishes Husserl's goal from 'sympathetic introspection' (1991:385). Husserl's goal is to identify the processes of consciousness rather than their contents. The focus is therefore on the thinking process not the thoughts. If we relate this approach to teachers' stories we would inquire into how teachers story their lives rather than the content of their stories.

#### **3.4.1.1 Consciousness**

From Husserl's perspective humans develop knowledge about the world through direct experience. All experiences are filtered by human consciousness in his view. The task of phenomenological inquiry is to understand how consciousness shapes reliable knowledge about the world. Phenomena derived through experience, from this perspective, have no separate existence apart from our consciousness of them. Turner describes Husserl's stance as identifying that 'the existence of other people, values, norms and physical objects is always mediated through the senses and can be known only through mental consciousness' (1991:384). Therefore, reality cannot be experienced directly. Reality is always mediated by consciousness. Husserl defines phenomenology as 'a study of consciousness, but it is not a psychology' because it does not perceive consciousness as a 'physical something' (Husserl, 1965:10). It is to the quest for essential intuitions. Phenomenology is directed at being, rather than appearances. Phenomenologists see all experiences as having 'an internal structure' which can be successfully investigated and understood 'from the inside' (Pivcevic, 1970:19). Like Dewey, Husserl rejected the subject-object dichotomy. He insisted that the essential nature of things is always revealed



through consciousness. Subjectivity is therefore always implicated in the perception of objects. Therefore Phenomenology inquires into the intentionality or consciousness of a thinking spiritual subject always in relationship with objects in the world.

### **3.4.2 Philosophy of Heidegger**

Heidegger's conception of Phenomenology is directed at understanding how phenomena appear (Moran and Mooney, 2002:2). Heidegger probes the linguistic meanings we attach to what appears in our intentional consciousness. Consequently, there is no dichotomy between being and the appearance of phenomena in Heidegger's philosophy. His journey began with an ontological inquiry into the nature of being and evolved into a 'quasi mytho-poetic reflection' on the nature of the human world (ibid:246). Consequently, the study of the language humans use, to express their sense of the world, became the lens for his phenomenology, expressed as 'language is the house of Being, in it's home man dwells' (ibid: 246).

#### **3.4.2.1 *Dasein***

Heidegger defines 'the entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being' as *Dasein*, (Heidegger, cited in Biemel: 29-30). We would take 'Dasein' to mean the human subject with a capacity for self-reflection into the nature of her subjectivity. Heidegger considers two options with regard to 'Dasein', authenticity or inauthenticity. Authenticity addresses the full possibilities of being human. Inauthenticity opts for what is given or pre-set as determining the possibilities of being. How might 'Dasein' resonate with being teachers in DEIS schools? It directs our attention to the choices available to us as educators to act according to the expectations set for us or to be ourselves and inquire into the full possibilities of being teachers in DEIS schools.

#### **3.4.2.2 *Awakening fundamental attunement***

Heidegger perceives the process of 'awakening a fundamental attunement' as consistent with conceptions of becoming conscious (1995:59). He argues that the 'being-there and not-being-there of attunement cannot be grasped via the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness' (Heidegger, 1995:60). He explains that being unawake does not imply being unconscious of something. Conversely, wakefulness does

not necessarily guarantee consciousness of something. Wakefulness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient ground for consciousness. Heidegger sees the awakening of an attunement as distinct from a shift in state from unconsciousness to consciousness. Heidegger describes the process of the awakening of fundamental attunement as 'to let it become awake and as such precisely to let it be' (Heidegger, 1995:61). This distinction is important because it brings us back to the crux of the matter which is that being-there, 'Dasein' and not-being-there, 'Wegsein' are 'possible only if and so long as man is' (Heidegger, 1995:64). It is therefore the existential being of man that provides the possibility of awakening to a fundamental attunement with Being.

### **3.4.2.3 *Being***

Heidegger sees that being must be approached through inquiry into the history of being-there or existence in the world, in which context the meaning of being has evolved. He clarifies that while it is a necessary prerequisite that we carefully attend to the word form and word meaning of being, we cannot approach the essence of being by doing so. Though we must take language as a starting point for inquiry into the essence of being, or any other phenomenon but 'the question of being is not a matter of grammar and etymology' (Heidegger, 1959:87). Being is fundamentally dependent on its naming through language. However, the word representing being does not constitute the essence of being. He argues that 'our understanding of being has a determinateness of its own, ordained by being itself' (ibid:89). So it is by being that we can understand how to be. We do not have to transcend our existence in order to be. There are strong resonances between Heidegger's understanding of being and Mindfulness perspectives cultivating awareness of being (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Nhat Hanh, 1989). A more detailed description of Heidegger's Phenomenological perspective is provided in the appendices (see Appendix D, Overview of Phenomenology).

## **3.5 Introduction to Critical Perspectives**

Critical approaches to social science provide an alternative view of the world to that adopted by interpretive approaches. They are so called because their stance is essentially critical of current social arrangements. These perspectives inquire into how the organization of social life promotes divisions and inequalities between groups. The

resulting apparent 'social order' arises from dominance and creates coercion (Newman, 1997:39). Critical perspectives investigate ideologies, structures and practices constructing and reproducing stratification. These perspectives expose the privileges stratification produces, ideologically and materially advantaging some individuals and groups. Conversely, stratification creates inequality and discriminates against those individuals and groups disadvantaged by it. Using historical, structural and ideological data, critical approaches attempt to explain the social world by providing an understanding of structural relationships underpinning stratification (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:9). Critical perspectives see stratification as exploiting human beings in the interests of capitalism. Accordingly, systems of stratification based on class, race, gender and other variables, are seen as designed to create and sustain inequality.

Critical perspectives take into account that 'while it is important to see that the social world is made up of reflective people' it is also important to recognise that 'they are constrained in what they do and how they think' (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:11). Marxists see these constraints emanating from class inequalities and as an outcome of the capitalist system of production and its ideologies. Feminists see these constraints, originating in gender inequalities, as an outcome of patriarchy and its ideologies. Anti-racists see these constraints resulting in racial and ethnic inequalities, as an outcome of slavery and colonization and ideologies supporting them. Common to all critical perspectives is the view that existing ideological and social structures create and sustain inequality.

Critical perspectives expose how ideological and structural systems cause oppression over time and they attempt to deconstruct these systems. Their intention is to reconstruct systems based on critical proposals for equality, arguably capable of delivering more equitable outcomes. The impetus towards social change in critical perspectives is clear given their consistent critiques of dominant ideologies and oppressive structures. 'Critical perspectives on class are dominated by the work of Marx and subsequent Marxists' revisions' (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:13). Consequently, a brief overview of Marx's theory is presented below with particular reference to his definition of consciousness and its implications for possibilities for social change. An overview of key concepts relating to his philosophy and the extension and revision of his ideas is provided in the appendices, (see Appendix E).

### **3.5.1 Critical social theory of Marx**

The work of Marx (1818-1883) provided the early scaffolding for the development of the critical or conflict perspective. It focused initially on social class and its implications for individuals and for society. The strong materialist analysis underpinning Marx's critical stance can best be understood through what he was reacting against. His materialism makes sense to us in the light of the fact that he espoused Hegelianism as a young man. Later he went on to utterly reject Hegelians as 'hopeless idealists' (Turner, 1991:84). Marx rejected the notion that the world is reflective of our consciousness of it. He saw the focus on ideas 'as nothing more than a conservative ideology that supports people's oppression by the material forces of their existence' (Turner, 1991:184). Marx saw this reliance on ideas as masking the injustices of material inequalities and their consequences for people's lived experiences. We can already see the stage is set for tensions between interpretive approaches such as Phenomenology and Critical and Post-Critical theories with their materialist analysis.

### **3.5.2 Marx's understanding of consciousness**

Marx saw consciousness as an instrument by which man could reflect on his context and then choose how to act. Marx viewed man as a materially grounded, embodied, real person. Therefore man exists as a materially constituted being first. Consciousness provides him with the potential for critiquing and challenging the circumstances of his existence. Consciousness of his situation provides the impetus for potential social and personal change. Marx saw the capacity in humans for the development and use of language as a means to engage consciousness to reflect on and analyse their material and ideological contexts and as the means to change those contexts (Turner, 1991:185). Arguably, consciousness allows humans to pause and make choices about whether and how to act in a given situations. Marx viewed consciousness as a 'social product' capable of expansion through 'people's activities, social relationships, and the production of material life' (Ritzer, 2000:158). He recognised the distinct ability in humans to 'control activities through consciousness' as potentially transformative (ibid:158). McMurty defines 'creative intelligence' as the recognition by Marx of the transformative potential of consciousness (1978).

### **3.5.3 Introduction to the Critical Theory of Paulo Freire.**

Critical consciousness is central to Paulo Freire's work and the development of his educational perspective. His work resonates with this study's focus on how teachers story their lives and their consciousness of their *praxis*. Goulet (2007) remarks that 'no contemporary writer more persistently explores the many dimensions of critical consciousness than Paulo Freire' (Freire, 2007:vii). Freire identified critical consciousness as the main purpose of education (2007). His goal was to develop mass literacy as a means to create critical consciousness and empower ordinary people to take control of their personal lives. He believed education could transform the oppressive social and political structures devastating the lives of Brazilians in the 1920's and 1930's.

#### ***3.5.3.1 Culture of silence***

Freire names a 'culture of silence' around those who are oppressed, (Freire, 1972:10). He observes the paralysis imposed on the dispossessed by virtue of the paternalism of socio-economic and cultural systems. He saw this silence as socially engineered, designed to subjugate and silence the dispossessed, maintaining the oppressive status quo. He identified education as part of both the problem and the solution. Problematic was the fact that the education system acted '*as one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence*' (ibid:10). The solution was transformation through education breaking the silence of the dispossessed by developing their critical consciousness. Freire's work reminds us that schools and teachers are implicated in cultures of silence as well as in breaking cultures of silence. We need to be mindful of this in our critical inquiry into teachers' storied lives.

#### ***3.5.3.2 Critical consciousness***

Freire charts a course from imposed silence to reclaimed voice in tracking the stages of developing critical consciousness. He starts with the assertion 'that men relate to their world in a critical way' and 'apprehend the data of their reality through reflection' (Freire, 2007:3). Consequently, for Freire the development of the capacity to reflect is pivotal to

empowering women and men to act. He identifies the capacity in man to 'discover his own temporality' and to transcend 'a single dimension' (Freire, 2007:3). Consequently, Freire believes the ability to pause and reflect on one's experiences, requires transcending the particular personal present and synthesising it, with the past and future potential, into a shared critical consciousness. Consciousness, for Freire, is a continuum. It spans from what he calls semi-intransitive consciousness to critically transitive consciousness. When people are submerged and silenced in their social and historical contexts Freire describes them as in a state of semi intransitive consciousness (Freire, 1974:13). He identifies critically transitive consciousness as corresponding to 'highly permeable, interrogative and dialogical forms of life' (ibid: 14). The promotion of critical consciousness becomes possible through education committed to dialogue, problem posing and problem solving. Freire makes explicit the link between critical consciousness and action stating that 'authentic reflection cannot exist apart from action' (Freire, 1974:15). Freire's continuum of critical consciousness resonates with how teachers story their lives. The question is not how critically conscious are we as teachers but rather how can we re-story our lives in a way that expands our critical consciousness, in order to better serve the needs of students in DEIS schools and our own needs.

### ***3.5.3.3 Agency***

Central to Freire's conviction about the potential of education to liberate is his assumption that 'man's ontological vocation...is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his world' (Freire, 1972:12). Subjects in this context means those 'who know and act' as distinct from objects 'which are known and acted upon' (ibid:16). Freire identifies critical consciousness as unlocking the 'iron cage' by providing man with the means to restore his agency. Conscientisation makes it 'possible for men to enter the historical process as responsible subjects' and 'enrolls them in the search for self-affirmation' (ibid:16). For Freire, man's normal role is as an active agent of his own destiny, not as a passive one. Dispossession and subjugation pacify and silence men. Oppression weakens their potential for seeing the circumstances that cause their subjugation and consequently disables their power to act to change unjust circumstances.

#### ***3.5.3.4 Adaptation and integration***

Freire distinguishes between the integrated person who is 'person as subject' and the adaptive person who is 'person as object' (Freire, 1974:4). Adaptation is adjustment to an environment within which one finds oneself. It is vital for survival, but it is not creative. Integration is, according to Freire a specifically human activity resulting from 'the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality' (ibid:4). Integration is about more than surviving. Integration is about developing critical consciousness, exercising freedom of choice and actively engaging in the world thus becoming a change agent. Freire does not underestimate the challenge of restoring agency. He recognises that surviving may feel like a safer and more familiar struggle for disempowered people. Freedom may well represent fear. Freire accounts for this fear by the internalisation of the consciousness of the oppressor imposed on the oppressed (Freire, 1972:24). This internalised oppression is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it can lead to victimisation of the oppressed. On the other hand, internalised oppression can lead to aspirations to exercise oppressive power. Freire identifies 'autonomy and responsibility' as the means to replace internalised oppression with authentic living (ibid: 24).

#### ***3.5.3.5 Collective agency***

Freire identifies the collective agency of integrated individuals as holding the potential for transformative social change. He states that 'to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world' (Freire, 1974:3). Like Dewey and Mead, Freire identifies man as social and grounded in the material world. Man's capacity for relationships means that he is not confined to the limits of his own experiences and perceptions. Man has the capacity to share experiences and perceptions and solve problems with others, rather than on his own. Consequently 'men are not limited to a single reaction pattern' (ibid:3). It is the potential for critical reflection on events that offers the chance for an individual man to expand his reaction pattern. By reflecting on the human context individuals understand choices are available in terms of how to act, even if choices are limited. It is in communicating our reflections and insights to others that the possibilities for organising and effecting collective social change emerge.

### **3.5.3.6 Praxis**

In the tradition of critical theory, Freire recognises the power of naming the world. Accordingly, 'to exist, humanely, is to name the world, to change it' (Freire, 1972:61). Dialogue breaks the culture of silence imposed by systems of oppression. Dialogue as a result distinguishes existence from survival. Freire identifies two dimensions in dialogue, reflection and action. He warns that where one of these elements exists without the other there is distortion and an absence of authentic dialogue. Freire warns that dialogue lacking reflection leads to activism, action for its own sake. Dialogue lacking action leads to excessive reflection, naming for its own sake (ibid:60). He coins the term *praxis* to describe the synthesis of action and reflection in a dialogic engagement linking naming with acting (ibid: 60)

### **3.5.3.7 Dialogue**

Freire identifies the conditions promoting and obstructing dialogue (ibid:60-95). Respecting the right of every individual to speak is a precondition for dialogue in his view. Dialogue is always seen in relationship to others therefore 'no one can say a true word alone' (ibid:61). Freire rejects the displacement of power involved in speaking on behalf of another. This practice promotes a culture of silence around them, objectifies their words and nullifies their power to act. Freire sees love as a precondition for authentic dialogue (ibid:62). He defines love as a demonstration of commitment to others and the world. He argues that dialogue cannot happen without love and that love is always dialogical. Freire understands that commitment to others, expressed out of love, demands humility, openness and faith in others (ibid:63). He defines dialogue as 'a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the participants is the logical consequence' (ibid:64). Freire recognises the potential in problem-posing education as the means by which to foster horizontal relationships. Freire's commitment to authentic dialogue makes us mindful in undertaking this research study to inquire into the nature of the dialogic relationships reflected through teachers' storied lives.



### **3.5.3.8 Purpose of education**

Freire identifies the potential for education to function in two ways, either as an instrument of conformity or as the practice of freedom. He asserts 'there is no such thing as a neutral educational process' (Freire, 1990:13). He distinguishes between education and massification. Freire defines massification as 'the 'domestication' of man's critical faculties by a situation in which he is massified and has only the illusion of choice' (ibid: 30). Massification alienates man from his skills and the products of his labour under the illusion of improving the quality of his life. Freire sees education as the means to develop true democracy with the power to resist both 'paternalistic cultural traditions' and the newly emerging conditions generated by the massification of production (ibid:31). He acknowledges the weaknesses of the traditional educational curriculum transmitting 'inert ideas' with little potential for application in the real context of Brazil in transition (ibid: 33). He distinguishes between banking education and problem-posing education. Furthermore, he reconceptualises the relationship between students and teachers in the context of democratic education systems, and posits hope as a necessary tool for social change.

#### **3.5.3.8.1 Banking education**

Freire recognises education that massifies as 'banking education' (Freire, 1972:45-59). It accumulates information for storage, as a commodity. It promotes passivity and is inherently anti-dialogical. In this context education becomes a deposit scheme 'students are the depositories' and the teacher, the depositor (ibid:45). In this model of education the autonomy and creativity of the student is stifled under the guise of educational participation and the lure of accumulating educational credit.

#### **3.5.3.8.2 Problem-posing education**

Freire posits 'problem-posing' education as the constructive, democratic, life-enhancing alternative to banking education (ibid:52). He identifies this type of education as responding 'to the essence of consciousness-intentionality' (ibid:52). The influence of phenomenology can be traced here in the recognition of consciousness as an action

harnessing intentionality towards engagement, which in turn alters consciousness and subsequent engagement. This is 'consciousness as consciousness of consciousness' as framed by Karl Jaspers and cited by Freire (ibid:53). Freire draws on Husserl's concept of explicit awareness [Gewahren] where the proper perception of an object begins to bring the objective background awareness of the object into view and changes our consciousness of the object and ourselves in relation to the object (ibid:53). Problem-posing education is the only means, according to Freire, by which to achieve this critical consciousness that is the catalyst for action leading to social and personal change.

#### **3.5.3.8.3 Relationship between teachers and students**

The nature of the relationship between students and teachers is reconceptualised by Freire in democratic educational programmes 'reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (ibid:46). He rejects the teacher-expert student novice dichotomy. Instead he constructs the teacher-student relationship as an interactive, dialogical and mutually inclusive one. Freire envisages the teacher as 'not merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach' (ibid:53). This reconception of the relationship between teacher and student can be clearly traced back to Freire and forward through Critical and Feminist discourses on pedagogy presented in Chapter Four of this research study.

#### **3.5.3.8.4 Hope**

Freire holds out hope for pedagogy, despite the persistence of the reproduction of inequality in society and in schooling. He describes hope as 'an ontological need, demand[ing] an anchoring in practice' (Freire, 2004:2). Consequently, hope becomes meaningful only through action for social change and pedagogical change. The complex and competing demands of teaching in contemporary public schools, especially in DEIS schools, presents challenges as well as opportunities for teachers to nurture hope and translate it into pedagogical practice in DEIS schools.

## **3.6 Critical theory and the legacy of the Frankfurt School**

Habermas (1929- ) 'is regarded as the major contemporary heir to the Frankfurt inheritance' evolving from the Frankfurt School (Craib, 1992:231). The school was an Institute for Social Research founded in Germany in 1923. The focus of the work of the school was to expose domination and relationships reproducing domination in advanced capitalist societies. The Frankfurt school worked from a critical perspective, beginning with a critique of the works of Marx and Engels and reworking or elaborating some of their ideas. Their approach to critical inquiry was multi-disciplinary and multi-thematic. The Frankfurt School investigated questions relating to religion and morality and rationality and science, from a wide range of perspectives and across a wide range of disciplines. Please refer to Appendix 6 for an overview of the work of the Frankfurt School theorists. We will focus here on how the work of Habermas resonates with our inquiry.

### **3.6.1 Introduction to the critical theory of Habermas**

Seidman (1998) describes the task of Habermas as preserving the 'critical spirit of Marxism as a social force in late twentieth century Europe' (182). Habermas was influenced by the post-war democratic reconstruction in Germany. This context, and the democratic politics shaping it, allowed Habermas to revisit the critical challenges of attempting to merge the philosophical and scientific features of Marxism into an ideological and actual critical force for social change. In doing so he tries to bring structure and agency together in a new way and in a totalising theory. For Habermas 'theory was to be a force for social change by altering the social perspectives of agents of change' (ibid:187). Habermas was influenced by American Pragmatism, referenced earlier in this Chapter, through James, Dewey, Mead and Pierce. Consequently, Habermas adopted pragmatic method in his linguistic turn to the use of speech and how it can alter perception and meaning and promote communicative action. He also drew from the German hermeneutic tradition stretching from Dilthey (1833-1911) to Gadamer (1900-2002), (Finlayson, 2005:17-18). Their influence is clear in how he recognises language, and the meanings and values it conveys, as exerting an equal influence to labour in understanding social life and organisation.

Recognising the significance of speech, as the point of interpretation and communication of values and beliefs between humans, points in the direction of hermeneutics.

This recognition resonates with our focus, in this research study, on how teachers' stories communicate their values and beliefs. It leans us towards questioning how these values and beliefs shape teachers' actions and how these actions and perceptions shape the lives of students in DEIS schools. From the perspective of the current research study the redirection critical theory takes with Habermas, turning towards social and symbolic interaction and the life-world, directs our inquiry into the storied lives of teachers in DEIS schools and how teachers interpret and communicate individual and shared values (see Appendix 7).

### **3.7 Conclusion to the classical literature review**

The Literature review presented in this chapter brought together three perspectives on knowledge and the nature of the social world, namely, Pragmatism, Phenomenology and Critical theory. The interpretive approaches of Pragmatism and Phenomenology and the structural approach of Critical Theory provided two strong and contrasting theoretical pillars underpinning this study. The resonances and dissonances between these classical perspectives provide the theoretical breadth and depth to support this study. In Chapter Four, contemporary Critical perspectives build on these two classical pillars to build a robust contemporary theoretical platform for the study.

#### **3.7.1 Pragmatism**

Pragmatism is a theory of meaning and a theory of knowledge. It probes the construction of ideas and interrogates how we derive meaning from them and construct reliable knowledge as a consequence. Pragmatism understands the production of knowledge to be active and evolving. It views objects in the social world as tools for use in solving problems that confront us. Pragmatism adopts an instrumental perspective on objects, including ideas. It also restores human agency to centre stage. It shifts the gaze of philosophical inquiry from the macro level of society to the micro level of social

interaction. It examines the social consequences of ideas on human beings and on the social world. Consequently, it avoids debates concerning absolute truth. Truth for pragmatists is in the fluid, evolving, creative flux of investigating the social consequences of ideas through examining social interaction.

Dewey and Mead represent the Pragmatic tradition in this literature review. Dewey's work resonates with the focus of this study on teachers' storied lives and the implications of their constructions of knowledge on their interactions in DEIS schools. Dewey's epistemology of knowledge is focused on reflective thinking and linked explicitly to the practices of pedagogy. He sees human beings as active agents using reflective consciousness as a guide to interact in the world, reflect consciously on their interactions and re-evaluate them. Dewey asserts that democracy is the only mode of social organisation supporting the development of reflective consciousness and positive social interaction. Democracy, in his view, can only be created through education systems directed at critical consciousness and the development of shared social life.

Mead probes social interaction and stresses the significance of our understandings and interpretations of situations. The communication of these shared meanings is the substance of social interaction. This focus fits well with our research study, given its interest in how teachers story their understandings and interpretations of their situation and interactions in DEIS school contexts. Mead's perspective is the emerging present, the lens through which we interpret both past and future. Meanings are communicated in social interaction through language. Knowledge for Mead is 'a process in conduct' (Mead, 1932:91). It is forged in action, social interaction. Mead's interest, like Dewey's is in the active processes of operating conscious intelligence.

Dewey and Mead both see knowledge and the conscious intelligence driving it, as fluid. Consequently individual and social development becomes possible. By sharing our ideas we can; convey our understandings; understand the perspective of others; reflect on their views in relation to our own; re-evaluate our ideas; and develop new shared understandings. Stories provide a medium through which we communicate shared understandings. Through stories we can also re-author our lives to reflect new insights.

### 3.7.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology provides us with a second lens expanding the interpretive tradition. It focuses specifically on understanding 'the structures and workings of human consciousness' (Craib, 1992:98). Its interest is in the processes by which we develop and use consciousness rather than in the content of consciousness. This focus resonates with Mead's and Dewey's interests in how we make sense of the world by developing shared knowledge enabling us to take action in the world. Phenomenologists, like Pragmatists, hold the view that the phenomena of consciousness provide valid material for scientific and philosophical inquiry. Both perspectives refute the subject-object dichotomy. Phenomenologists identify the conscious subject as both the knower and in the known. Knowledge is therefore seen as constructed from the synthesis of intentional consciousness and phenomena. The focused intentionality of consciousness is considered capable of both constructing and adjudicating reliable knowledge claims.

The ideas of Husserl and Heidegger were used to represent the Phenomenological perspective in this Chapter. Husserl's work represented the foundations of Phenomenology. Heidegger's work traced the development of the original ideas in new directions. Husserl recognised that we make assumptions about the social world on the basis of familiarity with learned and inherited ideas. In order to understand how consciousness works Husserl argues that we have to suspend our taken-for-granted assumptions. Husserl proposes that we 'bracket' these assumptions. Consequently, the mind may be able to grasp what is essential or universal about being (Husserl, 1969:108). Husserl's goal was to develop an abstract theory of consciousness. Such a theory would arguably make sense of the processes by which we construct knowledge of the world, including self-knowledge.

Heidegger recognised the focus on the intentionality of consciousness in Husserl's work as hugely significant. He investigated the human 'Dasein', the capacity for self-reflection into the processes shaping subjectivity. He pointed to two possible options. These were authenticity, addressing the full possibilities of being or inauthenticity opting for what is given to us.

This research study sets out to critically examine the processes by which teachers construct knowledge about being teachers in DEIS schools and how they act on the basis of that knowledge. Phenomenology supports this inquiry. Bracketing, the suspension of our assumptions, resonates with Mead's goal of being able to take the position of the generalised other. It points to putting our own assumptions out of action temporarily, pausing, becoming aware, in order to truly understand our students, our colleagues, ourselves. Phenomenology suggests that all experiences have an internal structure that can be understood 'from the inside' (Pivcevic, 1970:19). We approach teachers lives, in this research study committed to looking 'from the inside' also realising that our assumptions need be suspended in order to recognise our own limiting beliefs and expand our understanding.

### **3.7.3 Critical Theory**

The second theoretical pillar underpinning this study is Critical or Conflict theory. This perspective is a structural theoretical approach. Critical theory is interested in the macro processes of social life and how they shape our experiences in the world. It focuses primarily on revealing the construction and effects of social and ideological structures. Conversely, the lenses of interpretive theories such as Pragmatism and Phenomenology are focused primarily on revealing the construction and effects of intentional consciousness. This classical literature review combines the strengths of both interpretive and critical perspectives troubling the tensions between agency and structure central to this inquiry into teacher *praxis* in DEIS schools.

Critical approaches embody critiques of existing social structures. They aspire to enhance the liberty of human beings. They see that liberty constrained by the stratification implicit in social structures. These theorists actively seek to expose and deconstruct the social, cultural, ideological, and political workings of domination and submission inherent in all stratified social systems, but particularly in advanced capitalist systems. In this chapter of the Literature review Critical Theory was presented against the background of the work of Marx. This work investigates social class primarily and reflects on the economic base of society as the root of stratification and of inevitable social conflict.

Marx, like Dewey, Mead, Husserl and Heidegger, identifies language as an essential tool with which human beings can analyse and share reflections on their material and

ideological existence with the potential to act to change those conditions. We recognise in these theoreticians the increasing significance of language as the means for communicating and reflecting on critical consciousness.

Freire and Habermas contributed important insights in the literature, relevant to our research study. Freire's work resonates with this study because he sees the whole purpose of education as developing critical consciousness. He explicitly makes the link between problem posing education and the development of critical consciousness. This resonates with Dewey's recognition that is through education that reflective consciousness, needed to support democratic social life, can be developed.

Through education, Freire identified literacy as the means by which oppressed people could break the culture of silence around poverty and oppression and take action for social change. Literacy remains a barometer of educational standards across the world, including in DEIS schools in Ireland. Freire sees in the spoken and written language of people the ability to break the culture of silence around poverty and other forms of oppression. Reclaiming their voices is, a significant step towards developing critical consciousness, necessary to restore the agency of people oppressed by unjust social structures. Freire plots a continuum of growth in consciousness from naïve to critically transitive consciousness. Teachers' stories may help us to consider how our own stories reflect on our consciousness as educators. Freire, identifies collective agency as the impetus for social change. Education is the means to develop critical consciousness and drive it forward. Critical consciousness is seen as a synthesis between reflection and action, or *praxis* (1972:60). Freire argues this critical consciousness is nurtured in dialogue. In dialogue individuals who respect each other as equals can articulate, develop, share, apply, reflect upon and modify their ideas and actions. Dialogue is always relational. It relies on interaction between human beings. Freire argues that education systems are never neutral. They are dialogical or anti-dialogical, tools for conformity or freedom. Freire's thesis can be turned to our research study to trouble whether teacher's stories signify dialogic or anti-dialogic education. The problem posing education Freire envisages as dialogic responds to 'the essence of conscious-intentionality' (Freire, 1990:52). This conscious-intentionality is at the root of *praxis* (ibid:60)



Habermas, drawing on the legacy of the Frankfurt School, exposes systems and relations reproducing domination in capitalist societies. The damage done by the dominating features of capitalism arguably eroded, the potential for the development of individual and collective critical consciousness, subsuming individual and collective agency and obstructing social change. Habermas proposed critical theory as the key to effecting social change by 'altering the perspectives of agents of change' (Seidman, 1998:187). He identified language as the significant symbol to effect social change. He identified the potential of speech to alter perception and meaning and promote communicative action. Habermas went on to develop a theory of communicative action by synthesising structure and agency in communicative interaction. He succeeded in establishing interaction as the twin pillar, with economic production, in the structuring of social life. He also echoes the emerging consensus among the principal theoreticians cited in this chapter that hermeneutics, in its study of the meanings and values language conveys, has insights to offer into any investigation of the links between critical consciousness and the potential for human agency, including teacher agency.

Conflict theories share, with Pragmatism and Phenomenology, the recognition that human consciousness holds the key to understanding and is the gateway opening up possibilities for improving the conditions of social life. All three theoretical perspective recognise that consciousness is forged in the grounded context of shared social life and that our capacity to share social life in turn depends on our abilities to communicate our social experiences to each other and thereby to develop options for acting.

## **4 Chapter Four: Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

This chapter will review relevant literature shaping contemporary critical perspectives on pedagogy. It challenges the impact of inequalities on opportunities for education and social life. The literature is selected to assist us to critically inquire into teacher's storied lives in DEIS schools. It will combine critical discourses and critical pedagogy discourses. Building on the Critical perspectives of Freire and Habermas in Chapter Three, this review will begin by focusing briefly on two legacies for critical pedagogies. The first legacy draws on the work of Foucault, (1926-1984). The second legacy draws on the work of DuBois, (1868-1963), Woodson, (1875-1950) and Horton, (1905-1990). The substantive part of this Chapter engages two perspectives on critical pedagogies, critical cultural discourses and feminist discourses. These perspectives emerge predominantly from scholarship within the Education community, including within Teacher Education, and within the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Women's Studies. Reflections on teachers' storied lives, presented in Chapter Six, will be read against the background of the critical and interpretive discourses presented across Chapters Three and Four. These discourses expose the material, socio-cultural, economic, and political interests which shape the ideology and practices of schooling and support us to critically inquire into being teachers in DEIS schools.

### **4.2 Contemporary discourses**

This chapter predominantly presents discourses referenced with the prefixes 'critical' or 'post', theorised under the titles of Critical, Post-Critical Post-Structuralist, Post-Colonial and Post-Modern. They can be identified under the general umbrella of Post-Modernist discourses. Ritzer accounts for the postmodern as combining 'a new historical epoch, new cultural products and a new type of theorizing about the social world' (2000:469). McLaren uses the term Postmodernism to relate to 'the rupturing of the unitary fixity and homogenizing logic of the grand narratives of Western European thought' (1997:13). In the Postmodernist era the unitary has been replaced with the plural. The current

theoretical focus is on difference and diversity, on the relationship between the local and the global. Multiple rather than singular interpretations of truth, beauty, culture, ethics, justice, democracy, knowledge, and education and its purpose prevail. McLaren cites the consequences of the current 'cultural logic' as creating a shift in which 'the alienation of the subject associated with Modernism has been replaced by the fragmentation of the subject' associated with Postmodernism (ibid:14).

A concurrent challenge is the fragmentation of the meaning of the postmodern object, whatever that object is, truth, justice, education, knowledge, ethics, culture or democracy. The tension implicit in the relationship between allegedly fragmented subjects and the fragmented meaning of objects is the dilemma of postmodern times. This research study will engage with these tensions in critically inquiring into teachers' storied lives.

Postmodern thinkers tend, according to Seidman to be preoccupied with 'identity, instability and change' as signifiers of cultural crisis (1998:317-318). Bauman attests a significant shift in the role of sociology, as a consequence of the impact of postmodernism, from a legislative to an interpretive function (1992:42). The aim of postmodern critiques is according to Bauman 'to enlighten citizens...to the social forces that threaten to diminish freedom and political democracy' (Bauman cited in Seidman, 1998:319). This view suggests that, albeit in a radically changed and deeply challenging socio-cultural landscape, the development of critical consciousness is as vital a precondition as ever, for re-creating the conditions making it possible for human freedom and democracy to survive.

### **4.3 Contemporary Critical Discourses**

Critical perspectives are so called, because the stance they adopt critically interrogates the distribution of power and resources in societies. Their goal is to expose and tackle inequality and injustice. They promote systems to actively redistribute resources and power. The critical perspective is focused on, the manner in which how we organise social life promotes divisions and inequalities between groups, and how the resulting apparent 'social order' arises from dominance and coercion (Newman, 1997:39).

Critical theorists, working in the discipline of Education and in other academic disciplines from a critical perspective, trouble current understandings about how education can function in relation to both inequality and equality. These theorists also highlight that the

reproduction of inequality through schooling is a complex multi-layered process. They understand the responses of educators, and students, to this process on a continuum between reproduction and resistance.

#### **4.4 Characteristics of Critical Discourses**

Critical perspectives adopt the view that human agency is constrained, not only in terms of how we might act, but in how we think. Critical perspectives, investigate the effects of stratification on the basis of class, 'race', gender and other variables. They demonstrate that existing ideological and social structures are embedded with values and practices, implicitly or explicitly conferring advantages or disadvantages, on the basis of these socially constructed categories. The result is the creation of privileged access and preferential opportunities for social and political power and access material and ideological resources, including education, for selected individuals and groups. The result is also the creation of 'pariah status' for other individuals and groups (Giddens, 1989). These result in inequitable access and outcomes, including inequitable access to and outcomes from education.

Critical approaches seek to uncover how ideological systems, implicated in the reproduction of oppressive structures and systems, have been constructed and sustained over time. Their stance is political to the extent that they seek to understand and deconstruct systems perpetuating ideological and material oppression. Their hope is to use critique as a tool to continually expose the relations supporting inequality and by so doing create opportunities to construct systems capable of delivering more equitable personal and collective social outcomes. There is an impetus towards social change in the critical perspective given its consistent critique of dominant ideologies and oppressive structures. Critical theories staunchly critique the dominant discourses shaping knowledge and determining the relationship between knowledge and power. We will begin by drawing on Foucault's account of this relationship.

## 4.5 Foucault's legacy for critical pedagogies

Foucault approaches examining the social world through the lenses of two central ideas, the 'archaeology of knowledge' and the 'genealogy of power' (Ritzer, 2000:459). His excavation of the archaeology of knowledge is focused less on the detail of the Artefacts of knowledge and more on the shaping of the epistemological ground rules of knowledge. These rules determine which details of knowledge are chosen for attention and which practices are deemed acceptable to facilitate their emergence, at a given moment in history. Foucault's archaeology of knowledge involves the search for 'a set of rules that determines the conditions of possibility for all that can be said within the particular discourse at any given time' (Sheridan cited in Ritzer, 2000:460). Foucault identifies discourses, statements of knowledge communicated through speech or documents, as the building blocks with which to construct the archaeology of knowledge. Hermeneutic interests do not motivate his excavation of discourses. Foucault's goal is not to seek a deeper understanding of discourses in the hermeneutic sense. His aim is to analyse, describe and organise discourses, and the documents derived from them, in order to reveal the patterns, relations, interests and ordering of priorities contained within them. He attempts to reveal the epistemological rules governing the prevailing discourses. His attention is given in particular to discourses that make particular systematic truth claims, such as those that underpin the formulation of the human sciences (Ritzer, 2000:460).

Foucault's approach to tracing genealogies of power involves 'a serial and critical analysis' of historical discourses, and then, testing their 'relationship to issues in the contemporary world' (Ritzer, 2000:461). Consequently, Foucault is interested in how people exercise power and control over themselves and others through the creation and use of knowledge. Foucault recognises links between power and knowledge. He does not see the exercise of power by elites as a consciously chosen act. Rather he draws on the 'structural relationships between knowledge and power' (Ritzer, 2000:461). This perspective draws on his background as a Structuralist. However, he increasingly recognises the limitations of structural explanations and ultimately adopts a Post-Structuralist perspective.

In her focus on the implications of Foucault's work for education, McNicol Jardine asks teachers 'how thoroughly are we permeated and controlled by the discourses of modern western societies and cultures?' (2005:2). This question is framed as a postmodern one. The focus has shifted from concerns with structure and agency to a question about the source and extent of control and governance, including self-governance. Critical pedagogy is deeply concerned with the impact of dominant discourses on schooling and we will later consider this issue in the context of McLaren's contention of a 'predatory culture' (1995). Foucault's writings on disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary acts of power expose a 'major source of the pressures we teachers feel to transmit knowledge even when we understand it is being learned inertly by our students...to continue to teach both content and processes that isolate rather than connect' and to teach to the test (McNicol Jardine, 2005:10). She contends that Foucault's work provides a challenge, and an opportunity, to 'examine our understanding of our own practices and our own acts of power and their effects' (ibid, 2005:10). This inquiry into teachers' 'storied lives' provides a unique opportunity, for such a challenge and opportunity, for us as educators. Foucault draws our attention to the fact that relationships between knowledge and power are embedded in all discourses of knowledge. As teachers who might aspire to critical pedagogy we may need to develop a discourse literacy, in order to understand the will to power implicit in all discourses of schooling and in our own practices as teachers. Foucault's legacy suggests that discourses, including the discourses of schooling, and practices, including pedagogical practices, are permeated by relationships between knowledge and power. This inquiry aims to provide an opportunity for us to explore how we understand relationships between power, knowledge and pedagogical practice, through teachers' storied lives.

#### **4.6 Legacies of DuBois, Woodson and Horton for Critical Pedagogies**

Graves (1998) credits Dubois and Woodson with an important legacy to critical pedagogy in the focus of their critical scholarship on the education of African American students and the exposure of racialised inequalities in public schools in America. The *Mis-education of the Negro*, published by Woodson in 1933, targeted the explicit racialised policies and practices perpetuated by mainstream schooling on African American students. Both DuBois and Woodson recognised the distortion and erasure of the history of African

Americans in the taught curriculum as destructive to the self-respect of African Americans. They broke the culture of silence about the legacy of slavery and domination embedded in schooling practices, and social practices, towards African Americans. They argued that schooling should provide African American students with the critical skills to interrogate their lived experiences of racialised inequality and to challenge the structures, policies, practices and beliefs supporting them. Horton (1905-1990) developed the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee to counter the violation of civil rights of African Americans and others, in society at the time and to provide schooling for leadership to resist segregation laws. Horton's vision for change was predicated on the assumption that 'in order for education or institutional change to be effective, it had to begin with the people themselves' (Darder et al, 2009:3-4). Like Freire, Horton saw schools as having a political function to create an environment in which people are supported to critique injustices affecting their lives and develop their leadership skills to exert social change to challenge inequalities.

#### **4.7 Introduction to critical pedagogies**

The literature review will now consider how critical perspectives have been applied to our thinking about teaching, learning, and the process of schooling, and how these perspectives might be relevant to the this study. Critical scholars and educators apply the critical perspective in uncovering undemocratic, inegalitarian, unjust, and divisive influences on the construction of knowledge, and on the structure, function, ethos, and pedagogical and organisational practices of schools, as well as on the outcomes of education. This body of scholarship is pivotal to this study.

Marxist, Feminist and Post-Colonial scholars, within many fields of scholarship but particularly within the fields of Education, Sociology, Women's Studies and Cultural studies, have contributed to developing contemporary critical perspectives on pedagogy, schooling and the future of democracy. The early critiques had historical roots in Marxist, feminist and anti-racist perspectives. These perspectives focused on class, gender or race and ethnicity as respectively shaping the socio-cultural, ideological and political context of education. They critiqued the extent to which social agency is afforded to teachers, students, and local communities, in that context. The ongoing development of critical perspectives has revealed the intersectional, as well as the unique, features of inequalities based on class, gender, and race and ethnicity perpetuated through social and ideological

structures, including schools. The critique has also exposed the workings of other related inequalities constructed on the basis of difference, factored as deficit or asset, according to the value placed on it by contemporary culture, including school culture. These other socially constructed differences relate to ability; health status; legal status; marital status; age; religious persuasion and sexual preference.

Contemporary critical scholarship on pedagogy has drawn on understandings developed through critical cultural discourses, critical feminist discourses and critical race theory discourses on education and on social life. These discourses offer a range of critical lenses through which to examine a through which to examine number of tensions, which manifest in education and in social life. These tensions are stretched between possibilities for: critical consciousness and the fragmented consciousness offered in postmodern culture; tensions between social agency and the weight of ideological and social structures imposing on teachers, students and the school community; tensions between the struggle to develop freedom and democracy and the forces in postmodern culture which threaten to subvert freedom and undermine democracy, including through education. Central to these critical discourses is the continuing hope that education can be a vehicle promoting critical consciousness and exploring the contemporary challenges for teacher praxis, the synergy of action and reflection, to nurture freedom and help to continually recreate democratic structures, and the practices to sustain it (Freire, 1972:73). Freire, whose name is readily identified with critical discourses on pedagogy, holds out hope for pedagogy, despite the persistence of the reproduction of inequality in society and in schooling. With reference to the prospects for social transformation and pedagogical progress, he describes hope as 'an ontological need, demand[ing] an anchoring in practice' (Freire, 2004:2). In other words hope becomes meaningful only through action for social change and pedagogical change. In the light of the complex and competing demands of primary teaching, retaining a hopeful vision and developing knowledge that can be a catalyst for engaged pedagogy may be vital for teachers, and in turn vital for their students.

Marxist perspectives, and other left-wing Critical perspectives on inequality in education, have a long history associated with revealing the reproduction of inequality through student selection, selection of curricular content, the impact of the hidden curriculum, educational policy, funding policy, pedagogical practices and the impact of poverty, racism, sexism and other inequalities in society, on schooling. Some of the early critiques



seek evidence of the reproduction of inequality through examining explicit schooling practices and policies. They also examine the implicit influence of the hidden curriculum on inequitable opportunities in education, and inequitable outcomes from it. The focus of this body of work in critical pedagogy is strongly associated with Freire, and is primarily focused on instructional practices and the microenvironment of schools. Other early critical theorists focused on the macro level of society, drawing attention to structural relationships between schools and dominant cultural, ideological, political and economic interests. Bowles and Gintis, 1976), working from a Marxist perspective argued an intrinsic link between schooling and the economy in terms of schools serving the interests of industrial capitalism (Bilton et al, 1996:336). They observed correspondence between the fragmentation of the curriculum and the fragmentation of work processes (ibid:337). They viewed both the selection of what is learned, the curriculum, and the purpose for which it is learned, grades, as corresponding to the need to provide workers to occupy unfulfilling jobs for the purpose of being paid in the capitalist economy (ibid, 1996:338). From this perspective, learning is subsumed by the needs of capitalism and is diverted from serving the needs of the human being to develop critical thinking and secure fulfilling work. Lynch argues that, 'whether you agree with them or not, the work of Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America* provided a model of schooling which exposed the ways in which the relations of production can influence life in classrooms' (Lynch, 1989:5). Critical theorists who followed (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1981,1983,1984; McLaren, 1986) drew attention to the limitations of correspondence theory (Bowles and Gintis, 1976)) especially in its tendency to see all aspects of the education system as oppressive, and its singular focus on class inequalities, to the exclusion of many other forms of inequality. The critical theorists reviewed below open the investigation of pedagogy and schooling to examining the effects of multiple inequalities, and to addressing resistance in contemporary schools and in society.

Within the disciplines of Education and Sociology, and outside of them, particularly within scholarship in the fields of Women's Studies and Multi-Cultural Studies, a large body of work on pedagogy has been amassed in the last thirty years. Labels of critical, radical, feminist, and multi cultural have been attached to these pedagogical discourses indicating some differences in definition, orientation and indeed location. Gore contends that what is common to these pedagogical perspectives is that they are 'constructed as oppositional to 'mainstream' or 'traditional' schooling practices and theories' (1993:3). They perceive

and define themselves as critical through their perspectives and commitments, which may tend towards cultural criticism, or feminist criticism or race relations criticism. Their stated purpose is to reveal the workings of hegemonic systems, exposing the complexity of class, gender and racially based inequalities through the development of critical consciousness. By doing so they hope to provide human beings with the skills to seek, to recognise, and to engage in actions to promote social change. Critical Cultural, Critical Feminist and Critical Race Theories employ a critical perspective but view the social world from their specific perspectives and therefore produce some different understandings. I will explore these differences here because of the interest of this study in pedagogical change and the pursuit of equality goals, through the science of teaching. In doing so it is mindful to be aware of a general criticism targeted at critical and feminist theorists that their theories tend to be high on aspirations towards change and allegedly low on delivering viable proposals to enact such changes. Lynch asserts that the reasons for this criticism are 'because they have been more effective on critique that they have been in identifying strategies for action and change' (1999:23).

#### **4.7.1 Critical pedagogies: Two strands**

Gore identifies two strands within discourses on critical pedagogies. One focuses on 'the articulation of a broad social and educational vision' the other on 'developing explicit instructional practices to suit specific contexts' (Gore, 1993:17). Gore associates Giroux (1943-) and McLaren (1948-) with the first strand, and Freire (1921-1997) and Shor (1945-) with the second. Insights derived from these two strands of critical pedagogy will be engaged here on the basis of their explanatory power to support us to investigate, teacher's critical consciousness in *praxis* (Freire, 1972:60). This section on critical pedagogy will begin with an overview of the broad critical, social, and educational visions of Giroux and McLaren. It will continue with an overview of the situational and instructional critical perspectives developed by Freire and Shor.

##### ***4.7.1.1 Critical pedagogies: Focused on broad social and cultural visions.***

The term 'critical pedagogy' was first used by Giroux (1983). His critique examines the potential for engaging strategies to resist hegemonic influences in education. These influences present an alleged consensus about the goals of public education as serving the common good. Consequently they agree the instructional, curricular and contextual

means to achieve such goals in public schools. Giroux engages critical theoretical tools in the process of mounting resistance to what he sees as the subversion of individual and collective freedom perpetuated within public schooling in America. Giroux's work on critical pedagogy reveals that what is arguably agreed upon pedagogically about public education, by apparent consensus, is inherently political in its intent and inherently unjust in its effects. Therefore critical pedagogy has, according to Giroux, 'tak[en] as one of its fundamental concerns the need to re-emphasise the centrality of politics and power in understanding how schools function within the larger society' (Giroux, 1995:29). Consequently, critical pedagogy has focused on 'the political economy of schooling, the state and education, the politics of representation, and the construction of student subjectivity' (ibid:29). Giroux is committed to exposing the reproduction of power interests and control through education. He reveals that the manner in which power is distributed in schools influences individuals, pedagogical practices, policies, the culture of schools, the agency of teachers and pupils, and the curriculum. The distribution of power reflects, according to Giroux, the attempts, successful or otherwise, of the dominant macro-economic and macro-political interests to exert influence on schooling, on teachers and on students. Giroux maintains, that despite the weight of vested economic and political interests seeking to sculpt education to serve its needs, education remains a contested site offering possibilities for social agency, resistance to hegemony and hope for democracy.

Giroux argues that:

No democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way (2011:19).

He critiques the culture of positivism, in the hegemonic effect it exerts on schools, which he argues runs counter to the development of critical consciousness, self-reflection, moral decision making and socially responsible action. Understanding the debilitating effects of positivism is, from a critical perspective, a prerequisite to understanding the challenges implicit for teachers in engaging a critical pedagogy. Giroux suggests that teachers must be regarded 'as a critical public resource' for providing empowering educational experiences to students as well as the 'formation of a democratic society' (ibid:171). Giroux considers the influence of positivistic culture on schooling against the background

of Gramsci's (1891-1937) work exposing the myriad and changing workings of domination in advanced western capitalist societies. Gramsci labelled the effect of these dominating mechanisms as 'ideological hegemony'. By blunting critical consciousness it facilitates the covert manipulation of social behaviour. Ideological hegemony provided the scaffold of values, ideas, beliefs, practices and mechanisms, allegedly benign and objective, but designed to support the dominant economic and political interests, and institutions, of advanced western capitalism. Cultural dominance is achieved, in Gramsci's view, not by overt social control through physical force but through covert social control through 'the distribution of an elaborate system of norms and imperatives' (ibid:22). Giroux contends that social agencies such as schools do not necessarily mirror these values, beliefs and practices literally, nor does he accept that they are immune to the impact of them. Rather he sees schools as contested sites where 'the historically changing dialectic between power and ideology' is played out (ibid:22). Teachers and students are at the front line in these contested sites.

Giroux presents a number of specific ways in which he observes the norms and imperatives of positivism working through schools. He identifies a 'limited focus on objectivity, efficiency and technique' as hallmarks of positivism reflected and reproduced through the curricula of public schools (ibid:20). These features contribute to 'a crisis of historical consciousness itself' (ibid:21), according to Giroux. This crisis involves a loss of the signposts from history, highlighting the preconditions necessary to support social agency and democracy. He argues this is loss promoted by the current focus of education on alleged objectivity, valuing efficiency and technique. Arguably, these losses have facilitated the rise of science and technology in the United States in the early twentieth century, predicated on the values of objectivity, instrumental reason, scientific method and efficiency. Giroux notes the influence of these values on both western culture and on perceptions of what progress means in that socio-cultural context. Progress, he suggests, is exemplified by what mass advertising offers as efficient, rational, technically useful, desirable and fulfilling. Giroux argues that 'this form of rationality has become the prevailing cultural hegemony' (ibid:24). Rationality, underpinning positivist culture and its attendant value system, undermines 'any viable notion of historical consciousness' (ibid: 25). With rationality and technical efficiency as the uncontested standards of social and educational progress, hermeneutic principles are subsumed by positivistic culture and rendered irrational, inefficient, anti-progressive and the realm of the soft sciences. Giroux

sees the hallmarks of the hegemony of positivism clearly in the shaping and functioning of theory. He argues that in this context 'theory has been stripped of its concern with ends and ethics' and appears to construct value-free knowledge, which is in fact value-laden knowledge (ibid:26). There are explicit tensions between standards and practices supporting instrumental rationality and efficiency in education and standards and practices supporting the development of critical consciousness, human freedom and democratic values and practices, according to critical theorists. It is probable that teachers' stories will reflect these tensions.

McLaren states that 'our culture in general (and that includes schools, the media and our social institutions) has helped educate students to acquire a veritable passion for ignorance' (2003:92). He sees that this ignorance is by no means a benign acquisition. McLaren quotes Lacan as asserting that 'ignorance is not a passive state but rather an active excluding from consciousness' (ibid:92). Consequently, we might legitimately ask what impact does school culture exert on teacher consciousness and on student consciousness? McLaren contends that the postmodern context is supported by a 'predatory culture that refuses to wager on the side of radical hope' (1995:2). In this culture, McLaren argues that, identity is shaped 'mainly and often violently' by aggressive marketing and conspicuous consumption (ibid:2). In this environment shaped by mass marketing and consumption, radical hope needs critical pedagogy to create and engage an ethics to offset the effects of predatory culture. McLaren sees educators as active agents vital in the task of *challenging 'the received truths or accepted conventions that have provoked the current crisis of history and identity'* (ibid:9). The curriculum for schools, should in his view, 'actively contest the historical amnesia' imposed by postmodern culture and communicated through mass media (ibid:10). This amnesia silences the subaltern voices of the dispossessed, the colonised, and the vulnerable and renders their histories and herstories obsolete. McLaren envisions the task of critical pedagogy as an antidote to this amnesia with a goal to 'construct a praxis for teachers that urges an active solicitude for the marginalised and dispossessed' (ibid:23). He defines this as a 'pedagogy of the concrete' constructed on the basis of a 'politics of ethics, difference and democracy' (ibid:24). This pedagogical vision is centered on the importance of the 'other', recognising, understanding, respecting and building on the strengths offered by differences. It uses this grounding in otherness in a proactive and politicised way. This

critical pedagogy recognises the vital need to create, what McLaren quotes Giroux as calling 'a common ground for linking the notion of difference to a publicly shared language of struggle and social justice' (ibid:24).

#### ***4.7.1.2 Critical Pedagogies: Focused on context specific instructional practices***

The second strand of critical pedagogy, identified by Gore (1993), is associated with Freire and Shor. Their critique stems from a similar analysis to that of Giroux and McLaren, that schools are contested sites. The outcomes of the contest have implications for democracy and individual and collective freedom. Freire and Shor focus on the development of instructional practices to guide critical pedagogy in context. These practices engage a critical understanding of the tensions between the purpose which education should fulfill in a democratic society and the reality of how it does function. Freire identifies the potential for education to function in two ways, as an instrument of conformity or as the practice of freedom. Freire asserts 'there is no such thing as a neutral educational process' (1972:13). In the classical literature review in Chapter Three and overview of Freirean concepts relevant to this study has already been presented. These included two central tenets. Firstly Freire saw the very purpose of education as explicitly aimed at the development of critical consciousness. Secondly the purpose for developing critical consciousness is to engage it, in order to act in a socially responsible way. This engagement relates to two types of action. The first involves examining the material and ideological conditions of existence and exposing oppressive and unjust conditions. This step involves making a moral judgement by engaging critical consciousness. The second step involves engaging critical consciousness to transform moral judgement into socially responsible actions to change oppressive conditions and replace them with more just and equitable arrangements than before. The process Freire understands as leading to transformation is 'conscientisation' understood as 'the awakening of critical consciousness' (ibid:160). Freire contends that this critical consciousness 'leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation' (ibid:160).

Freire sees pedagogy as the means by which 'conscientisation' will be realised and develops specific pedagogical approaches to facilitate the process. In particular Freire identifies the nurturing of the spoken and written words of the people through education as a catalyst to break the culture of silence around poverty and other forms of oppression. Freire identifies dialogue as an existential necessity' for man, the vehicle which brings his truth into relationship with the truth of others and offers possibilities for change (ibid:65). Freire sets out specific qualities identifying authentic dialogue in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Amongst these qualities he names dialogue as necessitating action and reflection, love for the world and men, humility, faith, mutual trust, and critical thinking (ibid:60-95). For Freire, dialogue predicated on critical thinking is the only dialogue capable of producing critical thinking (ibid:65). Unless this kind of dialogue can be established authentic communication cannot exist and 'true education' cannot occur (ibid: 65). Freire also specifies the hallmarks of unauthentic dialogue as naïve thinking, arrogance, domination, passivity, hopelessness, verbalism or activism (ibid:60), self-interest and self-sufficiency and denial of the material reality of men (ibid:60-95). Freire is specific in his articulation of the qualities that need to be developed to achieve authentic dialogue and the qualities that obstruct and subvert authentic dialogue. Freire stresses instructional practices, the qualities brought to dialogic encounter, as rendering opportunities for collective empowerment and collective agency or experiences that domesticate, pacify, disempower and subvert collective agency. His focus is on working solutions to be co-created in the situated context of the classroom, based upon the needs of the learners.

Shor, like Freire, looks to the transformative potential of education through exposing the situational realities subverting critical consciousness in schools. He interrogates instructional practices seeking those promoting both critical consciousness and engaged collective action. Shor recognises, as does Freire, and others critical educationalists, that there is no such thing as a neutral education system or process. He recognises that 'all forms of education are political because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society' (Shor, 1992:12-13). Politics is at work at many levels, according to Shor, including through: curricular content; the discourses of the classroom; learning processes; governance and funding of schools, (ibid:14-15). Shor envisions pedagogy for

empowerment as a 'critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change' (ibid:15). He identifies such a pedagogy as predicated on a number of specific values and describes it as: 'participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocialising, researching, interdisciplinary and activist' (1992:17). Amongst these values problem posing focuses on relations of power in the classroom, in the school, in the curriculum and in society at large. It contrasts with the concept of 'banking education' critiqued by Freire (1972) which renders students passive rather than active agents of learning, providing them with deposits of official knowledge rather than engaging them as co-creators of critical knowledge. Shor identifies that the 'responsibility of the problem-posing teacher is to diversify subject matter and to use students' thought and speech as the base for developing critical understanding of personal experience, unequal conditions in society and existing knowledge' (ibid:32-33). Opting for situated problem-posing means applying the practices of critical thinking to day-to-day living, beginning with the known and familiar and opening it up to scrutiny. More importantly the focus of situated problem posing is on student experience and culture. Its intention is to empower students to develop and engage in co-constructing critical knowledge. This allows students and teachers to draw on students' accumulated multi-cultural knowledge. This is the starting point for an engaged dialogic pedagogy, one that Freire advocated and envisaged as 'a synthesis between the educator's maximally systematised knowing and the learner's minimally systematized knowing' (ibid:54-55).

Shor contends that critical teaching has a counter intuitive task to accomplish. He argues for critical pedagogies focused on 'desocialisation' in order to nurture critical consciousness (Shor, 1992:112-134). Desocialisation refers to questioning the socially learned behaviours, values and norms transmitted through the educational process and the wider culture. For Shor desocialisation is a prerequisite to developing critical consciousness. By interrogating the social and personal implications of 'learned behaviour, received values, familiar language, habitual perceptions, existing knowledge and power relations, and traditional discourses in class and out' students are empowered to construct a critical knowledge, which is authentic and potentially transformative (ibid: 114). The construction of critical knowledge requires the development of critical consciousness. Shor proposes four qualities as a basis for its development: power awareness, critical literacy, permanent desocialisation, and self-education/organisation



(ibid:112-134). For Shor, teacher-talk, 'the one-way discourse of traditional classrooms' (ibid:85) or every-day talk, the discourse of the students, emerge from the context of an unequal society and therefore restrict the potential for authentic critical dialogue. Shor suggests teachers lead in promoting a 'third idiom' defined as a 'linguistic, aesthetic and political achievement of dialogue' (ibid:257). This dialogic pedagogy is constructed as a 'student-centred, teacher-directed process to develop critical thought and democratic participation' (ibid:85).

The research study will strive to support and engage teachers in a critical dialogic field work process supporting them to reflect on their storied lives. The methodology and methods to support this process will be elaborated in Chapter Five. However, the values identified by Shor as underpinning a 'critical pedagogy for self and social change', provide signposts for the inquiry (1992). Freire has promoted and modelled critical dialogic engagement throughout his life and his teaching. Shor and Freire provide exemplars for such engagement in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987). In that text they bring together the questions raised most often about liberatory education by teachers. They create a 'talking book' facilitating an authentic dialogue between them, emerging out of a committed effort to critically respond to the real issues raised by teachers in the field. This dialogue grapples with the implicit and explicit challenges in struggles to develop critical pedagogies.

#### **4.7.2 Critical perspectives on teacher agency and teacher accountability.**

Kanpol, investigating possibilities for dialogue on critical pedagogy between teachers, reflects on Giroux's identification of 'the importance of identity as a social consideration that is forged in history and in the shifting, contradictory terrain of struggle and self-reflection' (1999:xii). Kanpol places hope for change in the potential for teacher agency. However, he addresses the contradictions of teacher agency, drawing on his own experiences as a young teacher. He recognised then the major differences between '(a) what teacher educators were saying school was about, (b) state mandated curricular guidelines...and (c) what actually went on within the four walls of the classrooms' (Kanpol, 1999:10). Kanpol exposes the economic and cultural problems underpinning and undermining public education in America. Making reference to Kozol's findings in *Savage*

*Inequalities*, Kanpol reminds us of the devastating outcomes resulting from the gross inequity of the American education system. Kanpol identifies three general themes underpinning these inequalities, 'economics, teacher accountability, and sexism' (ibid, 1999:15). The first theme, economics, explores the extent to which state funds are allocated to schools and how that allocation affects what happens in classrooms. As America was coming out of deep recession in the early nineties it would have been expected that education budgets would be increased. Instead media reporting of the impact of budgetary cuts in education provided evidence, according to Kanpol, that 'education is not a priority for the U.S. Government' (ibid:16). The real effect of budgetary cuts created an increase in class sizes from thirty five to forty students, in some districts (ibid:16). In the light of the austerity measures imposed by Irish Government cutbacks in public spending since 2007, including spending on education, the real effects of the economic downturn on education are only beginning to be felt. It is probable that teachers' stories will reflect the impact of these cutbacks in DEIS schools.

The second issue Kanpol addresses in relation to inequality and schooling is the increased demand for teacher accountability. He sees the impact of these demands as curbing teacher creativity and agency. These schemes are based on a national curriculum and impose an outcome-based model approach to education on teachers and adherence to set standards, goals, and objectives. These reflect the instrumental, performance-based interests of schooling policy, and serve the demands of accreditation systems and performance systems, arguably at the expense of teacher and student agency. This, one size fits all, approach imposes a uniform curriculum, and uniform standards on all students ignoring differences of culture, learning styles, socio-economic circumstances, gender and ability. Consequently the imposition of a national curriculum places unjust burdens on teachers as well as on students. Kanpol points to some teachers who manage to transcend the confines of these demands and 'extend beyond national curriculum boundaries because of student diversity' (ibid:19). In so doing these teachers opt to make themselves 'accountable to diversity' and not just to the standards set by the national curriculum (ibid:19).

Sexism is the third problematic issue contributing to inequality in schools, and raised by Kanpol. Sex discrimination is evidenced in the hidden curriculum of the classroom and

school by: sexist behaviour towards girls, by teachers and classmates; sexism in textbooks and materials; less attention given to female students by teachers; poor attainment of girls in mathematics and science compared to male counterparts; sexism in the design of standardised tests; and increasing levels of sexual harassment of girls by male classmates (ibid:19-20). To counteract these embedded inequalities in education critical theorists, including Kanpol advance critical pedagogy as a means to engage in liberatory teaching and learning.

#### **4.7.3 Critical perspectives on the construction and production of knowledge**

Kincheloe (1950-2008) advocates the need to 'move beyond the truncated insights of the present, to find new (and old) knowledges that inspire us and change the nature of our being, and to produce new wisdom in the light of our understandings of the failures of the past and present' (2010:19). He turns our attention to the construction and production of knowledge itself and suggests that what we call knowledge is both 'complicated' and 'harbours profound consequences' (ibid:3-24). Kincheloe refers to the damage, from which no Western or international culture is now immune, caused by 'the distorted politics of knowledge' (ibid:3). Like Freire, Kincheloe recognises that being educated in the banking mode implies receiving deposits of prescribed knowledge and storing it in 'our mental filing cabinets' (ibid:3). Instead Kincheloe investigates the process by which knowledge is implicated in power relations in terms of its purpose, content, construction, transmission and validation.

For Kincheloe, and other critical theorists such as McLaren, Giroux, Freire, Shor, Kanpol, Apple, and Greene, a truly democratic curriculum must explore where selected knowledge comes from, whose interests it represents, whose interests are excluded, how knowledge is transmitted, what implications modes of transmission have for individuals and groups with different resources, abilities and perspectives, what knowledge is validated, how the quality of knowledge is assessed, who is entitled to make decisions about the validity of knowledge and what are the implications of all of these issues for social justice and the ongoing development of a democratic society. Kincheloe grapples with the challenges implicit in attempts to draw the attention of teachers and students away from the 'trance of Western imperial epistemology' (ibid:20). He sees the necessity of drawing teachers

and students out from under the yoke of 'consumerism and hyperreality's saturation of information and marketing iconography' (ibid:20). He identifies the knowledge offered by mainstream psychology and education as 'deficit laden and disempowering' (ibid:20). The hallmarks of the legacy of positivism are evident to Kincheloe in the epistemologies supporting the production of such knowledge. Kincheloe creates an acronym, FIDUROD (ibid:22), to represent these features and directs attention at the implications of these features for shaping the construction of knowledge, and in turn influencing what is valued and transmitted through education. FIDUROD represents an epistemology supporting knowledge that is: 'formal, intractable, decontextualised, universalistic, reductionistic and one-dimensional' (ibid:22-23). Exposing these characteristics of Western epistemology provides teachers interested in critical pedagogy with tools to direct their attention at the forces that are implicated in the construction of knowledge.

Kincheloe identifies the development of criticality with turning attention to the subaltern voices. He is particularly committed to listening carefully to 'feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial and indigenous voices' and 'incorporating their insights into the critical canon' (ibid:27). The alternative is to settle for a distorting, damaging and destructive 'North American discourse that re-inscribes-albeit in the name of justice-a Eurocentric, male, heterosexual, and colonial view of the world' (ibid:28). An epistemology based on informal, flexible, contextualised, particularistic, complex, and multidimensional values, is necessary to create critical educational knowledge.

Kincheloe argues that a shift from traditional epistemology causes a necessary shift in the conceptualisation of the self. Drawing on insights from Foucault (1990) and Bakhtin (1984), Kincheloe accepts that we can no longer maintain a defence of 'autonomous self' capable of being 'free from the contamination of the social' (ibid:30). If we accept this as a reality then we cannot avoid recognising, as individuals, and as teachers, that our view of the world has been significantly shaped by the dominant discourses of our era. If we have the courage to investigate our views we are forced to recognise the imprint of dominant discourses inscribed on our views of the world and our views about what is pedagogically possible. The willingness to critically reflect is the first step, for teachers and others, towards recognising and deconstructing how we are implicated in the values of FIDUROD. The second step is for teachers to act by identifying and engaging strategies to become creative agents of a liberatory pedagogy, in the Freirean sense.

He stresses the centrality of interpretation as the key to making sense of the world. He identifies the goal of critical hermeneutics as developing 'an interpretation of relationship, significance and relevance for action' (ibid:245). He distinguishes this goal from a hermeneutics based on FIDUROD that produces a 'mimetic image of what our own ethnographies see or our own histories uncover' (ibid:245). Kincheloe warns that committing to developing criticality is not for the faint hearted because it involves letting go of the notion that we are 'things-in-themselves' and accepting that we are 'things-in-relationship' (ibid:252). This step involves humility and risk taking. It also offers creative possibilities. Kincheloe suggests these opportunities may lead us into 'new domains, new mindspaces, new modes of seeing, being and acting' (ibid:252). These new landscapes of critical complex knowledge become accessible by virtue of the use of the tools and guidance offered by way of critical pedagogies and by the development of critical consciousness.

#### **4.7.4 Critical perspectives on the conscious self as socially situated**

Greene (1917-2014), like Kincheloe, is committed to 'trying to awaken educators to a realization that transformations are conceivable, that learning is stimulated by a sense of possibility' (1978:3). She draws attention to the current 'fascination with interiority' as an understandable attempt to address the abject neglect of consciousness imposed by technocratic and scientific approaches to knowledge building (ibid:4). This fascination emerges from the unquestioned acceptance of a dualistic split between the inner self and the outer world. Greene warns that isolating the self from lived reality creates distorted rather than reflective thinking. She invokes Dewey's warnings about the dangers of fascination with interiority as forcing people 'back into their own thoughts and desires without providing the means by which these ideas and aspirations can be used to reorganise the environment' (1978:13). Greene is addressing the tension between notions of self as in-and-of-itself and self as socially situated and therefore in relationship with others human beings and objects in the world.

She uses the concept of praxis, the synthesis of action and reflection, to merge the concepts of interiority and exteriority. In so doing, she attempts to create a holistic landscape for potential critical learning. Greene draws on the legacy of critical pedagogy,

which is oriented to strengthening individual and collective consciousness in education, in order to engage it in the service of progressing social justice and strengthening democracy. This critical consciousness is not characterised by a fascination with interiority. Conversely this 'consciousness thrusts towards the world, not away from it' (ibid:14). Greene associates this understanding of consciousness, actively engaging with living experiences, with James, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Schutz (ibid:14). This version of consciousness is predicated on intentionality. Accordingly, intentionality harnesses experience and seeks to derive meaning or sense from it. Greene quotes Schutz as identifying that 'the meaning of our experiences constitutes reality' (ibid:16). In so doing Greene reminds us of the diversity of 'provinces of meaning' which Schutz recognised as attached to interpreting all experiences (ibid:16). These discourses engage particular approaches to interpretation and adopt specific cognitive styles. We draw on the discourses of our historical time, our social context, and our previous experiences. These discourses form our familiar interpretive comfort zone. However these discourses are implicated in particular interpretations of reality, they are therefore partial and often even partisan perspectives on reality. Furthermore each of our standpoints as human beings, in the day-to-day reality of the world, is unique and therefore also reflects diversity. 'Each of us, because our biographies, our projects, and our locations differ, encounters the social reality of everyday from a different perspective' (ibid:17). Greene suggests that we are too often unaware of how these differences of perspective influence the construction of the meanings we derive from experiences. When we take these differences for granted we impose a false coherence on reality. This alleged coherence masks the diversity and complexity of lived experience.

Greene contrasts this 'uncritical, submissive and submerged' approach to reality with focused intentionality, which adopts a constructively critical perspective to making sense of reality (ibid:17). This approach filtered through critical reflection is specifically focused on social change. Critical reflection opens up our range of choices to act meaningfully in order to enhance social justice (ibid:18). Learning must provide the tools, to both 'recognize mystification, whatever the source' and to enable human beings 'to repair and transcend' deficiencies (ibid:19). This narrative inquiry provides an opportunity for us as educators to reflect on how our biographies, locations and commitments influence the construction of meaning we derive from being teachers in DEIS schools. The challenge is

to recognise the diversity and complexity of the lived experiences of students in DEIS schools and respond in a way that better addresses their needs.

#### **4.7.5 Critical perspectives on dominant ideologies shaping schooling**

Apple (1942-) focuses on exposing the mystification embedded in the dominant ideologies shaping schooling. Reflecting on knowledge in schools he asks, '*Whose knowledge is of most worth?*' (Apple, 1990:vii). Apple agrees, with Kincheloe, Greene and other critical theorists, that the answer to this question has profound consequences. It reveals where power resides in a society and about whose interests currently exert control on education. It also reveals whose knowledge is occluded and rendered comparatively worthless. Apple exposes the facile defence of educational knowledge as being technical. He argues that the 'theories, policies and practices' adopted by education systems are not technical. They are innately 'ethical and political' and they make 'intensely personal choices about...the common good' (ibid:viii). The common good arguably reflects the universalistic and reductionistic claims highlighted by Kincheloe in his concept of FIDUROD already cited at 4.7.3 above. The concept of the common good perpetuates the myth of justice, including justice in education, as something available and accessible to all irrespective of social or cultural context, resources, ability, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference or creed.

The curriculum is seen by Apple as a political instrument, making specific ethical choices about inclusions and exclusions, choices that effect people's sense of themselves, the value of their lives and the opportunities open to them. Apple argues that we have got to recognise the reality that 'differential power intrudes into the heart of the curriculum and teaching' (ibid:ix). Apple advocates that it is vital for educators, especially those 'interested in what happens inside classrooms' to engage in critically examining 'the assumptions they had about what education does' (ibid:ix). An important part of that examination involves probing the links between the reproduction of 'existing social relations' and education (ibid:x). For Apple the investigation of the overt and covert implications of the actual curriculum on classrooms has to be juxtaposed against the knowledge constructed by teachers. Apple utilises critical sociology and critical theories of knowledge to identify curricular knowledge as a potential means to exert 'socio-economic

selection and control' (ibid:155). Acknowledging Apple's concern, it is vital for teachers to examine the overt and covert implications for teachers of the curriculum for their classrooms in DEIS schools. His scholarship suggests we will find evidence in teachers' storied lives of tensions between the official curriculum and the knowledge constructed by teachers and students.

The literature on critical pedagogy, presented above, represents the critical cultural strand of critical pedagogy. Proponents of this perspective, cited above, include Freire, Giroux, McLaren, Apple, Shor, Kanpol, Kincheloe and Greene. From this critical perspective the lens of culture is used as the initial filter through which to focus on enacting critical pedagogies. Feminist pedagogies provides a complimentary critical lens, focused initially on gender, to explore tensions between the interests of the dominant discourses shaping schooling and the agency of teachers as potential change agents within schools.

#### **4.8 Feminist Pedagogies**

Feminist pedagogy emerged from the engagement of feminist teachers, theorists, and researchers with the challenges posed by feminist theory for radical pedagogies. This engagement sought to progress the proposal for critical and radical pedagogies by using the lens of gender and the tools of feminist theory to re-examine the hegemonic influences of existing modes of teaching and learning. This engagement developed in different institutional locations, within the field of Women's Studies itself and particularly within the disciplines of Education, Sociology and Cultural Studies. The Women's Studies classroom provided a feminist intellectual space to explore and test the challenges critical feminist pedagogies posed. These challenges made clear to feminist teachers the fact that Women's Studies Courses, and Courses on Feminism offered within disciplinary areas outside of Women's Studies, were producing classrooms that were 'highly charged arenas of inquiry' (Culley & Portuges, 1985:11).

This proposal for critical feminist pedagogies can best be understood against the background of the second wave of the women's movement. This context makes sense of the ideological and political commitments framing the early articulations of feminist pedagogies. This background is outlined below.



#### **4.8.1 The women's movement and the development of Women's Studies**

The 'new scholarship on women' developed against the background of the second wave of the women's movement in the 1960's and 1970's (Maher, 1985). During this period women began to develop small locally based consciousness raising groups to examine their lived experience. The purpose was to support each other to cope with the demands of their lives, and to learn together through sharing stories, experiences and understandings of their social world. As these groups gathered momentum, developed a voice, became politically visible, an identifiable women's movement evolved. This movement was explicitly political from the start, committed to exposing and challenging the systems of male privilege negatively effecting women's lives.

Women began to understand their systematic oppression in the public sphere of work. There, the glass ceiling horizontally segregated women to low levels of pay and position within the workplace. It also vertically segregated them into areas of work predominated by women, and consequently characterised by low status, low pay and poor conditions. Women began to understand their own contributions to family life and how men benefitted from their unpaid labour in the home. Wolpe linked the role of gender to schooling. She critiqued stratification theories, accounting for women's traditional roles as related to innate psychological differences in females, lending them to nurturing and non-aggressive behavior (1978). She provided a socialist feminist analysis of gender stratification through schooling. She argued that the capitalist economy required the services of women's unpaid domestic work to produce its workers, and in turn needed

As women began to identify and understand the systematic social, cultural, economic, and political factors supporting the domination of women by men, they began to seek explanatory frameworks to account for how male dominance and female subordination is created and sustained.

#### **4.8.2 Feminist Theory**

These understandings of women's oppression developed into a body of feminist theoretical positions with distinct and sometimes conflicting views both about, the construction of patriarchal power and control, and a variety of solutions to supplant it

with a system based on equality. Feminist theory in the 1980's was represented by a broad range of theoretical positions including identifiably Liberal, Radical, Marxist, Socialist, Psychoanalytic, and Existentialist perspectives. Tong recognizes these perspectives to be 'a partial and provisional answer to the 'woman question(s)', providing a unique perspective with its own methodological strengths and weaknesses' (1989:1).

Weiler asserts that interpreting feminist pedagogy through the lens of 'grassroots political activity, particularly in the consciousness-raising groups of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960's and 1970's provides the key to understanding its epistemological stance and its methodological commitments' (1995:29). Inevitably feminists were drawn to academia, in an effort to develop a robust theoretical, research and teaching base within which, and from which, to challenge the exploitation of women and others. Feminists, and other academics committed to equality and already positioned within academia, began to respond to the challenges posed by feminist theory and the women's liberation movement for social justice and for educational change. This included challenging the culture of the academy and the accepted modes of pedagogy within it.

#### **4.8.3 The early development of Feminist Pedagogies**

Subsequently, Women's studies programmes developed as designated areas for academic study and research in universities, and began to pose challenges for existing theory, research, and teaching, in universities, in colleges of education and in other educational sites. Feminists began to expose the consequences of sexist and other inequalities perpetuated through education. Feminists with the field of Women's Studies and within the fields of Education, Sociology, and Cultural Studies began to challenge the assumptions of existing liberatory educational theories. They challenged, re-worked or rejected them using the lens of feminist theory and evidence of women's lived experience as tools for critical inquiry. As a consequence 'the early and mid 1970's produced a richness of material descriptive of the challenge of teaching and learning about women' (Culley and Portuges, 1985:1). Shrewsbury defines the intention of this feminist analysis of pedagogy 'to engage with one another in a struggle to get beyond our sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge' (1987:6). Feminist pedagogy revealed tensions about curricular content and about pedagogy. The emerging body of research and new writing from a feminist perspective also acknowledged challenges emerging for feminist theory for the

development of feminist pedagogies. Some of the major issues implicit in these challenges will be presented below to illustrate the evolving concerns of feminist pedagogy. These debates will be referenced through the work of Aaron and Walby (1991); Arnot and Weiler, 1993; Culley and Portuges, 1985; Freidman, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Gore, 1993; Hernandez, 1997; Holland and Blair, 1995; hooks, 1994, 2003; Lather, 1991; Lynch 1999; Maher, 1985; Mitchell and Weiler, 1992; Spivak 1996; and Weiler 1988, 2001.

*Gendered Subjects* (1985), a work focused on the dynamics of feminist teaching, is an exemplar of early work on feminist pedagogy. It illustrates some of the central debates about Feminist Pedagogy in the ninetenn eighties. The lens of gender is employed to examine the challenges and opportunities provided by the dynamics of being gendered subjects, and being aware of being gendered subjects, in Women's Studies classrooms, in patriarchal educational institutions. Significant themes emerging for feminist teaching and learning relate to: emotion and nurturance; subjective experience; new scholarship on women; role and authority of the teacher; communicating across differences; transforming the disciplines. Each of these themes will be briefly introduced below.

#### **4.8.4 Emotion and nurturance**

A clear commitment to supporting the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning and exploring its implications for the dynamics of classrooms, is evident within several texts on feminist pedagogy (Bowles and Dueili-Klein, 1983; Culley et al, 1985; Fisher, 1987; Gilligan, 1980; Hochschild, 1975; Schniedewind, 1987; Weiler, 1988, 2001). Emotion, so strongly associated traditionally with female subjectivity and female socialisation, is re-envisioned in the context of feminist pedagogy. From this perspective 'our emotions have a cognitive and evaluative aspect that is part of the way we understand and respond to the world' (Fisher, 1987:47-58). The commitment to a 'politics of nurturance' valuing the role of emotion, is presented as both promising and problematic for students and for teachers in feminist classrooms (Culley et al, 1985:111-20). Feminist pedagogy, in the early eighties, sees the 'intrusion/infusion of emotionality- love, rage, anxiety, eroticism –into intellect as a step toward healing the fragmentation capitalism and patriarchy has demanded from us' (ibid: 19). It points out that we come to classrooms, as teachers and as students, bringing with us texts inscribed on us by social and experiential contexts beyond the boundaries of the classroom. These social and experiential contexts produce gendered subjectivity, as well as exerting other inscriptions on subjectivity. Arguably, critically inquiring into the

inscriptions of our storied lives as educators, in this research study, should provide possibilities for broadening the horizons of our self-understanding and our understanding of students in DEIS schools.

The dangers of developing a politics of nurturance based on essentialist assumptions about women as nurturers quickly became clear. Nurturance is itself a gendered construct. Nurturing also represents only one side of the spectrum of emotions attributed to women. It ignores harder to handle aspects of emotional engagements in classrooms such as expressions of anger, rage, anxiety, and resentment, as well as avoiding the role of men as nurturers in families and in teaching. As Weiler (2001) points out:

The developmental work of Gilligan and her group...has been frequently criticised for its implication that the experiences and attitudes of white middle-class girls and women are representative of all women, and for failing to explore the possibility that women may act in particular ways not because of essential womanly qualities, but in response to specific forms of oppression (2001:69).

Feminist teachers may be deeply challenged themselves by their students, when explicitly bumping into their own inscribed texts. The result provides a highly charged atmosphere and challenging classroom dynamics. The challenge of engaging a politics of nurturance is therefore both complex and contradictory. However, feminist pedagogy is committed to utilising the politics of nurturance as a means to admit 'the intensity of our own emotional involvement' (Culley et al, 1985:17), as teachers and as students, and to use this involvement as a catalyst for deepening our own understanding and our mutual understanding. In research by Weiler she found that 'all of the teachers, in talking about their teaching, mentioned the value of nurturing and caring in themselves and their work' (1988:78). Investigating the nature and implications of an ethics of care is at the heart of feminist pedagogy. It asserts that the affective dimension of being human is a significant catalyst for learning. It will be interesting to investigate whether teachers' storied lives, in this research study, reflect an awareness of the affective dimensions as significant for their teaching and for their understanding of learning.

#### **4.8.5 Feminist Challenges to Mainstream Psychology and Psychoanalysis**

Feminist challenges to mainstream psychology and psychoanalysis have provided an important source through which to explore the concept of nurturing and the expression of women's emotionality from a women's perspective, (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1977; Firestone, 1970; Friedan, 1974; Gilligan, 1982; Horney, 1973; Millett, 1970;). The work of Gilligan is a case in point (1982). Gilligan's purpose is 'to expand the context of human development by using the group left out in the construction of theory to call attention to what is missing in the account' (1982:4). Gilligan directly addresses the problem with existing psychological literature, it accounts for 'the disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development' as evidence of a fundamental problem with women (1982:1-2). She suggest the 'failure of women to fit existing models of human development' as possibly relating to the limitations of the psychological models themselves and the partiality of the perspectives informing them. The role of emotion and the politics of nurturance began as, and continue to be, pivotal to the struggle for feminist pedagogies.

#### **4.8.6 Post-Modern, Post Structural and Cultural Identity Theories and feminist Pedagogy**

Post-modernism, Post-Structuralism and Cultural Identity Theories have infused feminist pedagogy with a keen sense of the complex and contradictory factors shaping the web of relationships underpinning an espoused politics of nurturance in the classroom. Despite this fact, feminist pedagogy continues to explore the affective dimensions of the construction of knowledge, relating to 'those activities involved in developing bonds of solidarity, care and love between human beings' (Lynch, Baker, & Cantillon, 2001:22). Lynch et al, see the affective dimension as one of 'four core social contexts in which the generative causes of inequality may emerge' (ibid:22). The other three, the economic, the political and the cultural contexts, are more typically recognised in sociological, and educational terms, as generating inequality. Feminist theory has particularly highlighted the significance and complexity of the affective dimensions of human relationships for teaching and learning and for social life in general. Feminist pedagogy has focused on how

this affective dimension might be engaged, in the feminist classroom, and in other liberatory classrooms, to nurture more mindful and meaningful teaching and learning.

#### **4.8.7 Lived experience**

Situated experience was the starting point for reflection on women's oppression and investigating how action to empower women and promote equality might be accomplished. This focus 'legitimate[d] personal experience as an appropriate arena for intellectual inquiry and insist[ed] on a wedding of affect and intellect' (Culley and Portuges, 1985:2). Holland, Blair & Sheldon acknowledge the experientially grounded starting point for feminist pedagogy, and the 'different subject positionings of students' differences in experience and diversity' (1995:xi).

A commitment to acknowledging lived experience as the raw material for intellectual inquiry argues for research and scholarship for women, rather than research about women. Feminist approaches to developing knowledge useful to women, and excluded others, insists that 'women's experience as workers, mothers, and carers is not left outside the classroom, separate from the 'serious' job of theorising' (Richardson and Robinson, 1993:7). This commitment poses a challenge to existing academic disciplines exposing the extent to which the portrayal of what is regarded as human knowledge, through the sciences, hides the masculinist dominance of the construction of knowledge. In doing so it erases the personal dimensions of knowledge, in an effort to demonstrate scientific objectivity. Placing the subjective experience of women and excluded others, at the centre of the investigation shifts the methodological focus of feminist pedagogy. The focus moves from alleged 'objectivity' to declared subjectivity. This shift facilitates re-examining interactive pedagogies drawing on student's understandings of their own experiences. It also proposes expanding the knowledge base within the disciplines, incorporating this 'new' knowledge about women.

It moves inquiry away from notions of objectivity and 'towards a multi-layered and comparative construction of social realities' (Maher, 1985:36). This multi-layered and comparative approach is predicated on acknowledging subjectivity while simultaneously trying to 'transcend it by listening to, and drawing on, the experiences of others' (ibid, 36). Rich argues that 'to study women as subjects, equal to men, is to recognise that human experiences are multiple and must be multiply interpreted' (Rich, 1985:34). It also

provides the impetus for revisiting the study of men, this time as subjects, acknowledging the multiplicity of their experiences in the world and the complexity and variability of their identities.

One danger, emerging from the use of personal experience as a basis from which to develop understanding, is the risk of valorising subjective experience for its own sake, rather than as a potential source of learning. The valorisation of lived experiences of oppression must be distinguished from the validation of such experiences. hooks warns that 'biases imposed by essentialist standpoints or identity politics, alongside those perspectives that exist that experience has no place in the classroom (both stances create an atmosphere of coercion and exclusion), must be interrogated by pedagogical practices' (1994: 86). She warns that we can 'critically engage the experiences' of students and move beyond it, but 'we can't deny it' (ibid:88). She proposes that the feminist classroom provides a space in which the question of whether 'experience of oppression confer[s] special jurisdiction over the right to speak about that oppression' can be fully explored (ibid:89). In doing so hooks raises moral questions about giving voice to oppressions that we have not lived, through experience. She also probes how we acquire knowledge that is not derived from experience. Feminist pedagogy, according to hooks, acknowledges that lived experience is a vital factor which provides the raw material from which meaningful collective critical analysis may emerge if the feminist teacher promotes the pedagogical conditions to support it.

The challenge of firstly acknowledging and then transcending subjective experience, especially lived experiences of oppression and resistance, raises questions about our potential as human beings, and as teachers, to extend our commitments and our understandings beyond the limitations of our own personal experiences, and professional self-interests, in order to create a truly inclusive learning space and meaningful learning outcomes for our students. Teachers stories should provide evidence of the prospects teachers see, or don't see, for creating an inclusive and participatory learning space in classrooms in DEIS schools.

#### **4.8.8 New scholarship on women**

Feminist scholarship has provided a new lens through which to study the knowledge of women about the world and to review what has been offered and validated, heretofore,

as human knowledge, across the existing academic disciplines. Feminist critiques of 'malestream sociology' are a case in point' (Abbott and Wallace, 1990:1). Oakley describes the seriousness of the distortion as such that:

'male orientation may so colour the organisation of sociology as a discipline that the invisibility of women is a structured male view, rather than a superficial flaw. The male focus, incorporated into the definitions of subject areas, reduces women to a side issue from the start' (1974:4).

Malestream knowledge, is itself internally flawed, dominated as it is by the perspectives of white, western, privileged males and not representative of the perspectives of men disadvantaged by poverty, racism, homophobia, ethnicity, sectarianism, and other systems of oppression.

Feminists created a new body of scholarship documenting the lives, struggles and achievements of women previously hidden from history. However challenges from feminists themselves pointed to the predominance of scholarship focused on the experiences of white, western, Christian, middle class women, and to the relative exclusion of the voices of women of colour, women of ethnicities other than western, lesbians, poor women, women with disabilities and older women. Feminists have struggled to respond to the legitimate charge that all knowledge production, including the production of feminist knowledge, has hegemonic tendencies. Feminist scholarship strives to resist totalising accounts that falsely universalise women's experience, or people's experiences. In the context of the challenges posed by Post-Modernism, Post-Structuralism, and Critical Race Theories, they recognise the situatedness and diversity of experiences, including women's experiences. Despite this many feminists, including Lather, hold out hope for Women's Studies and feminist pedagogy as 'counter-hegemonic work, work designed to create and sustain opposition to the present maldistribution of power and resources' (Lather cited in Holland and Blair:292).

#### **4.8.9 Communicating across differences**

The understanding derived from using lived experience as the basis for learning exposes the complexity and diversity of women's experiences, in particular. Therefore the levels of



social injustice experienced by some women, for example those experiencing the dual struggle of sexism and racism, has to be acknowledged, understood and challenged because of the disproportionate weight of disadvantage it imposes on those women, when compared to other women. More challenging still is the question of whether white feminists are willing to face the reality of how they are implicated in racism. Aziz argues that the challenge of racism 'indicates that women on different sides of these global processes have significantly different interests' as a consequence of 'slavery, conquest and colonisation' (1992:71). The outcome of this reality is that 'most crucially, women oppressed and exploited by racism and/or by imperialism, have some interests in common with their menfolk, and in opposition to those of white Western men and women' (Aziz, 1992:71). Dugger suggests that the concepts of race and gender should be viewed interactively, suggesting that researchers must 'recognise that racism and sexism combine to produce race-specific gender effects that generate important experiential cleavages among women' (1991:38). Cleavages may be replicated also in the experiences of women disadvantaged in relation to sexism, but advantaged by virtue of their class position relative to other women experiencing poverty. Recognising these cleavages acknowledges that the risk of poverty is higher for some categories of women when compared to others. Those women at greater risk of poverty are likely to be: lone parents; older women; women from ethnic minority groups; women with differential abilities; women experiencing racism; women refugees and asylum seekers; women experiencing violence; women with mental health issues or women experiencing a number of these disadvantages.

The multiple struggle imposed by the intersection of inequalities points to the success of the mutually reinforcing vested interests of systems which exploit human beings across categories of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual preference, ability, etc. It also points to the challenge for feminism of the different locations of privilege and oppression women may occupy in relation to each other, and the contradictory positions they may themselves embody and occupy. As a consequence of recognising this diversity we can no longer speak with any validity about a universal category of woman or in an essentialist way about what it is that defines and constitutes collective female experience, or a collective female experience of oppression. Nor can we speak credibly of a unitary experience of racial, sexual, ethnic, class or other identities. This does not mean that sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ageism, and sectarianism, do not exist and create

social injustices in peoples lives. In fact recognising the diversity and intersectionality of systems recreating inequality, renders more urgent, if more complex, the task of creating democracy and schools that support it.

#### **4.8.10 Role and authority of the teacher**

The development of feminist pedagogies envisages teaching and learning as a mutually engaged dialogic process. In doing so it has 'specifically challenged the teacher/expert-student/novice dichotomy' (Maher, 1985:45). Feminist pedagogy specifically targets the dynamics of teaching and learning and seeks to create classroom conditions for acknowledging, respecting and proactively working with the wealth of diverse experiences, subjectivities and interpretations which students, and their teachers, bring to classrooms. Feminist perspectives are engaged as tools to explore and expand the parameters of knowledge and mutual understanding.

This vision is consistent with Freire's concept of problem posing education. The goal is to develop critical consciousness, break silences about experiences of oppression, build constructive strategies for power sharing and create truly democratic practices in education. The intention is to draw on differences as strengths, rather than as weaknesses. From the feminist pedagogy perspective 'teaching is not viewed as a strictly cognitive delivery of information, but rather as a complex intellectual and emotional engagement' (Culley & Portuges, 1985:4).

Weiler asserts that 'the question of authority in institutional settings makes problematic the possibility of achieving the collective and non-hierarchical vision of early consciousness-raising groups within university classrooms' (1995:32). However, the question of authority must be addressed because it speaks to the exercise of power. Culley argues that 'the radical feminist teacher (this has nothing to do with 'radical feminism', it has to do with getting to the roots-the roots being the hatred of women) has power and must claim her authority if her students are to claim their own' (1985:211). In accepting the authority of her own 'intellect and imagination' the feminist teacher arguably mirrors female authority and provides students with challenges and opportunities of accepting the authority of their own imaginations and intellects (ibid: 215). What does claiming their authority mean to teachers and can they share power with their students and maintain authority as leaders in the community of learners constituting

the classroom? This research project is targeted at what teachers understand about their own authority, how they exercise it in the classroom, what implications the context of their school exerts on their interpretation and use of authority and how the authority of teachers impacts on the autonomy of students.

hooks insists that 'it has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practice' (1994:8) that everyone's presence in the classroom is acknowledged and valued, rather than merely stated, in order to create the pre-conditions for a radically engaged pedagogy. hooks suggests the challenges involved in the effort to develop what she terms an 'engaged pedagogy' demands more of teachers than 'conventional critical or feminist pedagogy' (ibid:15). She argues that an engaged pedagogy is committed to the wellbeing of all members in a learning situation. From the perspective of this research project, it is interesting to note that hooks insists that 'teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in manner that empowers students' (ibid:15). hooks directs our inquiry towards troubling the relationship between teacher well-being, self-actualisation and empowering students in DEIS schools.

hooks pushes out the boundaries of radical or critical pedagogy beyond the cognitive and the affective dimensions of teaching and learning and argues for an approach to pedagogy that engages mind, body and spirit, in a holistic synthesis of awareness and practice. She draws on this perspective from the work of the Buddhist spiritual teacher Nhat Hanh (1926- ) who articulates the need for a pedagogy, which emphasises wholeness. She relates his concept of holistic pedagogy to Freire's insistence 'that students be active participants in their own learning', merging their 'awareness with practice' (ibid:14).

#### **4.8.11 Feminist engagements with Feminist Pedagogies and Critical Pedagogies**

The literature review for this research study has drawn strongly on the work of Freire, Dewey, Gramsci, Foucault, and others, male writers whose interests were with promoting democracy and social justice. 'Education feminists have been drawn to and in turn have redeployed the conceptions of culture, hegemony, and race put forth by these theorists' and have used these concepts to deepen, develop and challenge their own feminist perspectives on women, on education and the construction and uses of knowledge (Weiler, 2001:1). Many education feminists have forged their thinking at the confluence of

feminist theories of education and critical theories on pedagogy, such as those cited earlier in this chapter and in the classical literature review chapter, preceding it. This section of the chapter presents an overview of some feminist perspectives on pedagogy as a consequence of their engagements with critical and feminist discourses on pedagogy, combined with the knowledge drawn from their own lived experiences as teachers and researchers, in a variety of educational contexts.

#### **4.8.12 Gendered Subjectivity as a lens to explore classroom dynamics**

Freidman attributes her understanding of feminist pedagogy to a synthesis of feminism and radical pedagogy (1985:204). Her assumptions about feminist pedagogy, influenced by her reading of feminist theoreticians and educationalists at the time, included the following: 'non hierarchical classroom; validation and integration of the personal; commitment to changing student's attitudes towards women, most particularly women's images of themselves and their potential; recognition that no education is value-free and that our field works out of a feminist paradigm', (ibid:204). What her attempts to engage feminist pedagogy in her classroom revealed to her, over time, was a paradox. She recognised that feminist teachers had 'ignored the lens of gender as it operates in classroom dynamics and pedagogy' (ibid:206). However, when the gender lens is focused on classroom dynamics, it reveals the nature of gendered subjectivity shaping feminist teaching and the reality of the challenges involved in efforts to engage feminist pedagogy in patriarchal institutions. This revelation provides an intellectual space in which to deconstruct gendered subjectivity and examine its profound implications for classroom dynamics and for the possibility of engaging in liberatory teaching and learning in institutional educational settings.

Freidman's exploration of the struggle of engaging in feminist pedagogy reveals two additional aspects. She adds these on to her list of assumptions about feminist pedagogy. Firstly, she recognises the negative impact on classroom dynamics between teachers and students, of 'a culture that has negated or trivialised woman's intellect and authority' (ibid:208). Secondly, she recognises the significance and the positive potential of a pedagogy premised on 'a celebration of women's intellectual potential' (ibid:208).

Reminding us of the ways in which her-stories have been erased, misrepresented or marginalised draws attention to part of the problem created by sexism. However, hindsight makes us aware of the dangers of creating a female canon of selected her-stories, mirroring the his-stories of particularly powerful patriarchal men and their interests, at the expense of marginalised women and marginalised peoples. Freidman's work also echoes the complex question of what authority the female teachers can exert in patriarchal educational institutions and how authority can be exercised in a manner which respects and supports all learners. These questions are pertinent to the storied lives of teachers in DEIS schools.

#### **4.8.13 Feminist *Pedagogies* and *Feminist Pedagogies***

Gore identifies two distinct strands in discourses of feminist pedagogy, and argues that their locations within education account for some of the differences in their perspectives (1993). The first strand is *Feminist Pedagogy* with the emphasis on the 'instructional aspects of pedagogy' (1993:17). This strand mirrors the focus of Freire, Shor, and others, on instructional practices. Advocates of this strand tend to be located in Women's Studies Departments, in Universities. The second strand is *Feminist Pedagogy* with the emphasis on feminism and on the ideological and structural effects of patriarchy. The proponents of this perspective on feminist pedagogy tend to be 'located in schools of education' (ibid: 17). Their focus on gendered inequality, and how it is reproduced and resisted, mirrors the macro-level interests of critical theorists such as McLaren, and Giroux, according to Gore (1993:18).

##### **4.8.13.1 Feminist *Pedagogy***

This first strand, *Feminist Pedagogy*, emerging from Women's Studies Departments, focuses on pedagogy. The works referenced below provide exemplars of such a focus. From this perspective 'schools are seen as sites where gendered ideologies are transmitted ... and the hidden curriculum ... makes the task of changing gender relations very difficult' (Holland et al., 1995:7). Lynch defines the hidden curriculum as 'the relational life of the school' (1995:xii). The Women's Studies classroom is perceived as a space where 'each student's contribution provides a common point of access and a means

of enabling everyone ... to participate' (Aaron and Walby, 1991:43). hooks speaks of 'a classroom community [with] capacity to generate excitement, deeply affected by our interest in each other, in hearing one another's voices' (hooks, 1994:8). The challenge of feminist pedagogy is to create inclusive, nurturing and intellectually challenging learning environments. The emphasis on the hidden curriculum is paramount as a consequence of the instructional focus of the pedagogy. As a consequence, this perspective on pedagogy prioritises the dynamics of the classroom. It seeks to critically investigate through the discourses of feminism: how inclusive and nurturing learning environments can be constructed; what role emotion plays in the construction of knowledge and classroom relations; how lived experience can be valued and used as a tool for developing knowledge; how the classroom can be developed to cultivate communicating across differences; how the role and authority of the teacher can be exercised; how the role and autonomy of students can be cultivated; and how inequality can be challenged through feminist praxis. The question of how we relate to each other in the dynamics of the classroom is at the heart of this work.

These concerns resonate with what Lynch et al., refer to as the concept of 'affective equality', investigating the conditions for fostering 'relations of solidarity and support, care and love' (2001:35). Proponents of the affective domain marshal evidence to argue that 'emotions are intelligent and discriminating aspects of human personality ... closely tied to perception and judgement and provide us with guidance and information with respect to both' (ibid:34). This study will trouble the affective dimensions of pedagogy on teacher *praxis* through teacher's stories. Consequently, we can possibly better understand what constitutes inclusive or exclusive instructional practices, from the perspective of participating teachers.

#### **4.8.13.2 Feminist Pedagogy**

The second strand, *feminist pedagogy*, emerging from Education Departments and Education Colleges, has placed its emphasis on feminism, according to Gore (1993). This version of feminist pedagogy is set in the context of long traditions of educational thought and engagement with the concerns of pedagogical practice, including proposals of radical pedagogies, including feminist pedagogies. Gore contends that these traditions are

immersed in 'scientism, professionalism, technical rationality, and patriarchy' (ibid:25). Within this context pedagogy is framed in the broadest sense from the perspective of how 'gendered knowledge and experience are produced' (Gore, 1993:26). This contrasts with the more instructional focus on perspectives on pedagogy developed within Women's Studies. *Feminist* pedagogy, accordingly challenges the technical, rational, scientific, patriarchal and hegemonic assumptions of traditional educational epistemologies and pedagogies. It counters these with the use of feminist theory as a tool to expose the workings of inequality through Educational theory and practice and to cultivate inclusive epistemologies and develop and engage liberatory pedagogies.

#### **4.8.13.3 Critiquing Feminist 'Pedagogy' and 'Feminist' Pedagogy**

Constructively critiquing both *Feminist Pedagogy* and *Feminist* Pedagogy in equal measure Gore, herself a proponent of radical pedagogies and a teacher educator, points to some weaknesses in both perspectives.

She contends that *Feminist Pedagogy*, emerging from the context of Women's Studies, tends to re-present the relationship between pedagogy and educational practice in an ahistorical manner (Gore, 1993:20). Arguably if *Feminist Pedagogy* makes claims that Women's Studies offers proposals for liberatory pedagogy in a way that Education has not heretofore, it must marshal this argument successfully through discourses on educational thought, taking account of that history, as effectively as it does through feminist thought, acknowledging and accounting for its history. Gore interprets the resistance she perceives by some feminists in Women's Studies contexts to work developed in Education contexts, including work by feminists in Education, as resistance to the features of patriarchy reproduced through Education as a discipline (ibid:21).

However, that resistance may also reflect the disciplinary backgrounds, other than Education, by which many women come to Women's Studies research and teaching. It may also reflect the tendency for feminists working in the context of Women's Studies to interrogate instructional practices in the context of the feminist classroom. Consequently, claims about *Feminist Pedagogy* may not been equally tested in other educational sites such as public schools, colleges of Education and other sites of learning. Gore argues that this tendency also reflects a predominant focus of *Feminist Pedagogy* on women working

as professors and adult educators to the neglect of women working as teachers in schools and Education Departments or Teacher Education Colleges (ibid: 23-24).

*Feminist Pedagogy*, emerging from these colleges of Teacher Education Colleges and Education Departments focuses predominantly on the feminist component. It probes the question as to what value or advancement feminism offers to perspectives on liberatory pedagogy? This question arises in the context of the frustration referenced to Kenway and Modra of 'feminist educators' dissatisfaction about pedagogy's "gentle genuflections" of gender sensitivity, but lack of serious engagement with feminist literature' (1989: 27). Gore observes that feminist pedagogy literature in Education does not engage with critical pedagogy literature to any great extent. She accounts for this lack of engagement as possibly resistance by feminist educators to their perception of the masculinist and patriarchal assumptions of critical pedagogy. She urges feminist educators to engage critical pedagogy to explore the degree to which critically challenges the patriarchal legacy of critical pedagogies. It seems both logical and intuitive to promote dialogue between proponents of feminist and critical discourses in order to progress the radical pedagogies, they support.

However, feminist educators seem to gravitate towards Women's Studies, feminist theory, and in particular towards feminist pedagogy, with such enthusiasm that it may blunt the edge of their own critical educational analysis. As an example, Gore claims that 'there appears to be very little challenge to the concept of feminist pedagogy' from feminists located in Education (ibid:27). It would seem that a critical engagement with the claims of feminist pedagogy by Education writers would benefit the discourse by testing its feminist assumptions more closely. Instead Gore contends that 'in their haste to articulate feminist positions in Education, these writers have been uncritical of the feminist literature' (ibid:28).

An example of an issue appropriate for such testing of assumptions in the feminist literature by Education feminists, attributed to Greenburg (1982), is the claim that professional educators can usefully warn feminists 'to be wary of the temptation of making raised consciousness a requirement' in the teaching of feminism' (Gore, 1993:30). This warning seems to echo back to the roots of feminism in consciousness raising groups outside the academy. It distinguishes between the goals of feminist pedagogy to teach feminist discourses and the goals of the early women's movement to raise women's



consciousness. This warning echoes concerns about the thin line between preaching politics and passionate teaching. Raymond problematizes both a pedagogy that preaches and dispassionate pedagogy (1985). She argues that 'preaching is passion separated from its sources' while 'objectivity is also passion divorced from its depth' (Raymond, 1985:57). The equal dangers of teaching as indoctrination and teaching as detachment are implicit in the challenges posed by feminist pedagogy for an explicitly feminist model of teaching and learning that offers liberatory potential for all participants.

In *The Struggle for Pedagogies*, Gore is sensitive to the pressures that might deter feminist Educators from critical dialogue on feminist pedagogy, such as possible perceptions of disloyalty. However, she is acutely aware of the need and committed to cultivating the conditions that promote critical engagement between feminist scholars in Education and those located in Women's Studies. She is equally conscious of the need for critical dialogue between those who articulate discourses on critical pedagogies and those who articulate feminist pedagogies.

Critical and feminist pedagogies need to remain open to internal and external critiques. Only this openness and engagement can provide the transparency necessary to adjudicate their claims. Gore suggests that the centrality of addressing what happens in classrooms is evident in both strands of feminist pedagogy (ibid:31). The reflections of Spivak (1942-) signify that the knowledge we explore or create may be less important for the emancipatory goals of our pedagogy than the quality of the relationships we create along our teaching and learning journeys, exploring radical pedagogies. Implicit in the construction of healthy relationships between teachers and students, and between teachers, is the cultivation of mutual respect and the recognition of and deconstruction of systems of privilege. Investigating being teachers, through the storied lives of teachers participating in this research study, will help us to better understand the quality of the relationships that exist between students and teachers in DEIS schools.

#### **4.8.14 Post-modern and Post-Colonial influences on Feminist Pedagogies**

This section of the literature review on feminist pedagogies will draw on feminist engagements with postmodern and postcolonial perspectives. It will examine how these perspectives might provide new lenses, or improved lenses, for examining and progressing the development of feminist and critical pedagogies. Selected reflections from the works

of Spivak, Hernandez, Weiler, and Lather, presented below, have been chosen as exemplars of these kinds of engagements.

#### ***4.8.14.1 Deconstructing privilege and the subaltern voice: Spivak***

Spivak's work has resonances for critiques of feminist pedagogy because much of her writing has emerged from her engagement with 'critical problems that prop up pedagogically' (Landry and MacLean, 1996:7). Her feminist critique of deconstruction resonates with how feminists pedagogues recognise the need to unpack and critique assumptions about empowerment, teacher agency, critical consciousness, the affective dimensions of knowledge, communicating across differences, the construction of feminist knowledge, and the dynamics of classrooms. An example of Spivak's critique at work is illustrated in her deconstruction of the concept of privilege. Her teaching and writings cultivate the active unlearning of privilege and the re-reading of privilege as loss. This loss relates to being cut off from other possible experiences and understandings as a result of privilege. Landry and MacLean analyse this re-reading of privilege, by Spivak, as involving two dimensions (ibid:6-7). The first relates to recognising what is missed out as 'other knowledge' by virtue of whatever privileges we derived from our class, race, gender, nationality or other positions, more usually read as advantaged (ibid:6-7). This involves accepting that 'we are not equipped to understand' this Other knowledge 'by reason of our social positions' (ibid:6-7). This means that, if we espouse democracy, we must commit to engaging in ongoing efforts to unlearn our own privilege, and cease to assume that we can articulate 'other knowledge'. Unlearning privilege involves a second dimension, that is, engaging with those who do understand other knowledge in order to understand our losses, by virtue of the fact that they 'occupy the spaces most closed to our privileged view' (ibid:6-7).

Spivak's deconstruction of privilege can be used to probe our constructions of the teacher/expert student/novice dichotomy in a way that provides a fresh look at assumptions about power. It can also be used to explore the inscriptions of privileged and pariah status of those articulating feminist and critical discourses on pedagogy by virtue of their education and/or other social positions and experiences. Spivak's work of feminist deconstruction inverts the usual reading of privilege and the assumptions about the

knowledge derived from it. In doing so she turns the focus of possibilities for change to the subaltern voices embodying the 'other knowledge'. These voices are the sources from which the loss implicit in privilege can begin to be glimpsed and the possibilities for unlearning privilege begun. This deconstructive strategy provides possibilities for countering the hegemony of privilege. It is therefore relevant to the concerns of those feminists, and others, who struggle with how the voices of those in marginalised positions, might move to the center of the development of, discourses on, and strategies for, liberation, including liberatory pedagogies.

hooks warns, of the dangers of staying focused on the nature of the problems of inequality. She suggests we must give equal attention to solutions otherwise the outcome leads to cynicism or despair. Freire, hooks, Kincheloe, Spivak and others, point to the subaltern voice as a source to be drawn upon, for understanding and for developing solutions, but in a specific way. This approach is seen as needing to be an active, contingent, non-essentialist engagement in a critical dialogic encounter. Through such engagements we realise that 'we are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not solid, visible integrated: we are lacking' (Lugones, cited in Hernandez, 1987:20). Spivak points to the ethical route forward as conditional on the nature of relationships, rather than on difficulties with knowledge. This distinction by Spivak, suggests a primary significance for the ethics of relationships in the progression of liberatory pedagogies, including feminist pedagogies. Participating teacher's stories will provide us a space in which to consider the nature of these relationships.

#### ***4.8.14.2 Pedagogy, Democracy and Feminism: Hernandez***

Drawing on feminist theory and critical pedagogy, from Latin American and U.S. sources, Hernandez problematizes pedagogy, democracy and feminism in a rethinking of the public sphere (1997). She speaks about pedagogy from her context in the Argentinian university sector and her involvement in teacher education programmes. Addressing the question 'what is pedagogy, anyway?' Hernandez cites Simon's (1988) definition that:

Pedagogy refers to a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are...produced among particular sets of social relations...a practice through which people are incited to acquire a particular 'moral character' (Hernandez, 1997:11).

She critiques the limitations of the lenses through which she has experienced the academic tradition in Argentinian Universities, exploring questions of pedagogy through dominant European paradigms, to the exclusion of radical discourses, including Freirean discourses (ibid:11-13). She correspondingly critiques the educational field of the American universities where the concept of pedagogy is given, in her view, scant attention, and educationalists have little contact with critical pedagogy. She contends that what is missing from both dominant perspectives is 'an understanding of how pedagogical practices are about much more than removed philosophical foundations or the immediacy of teaching strategies' (ibid:12). In other words, both philosophical perspectives on education and technical perspectives on pedagogy fail to provide an understanding of the link between pedagogical practices and the 'kind of social visions they would support' (ibid:12). What are the consequences of using these lenses to explore questions of pedagogy? They result in the failure to address the fact that power is implicated in both the construction of philosophies and discourses of pedagogy and on the situated translation of those discourses into concrete grounded pedagogical actions in classrooms. For Hernandez, therefore, 'pedagogy is about cultural politics' (ibid:13). It embodies the power dynamics of the dominant culture and its discourses. Hernandez suggests that:

A feminist pedagogy linked to critical and liberatory concerns that extend to other oppressed groups than women, seems to offer and empowering articulation of those questions that are also part of the work of postcolonialism, poststructuralism, critical literary theory, and other theoretical fields that are undergoing radical renewal (Hernandez, 1997:14).

In considering how a feminist pedagogy might embody critical and liberatory concerns beyond those of women, Hernandez articulates a number of considerations needing to be explored, drawing on the work of Lugones and Spelman (1983). These considerations relate to dialogue, the place assigned to women's experience and how it is expressed, the theory making process and world travelling (Hernandez, 1997:16-22).

The significance of dialogue echoes the work of Freire, relating to the breaking of silences by the oppressed, as part of the process of conscientisation and asserting agency. In the context of exploring the relationships between pedagogy, democracy and feminism, as constructed by Hernandez, she too grapples with the conditions that might promote dialogue. She suggests that there is a danger of erasing difference as a pre-condition or as a consequence of dialogue. Conversely she argues that differences 'should be preserved as a precondition' of dialogic encounters (ibid:16).

The second consideration explored by Hernandez is the place accorded to women's experiences and how these experiences are articulated, 'what is said about experience, who says it, and to whom' (ibid:16). Thus the articulation of the woman's voice is central to feminist theory and practice. The woman's voice is not a singular voice, but a complexity of voices within an individual, an amalgam of identities, culturally and historically situated. This conception of the woman as subject articulating her experiences recognises both multiple layers of identity in the voicing of experience, as well as a multiplicity of experiences that any one woman may voice. It also recognises the complexity of interpreting any individual women's story, and thereafter the challenge of developing feminist theory and feminist pedagogy to facilitate dialogue between women with different experiences in the world. Hernandez relates the concept of woman's voice as a 'compound identity' advanced by Lugones and Spelman (1983), to Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of the subject as a 'multiplicity of voices' (Hernandez, 1997:17). These conceptions of voice as compound, or multiple, might be usefully linked to Peshkin's 'I's which provide a model for examining layers of subjectivity. Hernandez also links this exploration of the multi-layered articulation of the individual subject to what Vygotsky (1978) called 'inner thought, the internalised dialogue' (ibid:17). It is clear from these reflections on the significance of woman's voice that any one woman may speak with different voices, arising from the multiplicity of her own identities, and grounded experiences. It is probable that in the articulation of teachers' storied lives we will begin to understand the multiplicity of their identities and experiences.

Hernandez also engages with processes of constructing theory. Feminist theory has reconceptualised theory as situated, grounded in lived experience, in a specific time and place, reflecting the interests and interpretations of those involved in its construction. It rejects the binary opposition and therefore the distance placed between theory and practice, and between the subject constructing theory and the subjects of inquiry.

Hernandez, drawing on the work of Lugones and Spelman, stresses their most powerful claim about theories is that to be useful they should reflect both the perspective and situation of the theorist and the perspectives and situations of those about whom it theorises (ibid:17). This view centers the subject in theory making, and argues for a demonstrated transparency by the theorist allowing users of theory to see the inscriptions of the theorist's identities, experiences, interests and commitments, in the construction of the theory.

Giroux proposed the concept of a 'border pedagogy' capable of crossing the boundaries between discourses. He advocates border crossing as a purposeful attempt to move beyond the boundaries of our own discursive comfort zones and gain some understanding, albeit as border crossers, of the perspectives of those beyond our own boundaries. Hernandez links Giroux's concept of a 'border pedagogy' to the concept of 'world'-travelling' developed by Lugones. "World'-travelling envisages travelling to another's world creating an opportunity to 'understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves through their eyes' (Hernandez, 1997:18). The purpose of changing places is in an attempt to decenter our own discursive and subjective positions, and interpretations of our positions, and stand in the shoes of the other in order to gain some understanding of their perspectives on themselves and their experiences, and on their perceptions of us and ours. Concepts of "world"-travelling (Lugones) and 'border crossing' (Giroux) resonate with Gadamer's proposal to broaden the horizons of our understandings beyond the limitations of our own cultural perspectives. Gadamer proposed a hermeneutic scheme to cultivate a fusion of horizons providing 'an integration of differing views towards an improved understanding and a correction of previous understandings and distortions' (Malpas, Arnsward and Kertscher, 2002:39). For Gadamer, the horizon shifts, just as we shift in relation to it, it is therefore an evolving concept capturing the fluidity of our understanding. The concepts of border crossings, fusion of horizons, and 'world'-travelling captures the need to address what Gadamer calls 'the standing temptation [ ] to make too quick a sense of the stranger, that is, sense in one's terms' (1960:292). The impetus to shift our understandings, through encounters with 'other knowledge' (Spivak) has implication for re-positioning ourselves. Vattimo, reflecting on Gadamer's fusion of horizons as a precondition for understanding the other, suggests that there can be 'no understanding the other without a changed understanding of the self' (2002:295). This research, focused on being teachers, troubles the relationship between

understanding ourselves and our capacity to understand others, particularly the students we teach in DEIS schools.

#### **4.8.15 Feminist Criticism**

The challenges posed by Post-Modern and Post-Colonial feminist perspectives critique the 'unexamined voice of authority in western modernist theory' and the claims made by it, (Arnot and Weiler, 1993:212). This makes epistemology a target for feminist criticism, including feminist epistemology itself.

##### ***4.8.15.1 Schools as sites of struggle for pedagogies: Arnot and Weiler***

Weiler perceives feminist theory in the nineties, focusing on discourses of pedagogy. as 'trying to theorize a more just education for women while moving beyond a one dimensional theoretical perspective that focuses only on women' (1993:213). That effort focused strongly on 'the construction of difference and otherness in terms of race and ethnicity as well as gender and in the recognition of the complex interrelationship of overlapping modes of oppression' (ibid:214). Feminist educators engaged the strategy of using schools as sites of ongoing struggles over both knowledge and social relationships' (ibid:5). The classroom was seen as a place where, from a feminist theoretical perspective, these differences should be, not only accommodated but also integrated as a source of enrichment for deeper learning. However, Arnot acknowledges that 'as academics mainly working within institutions of higher education our own contribution is likely to have been more theoretical than practical so far as schooling was concerned' (Arnot & Weiler, 1993:4). This acknowledged weak link between critical feminist pedagogy and pedagogical practice in schools, continues to be a struggle for feminist theorists and educators. Proponents of critical pedagogy, as distinct from feminist pedagogy, point to this gap as a significant problem for feminist pedagogy. Ironically this weakness reflects in equal measure on the gap between their own theoretical perspectives and practices in classrooms. It points to the deeply challenging and complex nature of the struggle for liberatory pedagogical praxis, the synthesis of pedagogical action (practices in the classroom) and reflection (theorising the classroom) and efforts to deconstruct the relations of power influencing praxis. This research study hopes to make a contribution towards addressing this gap.

#### **4.8.15.2 Critical Pedagogy and practice: Weiler and Mitchell:**

Weiler and Mitchell address critical pedagogy and practice (1992). It is for this reason that their work is so pertinent to this research study exploring the link between feminist and critical pedagogy and the contexts of schooling. In defining critical pedagogy as a broad category of perspectives, Weiler and Mitchell observe that 'all of the work described as critical pedagogy shares a stance of critique and an interpretation of pedagogy in its wider sense as including curriculum, social relationships in the classroom, and the ways in which the classroom reflects the wider social context' (ibid:3). What distinguishes the critical stances applied to these aspects of pedagogy was the fact that:

They focus on the ways in which schools and curricula have reproduced racist ideology and assumptions, the ways in which patriarchal assumptions have defined both school practices and research in education, and the openings that exist for teachers to use students' own cultural worlds as the source of oppositional pedagogy (Weiler and Mitchell, 1992:5).

Weiler and Mitchell explore critical pedagogy and practice through two lenses of inquiry, theorising power/knowledge and pedagogies of possibility (ibid:6). In doing so they drive the momentum of inquiry towards an interrogation of power and its relationship to the construction of knowledge and the discourses of knowledge. They also propel the inquiry towards what is pedagogically possible in practice, in other words to what schools and teachers can do. Looking at the power/knowledge nexus it is possible to examine which versions of the human story are offered as truths through the construction and dissemination of knowledge in schools. What is presented as Multicultural Education, Women's Studies or Gender Studies across the curriculum is often offered as an add-on to unreconstructed curricula. This ensures that these critical oppositional perspectives remain on the fringes of the curriculum. It precludes the possibility of a paradigm shift in the construction of knowledge. Looking in turn at possibilities for practice, Weiler and Mitchell turn their attention to the classroom, introducing a broad range of work by critical educationalists. They evaluate the function of this body of work as exploring:



The ways in which teachers and students come to class as situated subjects with specific histories, experiences of dominance or subordination, and have available to them forms of knowledge (popular culture, for example), and different subject positions that work in complex ways as resistance or accommodation (Weiler and Mitchell, 1992:8).

This research study is specifically interested in participating teachers as situated subjects. They share with us with storied fragments inscribed by their experiences, identities, locations, dispositions and biographies. These inscriptions are likely to shape their perceptions of themselves, engagements with students and their vision for what is pedagogically possible. We can potentially learn a great deal as educators from critically inquiring into these inscriptions.

#### ***4.8.15.3 Voice as a Pedagogical Category***

Weiler uses 'the concept of 'voice' as a pedagogical category to examine the interaction of teachers and learners and the knowledge they both bring to the classroom, as well as the knowledge they produce together' (1998:xii). Voice is a powerful metaphor, it points to subjects being present and naming the world. Weiler contends that 'voice is related to the means whereby teachers and students attempt to make themselves present in history and to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds' (ibid:xiii). Voice can also be used to probe the perspectives that are heard or silenced through the discourses of pedagogy and schooling. These can be tested to assess how official discourses of schooling liberate or repress the voices of students and their teachers, especially in DEIS schools.

### **4.9 Conclusion**

The affiliation of women with feminist pedagogy can be understood when one observes the absence of an analysis of gender in the early work on critical pedagogy. Feminists have argued that adding on a piece about gender, race, or ethnicity, does not make for a critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has been accused of not engaging seriously with feminist theory. Conversely, feminist theorists have been accused of choosing not to engage sufficiently with critical cultural pedagogies. Claims by those who espouse feminist or critical pedagogies that they are liberatory provide no guarantees that either the claims

they make or the solutions they may offer make them so. All liberatory claims attaching to progressive pedagogies must be continually tested rather than assumed. There are clearly personal, political and professional challenges to be faced in committing to dialogic engagements within and between critical and feminist discourses on pedagogy.

However, meantime we need to take stock of the reality that oppositional discourses occupy marginal positions within Educational discourses. The effect of dominant discourses in Education in silencing or diluting dissent, renders more urgent dialogic encounters between radical educators, who continue to elaborate visions for transformative pedagogies and develop strategies by which to advance them. Despite this fact, Critical and feminist theorists and researchers continue to provide a space troubling the persistent inscriptions of inequality in education and challenging educators and policy makers towards transformative *praxis* in the spirit of Freire. Consequently, Critical and Post-Critical perspectives, particularly feminist perspectives, provide the theoretical tools to assist our critical inquiry into being teachers in DEIS schools.

## **5 Chapter Five: Narrative Inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum**

### **5.1 Overview**

In this chapter I develop a rationale for choosing qualitative methodology to undertake this study. Firstly, I define the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. Secondly, I justify adopting an advocacy/participatory inquiry paradigm. Thirdly I identify feminist interpretive communities as intellectual spaces resonating with the focus of this study. Fourthly, I provide an overview of feminist epistemologies. Fifthly, I define feminist emancipatory research as the stance to engage in this study. Finally, I outline the characteristics of narrative inquiry demonstrating why it provides the best methodological fit this study.

### **5.2 Qualities of qualitative research**

Qualitative research found a lot of support amongst feminist researchers, and critical researchers, who reject positivism (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Oakley, 1995; Smith, 1987; Woods, 1996). Kincheloe identifies qualitative approaches to research as providing a means to 'walk the crooked path' to meander into all the curves, crevices and recesses on the research journey (2003:195). This meandering potential allows us the means to explore 'particularity, intuition, emotion, rage, cognition, desire, interpretation, experience, positionality, passion, social theory and knowledge in relationship to one another' (ibid:195). The scope of qualitative inquiry, as defined by Kincheloe above, provides the range, flexibility and focus to inquire into the unique, particular and rich complexity of teachers' storied lives.

Qualitative researchers are capable of challenging grand narratives by factoring human agency, and individual narratives, into its exploration of social life. In this context, narratives provide lenses through which to examine the possibilities for being teachers, in schools serving communities experiencing disadvantage. Furthermore, qualitative research values and promotes methodologies and methods for harvesting emotion, intuition and cognition, shaping human beings' interpretations of experiences, relationships, and the social world. It provides a lens for reflecting and acting on the

construction, transformation and interpretation of knowledge, forged in the situated flux of situated living and teaching encounters. This qualitative approach fits with the goal of this study to critically re-story teacher *praxis* (Freire, 1972:60), in selected DEIS schools.

## **5.3 Philosophical assumptions of qualitative research**

Qualitative approaches to research are underpinned by a number of philosophical assumptions. Creswell considers five assumptions: ontological; epistemological; axiological; rhetorical; and methodological, (2007:16-19). The section below is based on the criteria identified in Creswell's analysis of the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research and their implications for research (2007:17, Table 2.1).

### **5.3.1 Ontological perspective**

Qualitative research assumes a particular ontological perspective. Ontology relates to what is understood to be the nature of the reality being investigated. Qualitative research interprets reality as a multiple and subjective construct. It views reality from the standpoint of those participating in the research. It seeks to uncover the multiplicity and subjectivity of human experience, drawing on the standpoint of participants. These multiple layers might be shaped by identity, history, context, relationships, emotions, cognition, values, beliefs, and personality and lived experiences. The literature reviewed, in Chapter Three, Classical Literature Review: Interpretive and Critical Perspectives, and in Chapter Four, Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life, explore the implications of subjectivity and diversity through Critical and Interpretive accounts of how individuals make sense of reality. This literature also presents a multi-layered construction of lived experience, forged from the multiple identities, experiences, and contexts shaping both individual and collective understandings of reality. As a consequence, the ontological stance of qualitative inquiry accounting for reality as subjectively constructed and multi-layered is an appropriate one to adopt in undertaking the current study.

### **5.3.2 Epistemological perspective**

Epistemology is concerned with the meaning of knowledge. From an epistemological perspective, qualitative research views the relationship between the researcher and the subject being researched as an important factor, as knowledge is seen as inseparable from the thinking-observing subjects engaged in knowledge production. The objective is for the researcher to get close to the subject matter being explored and to the participants in the research process. Qualitative methods offer, what Oakley describes as, an opportunity to develop a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the research participants where the researcher 'is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship,' (1981:41). The objective is for the practice of the qualitative researcher to be collaborative, field focused and adopting a position aspiring to be an 'insider' (Creswell, 2007:17).

This epistemological perspective of qualitative inquiry is consistent with the epistemological perspective presented in the literature reviewed for this study. It interprets knowledge as something constructed through the lens of a viewing subject or subjects. Knowledge from this perspective is viewed as subjective, always implicated in the relationship between an individual, or individuals, and the situated context of their lives. Subjectivity is always implicated in the production of knowledge. This is especially true of the subjectivity of the researcher. It has ethical implications necessitating the disclosure of researcher subjectivity for the purpose of transparency and accountability. The epistemological perspective of qualitative research also identifies knowledge as multi-layered, co-created, subjective and communicated between human beings in the systematic exploration of their lives. This epistemological stance resonates with both the literature reviewed and the focus of this study.

### **5.3.3 Axiological perspective**

Axiology is concerned with values. From an axiological perspective, qualitative research assumes that values influence all research inquiries and products. The significance of values relates to the researcher, the research participants, the research process and the

research products. If research cannot be value-free there is a responsibility to make the values, influencing qualitative research, visible. As research participants and researchers we carry specific assumptions about ourselves, others and social contexts into the research process. These perspectives are value-laden as distinct from value-free. Consequently, qualitative research impels us to make explicit the implicit values we bring to the research process. In the practice of qualitative research there is an on-going responsibility for the researcher to explicitly acknowledge her own values, experiences and positionality in order to render her values transparent. Research participants also bring their own values and beliefs to research engagements. These values also need to be made visible. Since values and beliefs are an intrinsic part of who we are as teachers, women, and human beings it is imperative that we critically reflect on how these values might shape this study.

#### **5.3.4 Rhetorical perspective**

From a rhetorical perspective, qualitative research assumes the use of a particular type of language. This language style is natural, uses personal voice and utilises qualitative terminology. This echoes Eisner's reference to expressive language and the articulation of voice as characteristic of qualitative inquiry (1998). In discussing voice he states that 'I want readers to know that this author is a human being and not some disembodied abstraction who is depersonalized through linguistic conventions that hide his signature' (1998:4). Qualitative inquiry aspires to be faithful to the language people use to articulate their knowledge, respecting that the language itself embodies people's perspectives. The language of the researcher or of academia, must not silence the language of research participants. Consequently, personal voice expressed as 'I', or 'me', highlights the thinking acting subject as instrumental, in the rhetorical approach adopted in qualitative research.

#### **5.3.5 Methodological perspective**

From a methodological standpoint, qualitative research engages inductive logic, focusing on the detailed study of particulars. It goes on to elaborate some relationships between particulars to make more generalised statements. The research topic is contextualized against the detailed particulars of its situated background. This standpoint is grounded in

the social and material construction of reality. Qualitative methodologies also evolve in design, as they respond to knowledge emerging from learning by engaging in the research process. Consequently, there is an on-going commitment to revising qualitative research designs in the field when engaging in qualitative research.

## **5.4 Worldviews**

Qualitative approaches relate to a number of worldviews. These worldviews may be chosen 'as a basic set of beliefs that guide action' in conducting research (2007:19). I have considered four worldviews, post positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism presented by Creswell, to guide action in this research study (ibid:19). The advocacy/participatory worldview resonates most strongly with the research question because of its commitment to solidarity with participants and to maximizing their participation and self-expression (ibid:2007). This worldview has been particularly developed through Feminist Emancipatory Research (FER), outlined below.

The advocacy/participatory worldview embodies a belief in the importance of the active agency of human beings and in supporting them to assert their agency more effectively. This perspective seeks to understand what individuals or groups need by way of support to progress their personal and working lives. The identification of a number of key characteristics of the advocacy/ participatory paradigm by Kemmis and Wilkinson provides a useful template to demonstrate the suitability of this approach as a set of beliefs to guide the current study (1998:22-23). They identify this paradigm as supporting: participatory action; helping individuals free themselves of constraints; emancipatory; and practical and collaborative, (ibid:22-23). Research explicitly promoting advocacy, such as Feminist Emancipatory Research (FER), provides an alternative to other research approaches, not so much by virtue of the methodologies it engages but by the alternative knowledge it seeks and creates. FER is outlined below at 5.8 below. Turning the question of advocacy towards participating teachers, in the context of this study, troubles the constraints obstructing teachers from developing their full potential in the situated context of their teaching lives. The focus advocates for how participants can be actively

supported to engage in the research process. Promoting the active participation of research participants and supporting them to articulate and develop their perspectives, is the objective of this paradigm, congruent with the focus of this study.

## **5.5 Interpretive communities**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) refer to distinct interpretive communities upon which qualitative research studies can draw. The literature they draw on, and the issues they prioritise, distinguish these interpretive communities. These communities provide specific approaches to understanding, interpreting and effecting social reality. Amongst these interpretive communities Creswell identifies several theoretical perspectives including: Post-Modern, Feminist, Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT), Queer Theory, and Disability Theories, (2007:24). The contemporary literature reviewed for this study draws on Feminist, Post-Modern, Post-Colonial and Critical and Post-Critical theoretical perspectives. These perspectives fit well with feminist interpretive communities and provide the natural base for this study.

## **5.6 Feminist interpretive communities**

Feminist Interpretive communities identify and make visible 'gender domination within a patriarchal society' (ibid 2007:5). Feminists recognise that patriarchy may exhibit different patterns and have different effects on women in different locations. While acknowledging this diversity between women's circumstances, the gender domination structure arguably 'possesses so much internal coherence so as to be thought of as one (differentiated) whole' (Gunnarsson, 2012:34). These communities 'seek to acknowledge the diversity of women's situated living contexts and the complexity of women's identities within and across cultures and social contexts' (ibid:34). They grapple with the challenges of the use of the category 'women' distinguishing 'conceptualising women as those who occupy the position as women' from 'reifying, homogenising and essentialising accounts of women', (ibid:33). This critical realist approach provides continuing opportunities to deconstruct essentialist constructions of the concept 'women'. However, it also provides ways to engage the concept women 'to denote women's specific relations to a gender structure the properties of which we may only then struggle to define', (ibid:34).



Feminists, and critics of feminism, pose challenges to conceptions of gender tending towards totalising and essentialist definitions of women and men. Some of the strongest critiques of their efforts to do so have been mounted by feminists who also identify themselves by black, lesbian, working class, disabled, Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, Chicano feminists, Hispanic, Native American, and other identities. They challenge the 'identity politics which has grounded Western thought and public life' and provide a strong internal critique of feminist discourses reproducing that politics, (Harding, 1987:8). Choosing labels of black feminist, lesbian feminist, working class feminist amongst others, embodies the tensions between women's identification with feminism and with the other aspects of their identities by which they choose to define themselves.

Stanley (1993) challenges feminists to face up to the grossly unequal power relations between women, based on internally differentiated grounds of inequality, as well as on externally differentiated grounds of inequality. Feminist interpretive communities provide a contested space in which scholars, adopting a feminist perspective, navigate the tensions, ambiguities and deep political and personal challenges of exploring the real consequences for women imposed by gendered structures and intersectional structures of oppression. These feminist interpretive communities are the ideal base, from which to critically inquire, in this study, into inscriptions of gender on the 'contextual relationality' of being female teachers in DEIS schools.

## **5.7 Feminist epistemology, methodology, and methods.**

Amongst feminist academics there are diverse views about what constitutes feminist epistemology, methodology and methods. According to Stanley these views range from accusations of essentialism, individualism and subjectivism on the one hand to their acceptance 'as a set of epistemological assumptions already fully embedded in the working practices of most feminist researchers' (1991:204). Feminists differ in their understanding, interpretation and articulation of feminist methodologies. Recognising and engaging this diversity of opinion helps safeguard against essentialist assumptions about what constitutes feminist methodology. Stanley challenges the accusations of essentialism, individualism and subjectivism leveled at feminist methodology. Despite her

acceptance of differences within the category 'women' on a variety of grounds she contends that 'there is a common external material reality that all women face characterised by inequality, exploitation and oppression: and it exists precisely because we are indeed women and not men' (ibid:207). Stanley also argues that all social research is individualistic since it engages individual researcher skills and develops research findings reflecting individual interpretations. However, rather than stripping evidence of individuality away, feminist research renders such evidence transparent. Stanley also rejects the criticism that 'feminist methodology' is atheoretical because it is concerned with experience' (ibid:208). She argues that humans constantly theorise on the basis of lived experience. Therefore for feminists to develop a theoretical perspective on the basis of reflecting on lived experience is legitimate.

Reinharz tackles the question of the relationship between feminist theory and research by examining which methods feminist researchers use and what reasons they advance for selecting them (1992). This approach avoids getting trapped in cyclical arguments about what does or does not constitute a feminist epistemology or methodology. Instead it focuses on the rationale and effects of engaging particular methods in the service of self-declared feminist research inquiries. This approach facilitates reflexively engaging with the tensions between situated feminist research and feminist research methodologies and epistemologies.

Harding argues 'against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research' (1987:1). She highlights confusion in debates about feminist methods and social science methods, relating to a lack of clarity distinguishing methods, methodology, and epistemology. Harding distinguishes methods as 'techniques for gathering evidence', methodology as 'a theory and analysis of how research should proceed' and epistemology as relating to 'issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justification strategy' (ibid:2). Feminist researchers use different methods and mixed methods to conduct research. These methods are tools for gathering evidence. However, it is in the use of the tools that a feminist approach can be demonstrated or denied. As Harding highlights it is 'precisely how they [feminist researchers] carry out these methods of evidence gathering [that]is often strikingly different' (ibid:2).

Byrne and Lentin argue that the feminist researcher is caught at the intersection of two contradictory identities, 'the identity of a 'feminist' committed to political change and the

identity of a 'researcher' committed to producing social research that is ethical, credible and authentic' (2000:2). Focusing their lens of inquiry on research in the social sciences in Ireland, they identify the following characteristics of feminist research methodologies: gender is a basic theoretical concept; power relations are deconstructed between researcher and researched; political commitment to the emancipation of women; models of research and practices that privilege participation: representation; interpretation and reflexivity (ibid:4). These features resonate with the objectives of this research study focused on critically re-storying teacher praxis.

## **5.8 Feminist Emancipatory Research (FER)**

FER methodology, like ethnography, adopts the perspective of 'learning from people', rather than 'studying people' (Spradley, 1979:3). Feminist social analysis provides a lens to learn with women, 'from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world' (Harding, 1987:8). This lens is ideally suited to engaging with teachers in DEIS schools in order that they, and we the readers understand their storied knowledge and its implications for teaching. Rather than studying teachers as such, FER perspectives seeks to learn from them. FER reflects the perspective of other 'underclass' approaches in insisting on the importance of studying ourselves and 'studying up' instead of 'studying down' (Harding: 1987:8). Adopting the perspective of 'studying up' helps me to remember that I have a lot to learn from research participants. It encourages me to adopt a listening and learning brief as researcher. The FER approach to searching for meaning encourages us to explore beyond levels of description, to critically inquire into teachers' storied lives, and our own.

## **5.9 Potential learning opportunities through this study**

There are multiple layers at which learning might occur, in this FER study for the participating teachers, the researcher and the reader. Possibilities for learning might be: intrapersonal; interpersonal; pedagogical; or cultural. Harding posits that the best feminist research 'insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research' (1987:9). FER demands this reflexivity of the researcher. This

approach, used with integrity, recognises that ‘the cultural beliefs and behaviours of feminist researchers shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers’ (ibid:9). The declared subjectivity of the researcher is therefore necessary from an ethical, political, and professional perspective.

## **5.10 Conclusion to Qualitative Research**

The qualitative approach facilitates research inquiry allowing the detail of every day events to be investigated using a number of ‘so-called introspective, biographical, subjective, or qualitative research techniques which are aimed at uncovering the actor’s point of view’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989:25). This perspective provides an intellectual space where interpretation and meaning can be interrogated in situated living and teaching contexts. Eisner sees the prospect of improving education not coming from scientific discovery but ‘rather from enabling teachers...to improve their ability to see and think about what they do’ (1985:104). The aim of this study is to provide teachers with an opportunity to pause, look, see, listen, talk, and think about what they do. The objective of the study is to challenge the horizons of our current understanding of who we think we are, what we think we do, how we see each other, and our students, their families and the communities in which we teach. The outcome is intended to challenge us to create expanded stories to live by. We must engage the courage and develop the capacity to critically examine the limits of our own understandings as teachers if we hope to provide students with possibilities for expanding the limits of their understanding. Can we accommodate and nurture difference and change otherwise?

The following section will propose narrative inquiry as the approach best suited to deliver the kind of qualitative inquiry I have outlined above.

## **5.11 Narrative Inquiry: Capturing situatedness and complexity**

The literature review scaffolding this study draws on classical and contemporary critical and interpretive scholarship, seeking alternative approaches to positivism, in describing and understanding the diversity and complexity of human beings and the social world. The work of Bruner (1915-2016) informs this body of work. Bruner identified narrative as

providing an alternative type of knowledge of the world, to scientific knowledge (1986). This recognition influenced those teachers and researchers already dissatisfied with positivistic scientific approaches to explore teaching and learning. Lyons and LaBoskey trace the subsequent shift in consideration of the possibilities of narrative from 'a medium carrying a message' to 'a means to capture the situatedness, the contexts and the complexities of human action in teaching and learning', (2002:3). Within this context, and the development and application of narrative inquiry in the field of teaching and learning, I explore the potential of narrative in relation to this study, below.

## **5.12 Adopting a Narrative Inquiry perspective**

Narrative inquiry recognises that we make sense of the world by storying our understanding of others, our context and ourselves. It adopts the perspective that 'we live narratively' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:120). Hardy articulates the centrality of narrative to lived experience stating that:

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves, and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future (1977:12).

Narrative provides an approach for harvesting the learning individuals communicate through dialogue, story and artefact. Narrative inquiry provide a lens through which we can focus on our perspectives of the world, learning how we story our identities, experiences, contexts, values, beliefs, dispositions and contexts. Becoming aware of how we story provides possibilities for choosing expanded ways of re-storying our own lives and re-interpreting the stories of others. Narrative inquiry reveals our storied lives as fluid, evolving and multi-layered. Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht argue that 'teachers' stories...are central to the type of inquiry and reflection that leads to professional development and personal insight' (1995:xvi).

### **5.13 Narrative Inquiry and Narrative Inquiry in Qualitative Inquiry**

It is useful to examine the tensions between the uses of narrative in qualitative inquiry and in narrative inquiry, in order to distinguish narrative inquiry as a way of interpreting the world. Clandinin and Murphy trouble these tensions in conversations with Mishler, Polkinghorne and Lieblich (2007). Polkinghorne observes the uses of narrative in qualitative research as 'not storied' (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007:634). Arguably, the familiar reaction of qualitative researchers to narrative data is to be 'still taking those narratives and analysing them' (ibid:634). However the product of narrative inquiry is necessarily a story or stories. The process of narrative inquiry is also storying. Narrative inquiry brings an interpretive process to bear on our storied lives teaching us to think and learn narratively. This process is, not aimed at theorising or abstracting. It aims to increase our awareness and our capacity to construct, co-construct and re-construct better stories to fit our lives.

Ellis suggests that the advantage of narrative modes of inquiry is that through them 'we can learn to understand the meanings and significance of the past as incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to the contingencies of present life circumstances' (2009:30). This arguably provides possibilities for revision in the present, but also hope for emerging understandings in the future. Ellis says she 'tends to write about experiences that knock me for a loop and challenge the construction of meaning I have put together for myself' (ibid:33). This study is committed to challenging the construction of meaning we attach to being teachers, perceiving students, understanding the community of our school and the possibilities for pedagogy. Narrative re-searching, re-visioning and re-constructing, points us towards the possibilities for us as teachers, women and human beings to actively expand the horizons of own current understandings of ourselves, our students and teaching in DEIS schools. This problem posing critical engagement with narrative thinking distinguishes narrative inquiry from the use of narratives in qualitative inquiry.

## **5.14 Background to Narrative or Interpretive Inquiry**

The emergence of the narrative mode as a specific line of research inquiry has a number of origins. This section presents a number of developments contributing to creating an epistemological and methodological space for the emergence of narrative forms of inquiry. These developments relate generally to the significance of epistemologies building on interpretivism and knowledge in action.

### **5.14.1 Narrative knowing: Bruner's 'Interpretive Turn'**

The recognition and development of narrative research as a significant mode of inquiry in psychology, developed in the late nineteen seventies and in the nineteen eighties. A number of psychologists, including Bruner (1915-2016), began to use narrative as a lens of inquiry to explore human understanding and responses to situated experience. This development contributed indirectly to the influence of narrative inquiry in education and in other disciplines. Bruner's work provides examples of how the significance of narrative research in psychology began to influence educational research. He pointed out how 'little attention [had] been paid to the intimate level of teaching and school learning' in debates about education' (1986:85). Bruner identified agency, reflection, collaboration and culture, as issues to be explored, in any serious attempt to examine 'how teachers teach and how students learn' (ibid:86). He traced a focus on interpretivism to the first quarter of the twentieth century, shaping the concerns of epistemology and education, as its influence developed (ibid:90). This focus turned inquiries about education to concerns about understanding, as distinct from teaching and learning. Bruner identifies 'the analysis of text' as one of the principal means of developing understanding through interpretation (ibid: 90). Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey credit Bruner's work as significant in confirming that narrative inquiry was 'a way of knowing as powerful as scientific knowledge but different from it' (2000:viii). This narrative turn signified much more than attention to stories, in the traditional sense, though the product of narrative inquiry is indeed story. It signified story as the lens through which intimate, subjective and shared situated interpretations of life experiences, can be communicated, explored and reconstructed. Consequently narrative inquiry provides an appropriate epistemology and methodology for inquiring into teachers' storied lives.

### **5.14.2 Knowledge in action: Schön's 'Epistemology of Practice'**

Schön (1930-1997) provided a specific focus on reflective practice in action, across several professions (1983). Demonstrating the limitations of technical rationality and a positivist view of science, he sought to elaborate 'an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict' (1983:49). Schön described knowledge derived from an epistemology of practice as 'reflection-in-action' (ibid:49). He was strongly influenced by Dewey's ideas. Schön's work identifying both knowledge in action, and the ability to reflect on knowledge in action, signifies that knowledge is derived from situated professional practice and reflective practitioners are uniquely positioned to explore its lessons. He anticipated the epistemological tensions that might exist between knowledge as defined by the universities and knowledge as defined by professional pedagogical practice in the field of teaching outside universities. In doing so he highlighted, according to Lyons 'the epistemology of institutional contexts that support or disconfirm ways of knowing' (2010:15). Clandinin and Connelly attach narrative significance to the influence of Schön's work on reflective practice in educational studies (2000). They observe how his 'ideas of reflective practice connected with the remnants of practices discredited by the grand narrative' (2002:36). They identify the application of Schön's insights to narrative inquiry as providing a means by which living narratives of teaching can 'legitimate our professional memory of reflective practice' (ibid:36).

### **5.14.3 Meaning as an act of interpretation: Greene's 'Landscapes of Learning'**

Greene distinguishes between deriving meaning from events and being aware of events (1978). Deriving meaning requires an act of interpretation, allowing 'for the fact that there are multiple realities available to human consciousness, and a network of relationships to effect that have much to do with the living self' (1978:16). The process of interpreting reality 'affirms the existential importance of cognition, or rationality, while providing a grounding in the lived world' (ibid:17). The interpretation of the lived world is mediated through what Greene terms our 'Landscapes of Learning'. The task of interpreting these



landscapes requires critical reflection, which depends, 'on our ability to be cognizant of our standpoint and to be open to the world' (ibid:17). Greene names the possibility of 'authentic speaking' (1978:68). This speaking constructs a dialogue to counter the 'mystification' of positivism. It articulates how constructions of social reality and self and others, are shaped by a complex mixture of biography and experience. This study is specifically interested in inquiring into changes teachers interpret in their own landscapes of learning. It will inquire into how these changes might influence teachers' understanding of themselves, others, pedagogy and school culture. The term landscape anchors the context for teacher learning in situated, experiential, embodied living narratives of self and school. Greene's concept assists us to inquire into how teachers derive meaning through their interpretations of their '*relational contextuality*' in DEIS schools, (Deegan, personal communication, 22.03.2016)

#### **5.14.4 Critical Qualitative research: Denzin's 'Interpretive Interactionism'**

Denzin identifies his evolving research practice as 'a critical, existential, interpretive approach' (2001:ix). This approach serves the development of 'critical qualitative research' in his view (ibid:1). The Literature review underpinning this study draws strongly on critical and interpretive frameworks. It resonates with Denzin's 'interpretive interactionism' and with narrative inquiry as an interpretive approach for this study. Interpretive research probes 'those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences' (ibid:1). This interpretive focus is ideally suited to the research question framed in this study, centered as it is on critically re-storying teacher *praxis* (Freire, 1972: 60).

Denzin characterises interpretive interactionism as existential, interactional, biographical, naturalistic, sophisticated in rigor, pure and applied, anchored in the twenty first century, building on 'feminist critiques of positivism, and concerned with the social construction of gender, power, knowledge, history and emotion' (2001:39). In adopting these characteristics interpretive interactionism insists 'there is no separation between self and society' (ibid: 58). This seamlessness between self and society is reflected in 'storied productions' according to Denzin (ibid:59). These storied productions communicate transitions in peoples' understandings of themselves and their social world. Denzin

conceptualises these transitions as ‘epiphanies’, interactional moments with the ‘potential to create transformational experiences’ (2001:34). The concept of ‘epiphany’ (Denzin, 1989, 2001) or ‘turning point’ (Strauss, 1959) is transferable to teachers’ understandings. Teachers’ narratives can provide opportunities for teachers to trouble taken-for-granted assumptions prompting possibilities for re-storying and therefore for new awareness. This study will support teachers’ to inquire into transitions in their own understandings, and in their understanding of students, the community and culture of their schools and pedagogy in their contexts. Interpretive Interactionism identifies the extent to which our knowledge as teachers, women, and human beings is forged in interaction in schools and mediated through our interpretations as human beings.

#### **5.14.5 Teacher Knowledge: Clandinin’s ‘Personal Practical Knowledge’**

Building on the interpretive interactive approach, Clandinin perceives teacher knowledge as a synthesis of ‘personal practical knowledge’ (1985:361). She rejects the dichotomy between theoretical knowledge and knowledge derived from the lived experience of teaching in classrooms. Naming the personal practical knowledge of teachers, Clandinin claims legitimacy for the personal affective dimensions of cognition and for knowledge in action through pedagogical practice. She defines teacher knowledge in the context of an epistemology of practice and views the contextually situated teacher as the narrator and interpreter of that knowledge. Clandinin defines the personal aspect of knowledge as recognising that our engagements and interactions in the world have ‘affective content’ for us (ibid:362).

Feminist research, including feminist research on pedagogy, has drawn particular attention to the affective dimensions of knowledge and therefore the significance of affective content for teaching and learning, and for relationships between human beings (Culley et al, 1985; Maher, 1985; Fisher, 1987; Shrewsbury, 1987; Lynch et al, 2001). Clandinin’s focus on the personal ‘draws attention to the individual local factor which helps to constitute the character, the past, and the future of any individual’ (1985:362). Practical references to knowledge recognise the value of learning from experiential, situated, grounded, living contexts within which knowledge is forged. Clandinin defines

knowledge as 'that body of convictions, conscious or unconscious, which have arisen from experience, intimate, social, and traditional, and which are expressed in a person's actions' (ibid:362). Elsewhere, Clandinin and Connelly identify stories as the conduit for knowledge, including teacher knowledge because 'they live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed possibilities, and relive changed stories' (1995:12).

### **5.15 Creating a Narrative Inquiry space**

Clandinin and Connelly elaborate four directions in which inquiry needs to lead in order to create a narrative inquiry space where interpretive knowledge can develop. These directions are 'inward, outward, backward and forward' (2000:50). The inward focus relates to the internal landscape of the self, to 'feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions' (ibid: 50). This provides a mirror to the personal dimensions of being teachers. The outward focus relates to 'the existential conditions...the environment' (ibid: 50). This provides for inquiring into the material, social and political conditions, shaping teachers' lives. The backward and forward directions provide temporal sequencing allowing past, present and future dimensions to be factored into the interpretation of events, actions, and responses (ibid:50). Factoring temporality into inquiry facilitates teachers' reflections on past, present and possible future challenges. This identifies the fluid and evolving nature of our understanding. Evolving narratives shaped by internal, external and temporal influences create what Clandinin and Connelly refer to as the 'three-dimensional narrative inquiry space' (ibid:51). This study will create such a space, facilitating critical inquiry into the storied lives of teachers in DEIS schools and into our own storied lives as educators and human beings. I will be attentive to the 'inward outward, backward and forward' momentum, Clandinin and Connelly identify as necessary to create a narrative inquiry space for critically examining teacher's storied lives by conducting this study (ibid:50).

## **5.16 Designing a Narrative Inquiry**

Connelly and Clandinin contend that engaging in narrative inquiry research requires 'learning to think narratively' (2006:481). They consider a number of approaches to research design, as a helpful means to enable the narrative inquirer to begin to think narratively.

The following seven aspects are proposed:

- Imaging a life space;
- Living and telling as starting points for collecting field texts;
- Defining and balancing the commonplaces;
- Investing the self in the inquiry;
- Research-participant relationship;
- Duration of study;
- Relationship ethics and narrative inquiry,

(Connelly and Clandinin, 2006:481-483).

The seven considerations alert the narrative inquirer to some of the features that are understood to contribute to narrative thinking and to the construction of narrative inquiries.

## **5.17 Negotiating Narrative Inquiry in the field**

Entering the field of narrative research inquiry requires flexibility, openness and capacity to deal with change. This is because the landscape of narrative inquiry is constantly evolving. Entry into the field does not mark the beginning of the story being explored there, nor the researcher's own story. These stories are already works in progress. They become intertwined through engagement in the field. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrate the challenges of being in the field of narrative inquiry through storying their reflections of experiences at the Bay Street School. They recollect the challenges posed by the need to repeatedly negotiate, at several levels, in order to respond to the situated context and in particular to the participating teachers, and others in the school. Their story, remembering and reflecting on engaging in narrative inquiry identifies the need to negotiate four elements of inquiry, relationships, purposes, transitions, and a way to be

useful (ibid:71-76). These are useful signposts to guide me as a narrative inquirer in conducting this study.

## **5.18 Conducting Narrative research**

Creswell presents, following the approach of Clandinin and Connelly, a five step procedural guide for conducting narrative research (2007). The first step considers whether narrative inquiry, 'capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a number of individuals' serves the exploration of the research question (Creswell, 2007:55).

The second step is to select people who have life experiences to tell, stories relating to the research question (ibid:55). This step requires investing time with participants, developing a capacity to listen to the nuances of their storied lives. It also involves engaging various techniques to gather stories. The stories or 'field texts' may be told orally and recorded. Participants may record their stories in journals or diaries. Stories may be caught through participant observation and recording by the researcher. They may also be drawn from other written and oral sources and from stories told by others about an individual's experiences.

The third step is to situate the gathered narratives within the wider context of the individuals life story, within the context of 'personal experiences' of family, home, work, culture, identity, values, history and place (ibid: 56).

The fourth step is analysing stories creating a framework that makes them coherent. This process might involve screening stories for key thematic features and presenting them in a new storied form to reveal these themes. Another approach to supporting the analysis of the gathered stories might be deconstructing them by way of 'exposing dichotomies, examining silences, and attending to disruptions and contradictions' (ibid: 56). Finally, actively collaborating with participants to 'negotiate the meaning of the stories' in the research process provides a means to encourage participation, benefit relationships and respect and integrate participants' interpretations (ibid: 57). This is consistent with the narrative inquiry stance to relationships between researchers and participants. It also provides a validating mechanism to support both the integrity and the rigor of the

research analysis. Clandinin and Connelly's consideration of the five procedural steps, outlined earlier in this paragraph, were useful to consider in designing the process this narrative inquiry. That process is outlined at 5.22 below.

## 5.19 Narrative research structure

Creswell observes that authors of narrative studies, examined by him, exhibit reluctance to prescribe a structure or specific writing strategies for narrative research, (2007:183). Instead they identify key elements supporting the development of narrative research. Creswell identifies the structure of narrative inquiry in the context of an overall 'rhetorical structure' and 'embedded rhetorical structure' (ibid:183-187).

The overall rhetorical structure for narrative research is derived from experimenting with various narrative forms and then 'viewing the narrative study as back-and-forth writing, as a process' (Clandinin and Connelly in Creswell 2013:220). The emphasis is on developing an evolving structure through the process of engagement. Alternatively a more classical dissertation style including an introduction, a literature review, and a methodology, might be adopted (Creswell, 2007:183).

The embedded rhetorical structure refers to the writing structure at the 'more micro level' and relates to 'several elements of writing strategies' authors might choose to use, (Creswell, 2007: 185). Drawing on Czarniawska (2004), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and others, Creswell presents a number of issues to consider in adopting writing strategies:

- Not silencing some voices/giving more space to other voices, (Czarniawska, 2004);
- Introducing a spatial element: progressive-regressive method (Denzin, 1989b); 'zooming in' and 'zooming out' (Czarniawska, 2004);
- Emphasising 'key events' or the 'epiphany' (Denzin, 1989b);
- Developing 'themes', (Smith, 1994), or 'common threads' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000);
- Using transitions (Lomask, 1986), foreshadowing, and metaphors, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000),

(Creswell, 2007: 185-186).

It is helpful to consider these issues, relating to the overall narrative structure and the embedded narrative structure while remaining open to developing an emerging narrative structure for this study.

## **5.20 Narrative modes in educational research**

In Educational research in the nineteen eighties and nineties, the narrative mode of inquiry emerged as an approach to understanding teaching. It offered valuable insights. Educational research incorporating narrative inquiry, by teachers interrogating their own practice, is evident in a substantial body of work cited by Doecke, Brown and Loughran, (2000). They count research by Casey, (1995,1996), Clandinin, (1992), and Connelly and Clandinin, (1990), Cortazzi, (1993), Elbaz, (1991), Gudmundsdottir, (1991), as together constituting a body of scholarship lending legitimacy to claims that narrative inquiry can provide a useful lens through which to examine teaching and learning.

### **5.20.1 Thematic diversity of narrative studies**

Elbaz-Luwisch identifies the thematic diversity of narrative studies of teaching. She identifies themes of 'teacher identity, teacher professional development, life stories, narrative inquiry as teacher research, the development of beginning teachers, curriculum, discourse and mutlivoceness, diversity and multiculturalism, teacher knowledge and work in school contexts' (2007:362). These studies might label themselves differently in terms of being biographies, life histories, or feminist inquiries. Elbaz-Luwisch clusters them according to the narrative inquiry stance of their 'research activities and practical outcomes' (ibid:362). These studies are significant for this study because they focus of their inquiries into teaching, teachers and schools, places teachers stories at the center of the inquiry process. These narrative studies 'have made the voices of teachers and their ways of speaking central to the discourse on research on teaching' (ibid: 362). The following section will select a number of narrative studies of teaching as exemplars of how teachers' voices have been made central to research inquiries.

### **5.20.2 Teaching as Work**

Nias refers to a substantial literature that existed by the late eighties, relating to teachers. However, she identifies two significant gaps. Firstly 'very few attempt to portray, as much as an outsider can, an insider's account of teaching' and secondly 'primary teachers have been given little opportunity to speak for themselves' (ibid:1). In contributing to redressing that gap, Nias describes the objective of her research as an attempt 'to present an account of primary teaching as work, from the perspective of its practitioners' (ibid:2). Nias based her research on the personal accounts of teachers training in a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education, her research explores two central assumptions. The first relates to the claim that primary teachers attach importance to 'a sense of personal identity' (ibid:2). She explores the early development of the self through teaching, the defense of the teaching self through reference groups, and teacher development as the development of the person who teaches (ibid:3).

The second issue relates to the claim that, in order to better understand primary teachers, it is necessary to draw on their interpretations of their day-to-day work in schools (ibid:3). In communicating how teachers make sense of the daily engagement in their work, Nias works through a number of subthemes. These include: what teachers report themselves as liking or not liking about their work; the demands of working with children as well as with adults such as peers, superiors, parents and other adults; the challenge of maintaining a balance between the tensions and paradoxes of teaching (ibid:83-201). The themes cited by Nias above, alert me to some of the issues that might arise while undertaking this study. Already, I have outlined in Chapter One, Setting the Stage for Her Stories, landscapes of self, students, pedagogy and school as embedded research questions pointing to possible themes that might emerge during the course of this study.

### **5.20.3 Motivation to teach**

Reflections on the teaching profession and the motivation to teach are at the center of Nieto's exploration with teachers in *Why We Teach* (2005). Nieto's study into teaching in public schools, sets out the political context within which teachers work. She identifies



and juxtaposes two competing contemporary discourses relating to public education. She labels the first the 'official' discourse:

embodied in the language of the federal No Child Left Behind Legislation and other mandates with a focus on accountability, standards, credentials, and testing and accompanied by punitive measures meted out to students and teachers for failing to live up to them (Nieto, 2005:5).

She labels the second the 'discourse of possibility', the 'unofficial discourse' of schooling and identifies it as:

a way of thinking about teaching and learning embraced largely by teachers and others who view public education as, on the whole, an elusive and unfulfilled but nonetheless significant goal in the quest for equality and social justice (2005:5).

It is from the unofficial discourses within schools and publications that focus on the positive contributions of teachers, that advocacy for challenging the official discourses of schooling comes. Nieto seeks and finds creative possibilities for public education and for teachers and students in these unofficial discourses. This juxtaposition of official and unofficial reveals the tensions implicit in being a teacher in the public school system where the values of official discourses predominate. Nieto seeks to unearth the unofficial discourses advocating for teachers with a vision for education in the service of equality and social justice. *Why We Teach* provides what Nieto describes as a 'counter narrative' to the prevailing wisdom about teachers' (ibid:7).

Dewey identified reflection on experience as the condition in which learning could be expanded. Nieto following that wisdom accounts for her learning as a teacher as follows:

my own evolution as a teacher might not have resulted in any particular insights were it not for the on-going opportunities I've had to think about my experiences as part of the larger context in which education takes place (ibid: 7).

She begins her reflection on her experiences as a teacher with her own story. Nieto believes 'that all teaching is ultimately autobiographical' (ibid:7). Palmer expresses a

similar belief that 'we teach who we are' and that 'good teaching requires self-knowledge' (2007:3). Nias, cited earlier in this section, also places significant emphasis on the construction of the self in order to understand being teachers. Nieto uses her own journey as a teacher as a reflective inquiry testing the tensions between the possibilities for public schooling and the limits placed on schools by the social and cultural context within which they function. Her approach juxtaposes questions of social justice, good teaching and education as politics against her own narrative as an evolving teacher, reflecting on her lived experiences. Her approach offers a signpost for grounding personal reflections on teaching in tension with the reality of the larger educational and social narratives shaping the context of teaching and schools. This offers a defense against the risk of subjectivism on the one hand, and being subsumed by the grand narratives of education and society on the other. She goes on to adopt the same strategy with other teachers' stories reflecting on their experiences. Nieto identifies a number of lessons learned from her research inquiry into why we teach. Teachers account for their motivation to teach because teaching:

- is an intellectual endeavor;
- is about-and for-democracy;
- requires love and respect;
- includes autobiography;
- necessitates creating communities of learning among teachers,

(Nieto, 2003:122-124)

The motivation to persist despite the limitations imposed on teachers by school policies, pedagogical practices, constraints of curricula, focus on results, under resourcing, poor pay, public hostility to teachers, suggests teachers remain resilient, resourceful and committed. Nieto puts the lessons learned from teachers to use in considering rethinking professional development, restructuring schools and setting new national priorities for teaching, (ibid:124-129)

Elbaz-Luwisch provides what she describes as 'one map to guide the reader through this complex and changing territory' of the development of narrative approaches to studying

teachers in K-12 classrooms, (2007:357). This map is relevant to the current research study since it traces the development of narrative inquiry into elementary schooling, from early to more recent studies (ibid:357).

She identifies narrative inquiry as typically beginning with 'a focus on individual teachers and their personal understandings' (2007:359). She identifies the need for individual biography to be balanced by the storied knowledge of the situational context of the school within a school system, and within an educational system shaped by national curricula, ideologies, pedagogical modes and various efforts aimed at reform, (ibid:359). These narratives create the inquiry context within which teachers and researchers can explore teacher and teaching narratives.

Elbaz-Luwisch draws on Clandinin's study of two teachers in Toronto, as an exemplar of work demonstrating the early development of narrative inquiry into K-12 teaching (1985). She identifies two significant lessons for narrative inquiry emerging from Clandinin's study, (1985). The first lesson relates to Clandinin's identification of teacher's thoughts and actions as 'interconnected and complimentary sides of the unified experience of the teacher' (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007:360). Participant observation and storytelling, and repeated participant observation and restorying, yielded Clandinin's understanding of teacher experience and thoughts as holistic. The second lesson, relates to Clandinin's thoughts/actions about herself as a researcher entering into teachers' classroom. Clandinin questions the ethics of the researcher's participation in narrative inquiry in classrooms and with teachers, mindful that teachers are often reluctant to admit researchers to their classrooms. Clandinin's study contributed to the developing ethics of narrative inquiry by arguing that 'researchers should have something of value to contribute to the school and to the teachers whose classrooms they enter' (ibid:360).

More recent narrative studies, cited by Elbaz-Luwisch include works by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), Gudmundsdottir, (1997, 2001), Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, (1995), and Lyons and LaBoskey (2002), (ibid:360). This body of work takes narrative inquiry in different directions in terms of both the focus of inquiry and the engagement of

methodology. Elbaz-Luwisch identifies five themes evident across this body of work: curriculum stories; teachers' lives and identities; interaction of knowledge and context; change; diversity in teaching. These themes provide me, as the would-be narrative inquirer, with signposts flagging the possibility that curriculum, teacher lives and identities, the interaction of teacher knowledge and context, change and diversity in teaching might arise as issues emerging in the storied lives of teachers in this study.

## **5.21 Challenges facing Narrative Inquiry**

In considering processes, roles and relationships, in narrative inquiry Elbaz-Luwisch questions whether narrative inquiry should become part of the ongoing development work of schools (2007:373). She notes Clandinin and Connelly's work with Bay Street School as an exceptional example of ongoing collaboration with a particular school, over many years (ibid:373). She contrasts this ongoing collaboration between researchers, a school, and participating teachers, with most narrative inquiries which involve engagement in a research process with schools and teachers, over much shorter periods of time, with limitations on teachers' and researchers' engagements, roles and relationships. Challenges also face narrative inquiry as a consequence of the fluid, emerging, ongoing nature of narrative research. Narratives of teaching, teachers, and schools, are necessarily partial stories, always incomplete. The challenge is therefore to 'find ways of telling open-ended narratives that is compelling and illuminating' (ibid:375). The challenge is to resist the temptation of closing the narratives, or of overstating what they reveal, in an attempt to find neat answers, rather than ask better and open-ended questions about teaching and learning.

Faithfully communicating the multivoiced nature of teaching presents further challenges to narrative inquiry. Elbaz-Luwisch draws attention to Johnson's work (1989) identifying teacher knowledge as embodied (ibid:375). This embodiment includes the physical senses, feelings and emotions. Narrative inquiry has to demonstrate its ability to represent the complex, evolving, sometimes contradictory, and sometimes complimentary, layers of

stories reflecting the multivoiced nature of teaching and respectfully mirroring the diversity.

Elsewhere, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) address persistent concerns in narrative inquiry. They consider questions of: ethics; anonymity; ownership and relational responsibilities; how we are storied as researchers; distinctions between fact and fiction; and possible risks, dangers and abuses, as the most persistent concerns (ibid:170). They identify 'maintaining wakefulness' (ibid:170) as an essential quality for narrative inquirers to develop, maintain, and nurture. Their concerns alert those adopting narrative inquiry as a research approach to some of the issues they need to consider during the inquiry process. Clandinin and Connelly remind us that ethical issues permeate the entire narrative inquiry process (ibid:170). They identify the tensions between the 'mandated ethical review process' required by universities for ethical approval to conduct research, and the 'relational negotiation' of ethics in the field of narrative inquiry (ibid:170-171). The ethical review process mandates frontloading the research design and gaining participant consent in advance of conducting narrative inquiry. However narrative inquiry itself is by definition an evolving generative research process, committed to continually developing research relationships in practice. Relational negotiation of issues 'which in narrative inquiry underpin the entire inquiry process' is not valued by, or factored into, the institutional ethical review processes (ibid:170-171). Clandinin and Connelly grapple with the ethical complexity of what the 'informed consent' of research participants means, over the timespan of a narrative inquiry. Their attention to the significance of this question for narrative inquiry is a useful signpost for researchers beginning and navigating the course of narrative inquiry. As a consequence of the concerns raised by the scholarship on Narrative Inquiry represented in this section, I am more aware of risks, ethical issues, my role and responsibilities as a narrative researcher. I am also keenly aware of the 'multivocality' and diversity of teachers' storied lives and therefore alert to attentively listening, recording, transcribing and re-storying teachers live in a respectful and critically conscious manner.

## **5.22 The process of inquiry**

This study presents the learning derived from the storied lives of nine teachers, working in DEIS schools in Ireland. It weaves together insights from their storied lives, and mine, into a co-constructed narrative inquiry. Each of the participants has at least ten years experience in teaching. All participating teachers teach in DEIS schools. Five of the nine participants teach at secondary, four at primary level. I began my teaching career as a primary teacher in what are now called DEIS schools. I spent ten years teaching in those school contexts.

### **5.22.1 Fieldwork.**

Nine female teachers from primary (4) and secondary (5) DEIS schools participated in this study. Five of them were mothers. None were known to me personally prior to this study.

Participating secondary DEIS teachers were colleagues in a single school:

Their pseudonyms are: Nicole, Meg, Julia, Victoria and Sophie.

Participating primary teachers work across three schools:

Their pseudonyms are: Hannah, Rachel, Caitríona and Jessica,

(Hannah and Rachel teach in the same primary school).

They were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. Patton outlines the advantages of this sampling strategy as actively seeking those participants who provide 'information rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry' (2002:230)

### **5.22.2 Profile developed for participating teachers:**

1. Teaching status: currently teaching in a DEIS school;
2. Gender: female;
3. Number of years in teaching: not less than ten;
4. Role: class teacher; Learning Support Teacher; Resource Teacher; or Home School Community Liaison teacher;
5. School type: DEIS School;
6. School level: primary and/or secondary;
7. Patronage of Schools: all types;
8. Location of teacher education: not applicable;
9. Post graduate studies: not necessary;
10. Within a single school or across several schools: either or both;
11. Types of schools by gender intake: all types;
12. Location of Schools: Limerick City\*.

### **5.22.3 Negotiating entry to the field**

The following is an account of how I developed access to schools and individual teachers. I prepared clear concise documents describing the focus of the research study. These outlined: the topic; the objectives of the study; time commitment required to participate; type of engagement required; timeline for the fieldwork; ethical issues; clarification of supervisor and institutional affiliation; contact details for the research (see Appendices H, I & J).

I identified relevant DEIS schools in the designated area to be sampled. This area was Limerick city to begin with. However, by word of mouth, through teachers themselves it expanded to two Dublin based schools.

I posted letter to principals in all Limerick based DEIS schools outlining the proposed study. I followed through with conversations with school secretaries.

I met with three interested principals. Subsequently I met with a cohort of interested teachers in each of the three schools. I gave an introductory session on the proposed research. I used three signature stories from my own life to mirror the kind of story sharing I envisaged (see Appendices K, L & M). One teacher in each of two primary schools

agreed to participate. Teachers in the third school declined. Subsequently the teachers who did agree to participate, and other educators committed to work in DEIS schools, helped me make contact with two schools in Dublin. I met principals in both of these schools. Subsequently, I met potential participants. Two teachers in the Dublin based primary school agreed to participate. Five teachers in the Dublin based secondary school agreed to participate.

#### **5.22.4 Preparing the ground work for engaging with participating teachers**

Nine teachers consented to participate and signed the necessary consent forms. Subsequently I began to negotiate a number of issues with each of them:

1. Times and locations for our sessions together;
2. Relational terms of engagement;
3. Supports I could offer;
4. Agreement about communication;
5. Re-negotiation of consent as the inquiry progressed;
6. My commitment to providing feedback;
7. Requested that teachers to fill out an evaluation form at the end of the process,

(7 of 9 teachers returned evaluation forms anonymously by post, see Appendix N).

#### **5.22.5 Managing relationships during the fieldwork**

This study provides a very significant focus on the '*contextual relationality*' of being teachers. However, reflecting back on the study, I see that my role guiding the narrative inquiry was influenced by and responsive to relationships and contexts in the schools. I put a lot of thought and energy into being fully present myself when I was doing the fieldwork. My disposition was to value every intended engagement with participating teachers and every accidental engagement with members of the school community as opportunities for my relational learning as a human being as well as gathering knowledge to support the inquiry. The following encounters were very valuable not just because of the knowledge I could gain as a participant observer and researcher but because of the value of the relational engagement itself for me as a person, a woman and a teacher. My



willingness to engage with teachers not participating in the study built good will and mutual respect between us. I will cite a few examples here as indicative of both the relational dividend, and the dividend to the inquiry, of being willing to spend the time relating to members of the school community:

- sharing lunch breaks in the staffroom with participating and non-participating teachers;
- telling non-participating teachers about the study and asking them about their interests;
- joining the mindful lunch session in Meg's classroom;
- having conversations/lunch breaks with principals and/or deputy principals, and having an entry and exit conversation with them about the intentions/findings of the study;
- joining the Christmas carol service to support the students and their teachers;
- talking to the librarian about her work in the DEIS secondary school;

Speaking of the context of the schools, conducting the fieldwork reminded me of the at times frantic pace of school life and the visible demands of it on teachers' time and energies. Below are some examples that made me aware of the influence of context on teachers' daily lives and the unanticipated challenges a new day can bring for teachers. Their best laid plans often had to be readjusted on the day, mine too.

Examples of these contextual incidents were:

- challenging behavior by students or others diverting teachers away from the planned day and into dealing with the crisis;
- students becoming ill or emotionally upset;
- disturbing anti-social incidents in the community affecting students;
- responding to unannounced visits from parents urgently needing to meet teachers;
- responding to the police;
- teachers becoming emotionally upset about incidents in school and needing the emotional and practical support of colleagues as matter of priority;
- bereavement in the lives of students or teachers.

Observing or hearing about these events from teachers challenged me as a researcher to respect and remember that the first responsibility of teachers is to their students. This meant that sometimes, scheduled sessions with teachers happened some hours later than intended. Some had to be re-scheduled for another day. Sometimes, because of my observation of the effect of unscheduled events on teachers' energies I offered to defer sessions in the interests of teacher well-being. In most cases teachers eventually managed to make space for our work together. This fact reflected on their commitment to the study, their professionalism as teachers, and their generosity as women and as human beings. In the context of some challenging school events I felt humbled that teachers were willing to follow through with the commitment they had made to engage with me on the day in question.

Between fieldwork visits to schools I emailed teachers to arrange the following sessions together and to update them on the progress of the work. These small casual communications were very important in maintaining the relational dynamics between us. They enabled me to encourage and support teachers' on-going storying by letting them know that I, valued the stories they had already shared with me and that I, was actively working with these stories every day. As a researcher the emails also provided me with valuable feedback about seasonal or exceptional events happening in the school, like school inspections, which helped me to schedule the fieldwork around teachers' workloads and made me sensitive to recent demands on them, when next I came to work at the school site. It also provided me with knowledge about teachers as human beings dealing with illness or challenges in their own lives relating to themselves or loved ones.

#### **5.22.6 Data sources in the field**

As I began to work in the schools the most significant data resulted from one-to-one dialogues with participating teachers. However, I spent hours at a time in staff rooms and school libraries observing the life of the school and meeting other members of the school community, besides my participants. I attended a Christmas Carol service for one of the schools. I was invited by one primary teacher to observe and participate in her classroom. I was also invited to observe and engage in one secondary teacher's classroom. These

experiences, outside the sessions with teachers, allowed me to be a participant observer and to gather important information about the culture and community of the schools. It was interesting to observe that because two of the schools, including seven of the teachers, were Dublin based, and because I was travelling from Limerick to work with them, I spent full days at a time in the schools and learned a great deal about the environment through engaging with members of the school community. In the Limerick based schools I had less of a window into the wider life of the schools and my interaction was more focused on engagement with the particular teachers.

### **5.22.7 Field Texts**

I developed a number of field texts to capture my learning. These included:

1. Field notes developed during visits to schools;
2. A journal tracking my reflections and observations;
3. Taped oral stories;
4. Photographs of artefacts teachers chose representing being teachers or teaching;
5. Mind maps, one representing each teacher's combined stories (Appendix 15)

The variety of field texts provided opportunities for triangulation lending rigour to the insights emerging from the fieldwork. The visual formats such as photographed artefacts (see Figures 1 to 10) and mind maps (see Appendix O) offered an alternative means for me to re-story teachers' stories and for teachers, through their artefacts, to re-story themselves in a medium other than the told stories. This added depth, breadth and creativity to the process for me and for the teachers as evidenced by their evaluation sheets (see Appendix N).

### **5.22.8 Fieldwork timeline and process**

The fieldwork for this narrative inquiry began in May 2013 and ended in January 2015. This period amounted to twenty months of ongoing contact with the nine participating teachers. The narrative inquiry comprised five narrative sessions with each of the nine teachers, forty-five in all. Each session lasted an hour, at least. Most sessions were held in school buildings. Most often we met in a small office. Two sessions were held off school grounds. One of those was in a teacher's home, facilitating me because I was in Dublin on

a particular Saturday. The other was conducted in a hotel foyer, near a maternity hospital, on the first morning of the teacher's maternity leave.

The first session with each teacher was introductory, explanatory and exploratory. During this session I introduced the thinking and motivation behind the study. I outlined the research design and the commitment that participating would require of a teacher in terms of time, place and process. In order to make my vision for the project as transparent as possible I mirrored the narrative mode I envisaged for the research process. I shared my own stories as a teacher and a woman, with the potential participants. I used three signature stories as exemplars, for this purpose (see Appendices K, L & M). This made sense to me as the only way in which I could demonstrate what the engagement in the research inquiry sessions might demand of teachers. I felt the need to build trust with potential participants by, from the very beginning, sharing something of myself with them. It seemed appropriate that I should take the first leap of faith with the teachers by revealing fragments of my own story given that I hoped they would be willing to share their stories with me, subsequently.

This approach brought me close up to and exposed me to some of the challenges teachers might experience in opening up their stories to me, a stranger. It placed me in the position of opening up my story to teachers who were, at that time, strangers to me. I felt personally challenged as I did it. I felt vulnerable, despite the fact that I had designed the process and so I was in a particularly advantaged position as the researcher-turned participant for a while. However, that exercise helped sensitise me to some of the challenges teachers might feel when they would later engage in this narrative inquiry. As a consequence I became sensitised to how it feels to speak about what matters to you in your life. Consequently, it made me think deeply about how to build solidarity with participating teachers during and between narrative sessions and how best to honour and later represent the stories they shared with me.

As I began to negotiate the shape of our engagements together the initial proposal changed as a result of teachers' responses. I had designed the research with a phase of one-to-one dialogic sessions with teachers and a collective phase where teachers would

work together. All participating teachers, by September 2013 there were seven, opted for a one-to-one engagement and did not wish to participate in a collective phase in the study. Consequently I re-worked the research design to respond to their interests and needs. Later, in October 2013, when two further teachers emerged as participants, both Dublin based primary teachers, they indicated that they would have been open to the collective phase of the study. By this time the decision had been made in favour of the majority of the participating teachers. The revised format for the inquiry is outlined below.

#### **5.22.9 Conversations with the teachers**

The substantive part of the gathering of narrative data was derived from three subsequent taped narrative sessions conducted with each of the participating teachers. These sessions happened usually a few months apart. During these narrative sessions teachers shared their memoirs and reflections on past experiences, observations and learning from their present experiences, and hopes and fears for the future.

The fifth and final encounter, with each teacher, happened in the winter of 2014 or in January 2015. This was a closing narrative session with each teacher, lasting for approximately one hour. The purpose of this session was to narrate back to the teachers my interpretation of the stories they had shared with me. This provided an opportunity for me to share with teachers the composite narrative I had constructed of each of the stories they had gifted to me during the inquiry. I traced the narrative threads that I found woven through their individual story fragments and presented them to each teacher through a mind map specific to her stories (see Appendix O). Returning the re-storied narratives to the participant teachers provided a means to: give teachers an opportunity to listen to and respond to my representation of their narratives; check my analysis of the data with them for accuracy and authenticity; provide a means to capture their responses to having engaged in the narrative inquiry process itself; capture glimpses of the way in which their stories had evolved since the field work had finished; provide closure for the substantive part of the fieldwork.

### **5.23 Narrative Inquiry process and product**

This tracing over and back through time and space, and across teacher's accounts, and my own, facilitated a distilling of the learning embodied in teachers' narrative fragments. The resulting research text is a multi-layered co-constructed narrative research tapestry. It is constructed from the warp and weft of differently textured narrative fragments: teacher's narratives; my narratives; their reflections on their narratives; their reflections on my narratives; my distillation of the narrative threads as I analysed their narratives; my reflecting back to the teachers a collective oral story I composed for each to represent to them an overview of their narratives; their reflection on that re-storied narrative; their narrative and verbal feedback on the experience of participating in the research process; my construction of the research text from these richly textured and diverse fragments, reflections, and observations from the field. The lessons that emerge from this narrative inquiry, embodied in Chapter Six, *Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play in Three Acts*, are the result of working the threads of teachers' stories and reflections, and mine, into this composite emerging narrative representing the findings. The result represents a shared journey of probing the horizons of our individual and shared understandings of teaching/learning and living as a consequence of engaging together in this relational, investigative research journey.

### **5.24 Conclusion**

In this chapter I provided a rationale for the development of a qualitative approach methodology to conduct this study. Firstly, I considered the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. Secondly, I selected the advocacy/participatory paradigm, resonating closely with the focus and the objectives of this study. Thirdly, I presented FER as a qualitative approach suited to developing the critical focus and emancipatory objectives of this study. Fourthly, I identified feminist interpretive communities, as intellectual spaces, where critical scholarship reflecting the interests and challenges of this study and its participants, are most likely to be sourced. Finally, I presented the characteristic features of narrative inquiry and explored some of the possibilities and challenges it offers as an approach to interpretive inquiry. Mindful of these possibilities and challenges I have

chosen narrative inquiry as the methodology best serving the purpose, and focus of this study. Finally, I outlined the process by which I conducted this inquiry.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Teachers' Storied Lives:**

#### **A Play in Three Acts**



## **6 Chapter Six: Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play in Three Acts**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the learning shared by the nine teachers, currently working in DEIS schools in Ireland, who participated in the narrative inquiry, which holds the heart of this research project. Each teacher has at least ten years experience in teaching. Five of the nine teach at secondary, four at first level. This chapter, critically tracing the narrative threads of their stories, opens up possibilities for us as educators for expanding the horizons of teachers' storied lives and our own.

### **6.2 Design for this chapter**

Since narrative is the research mode for this inquiry it seemed logical and intuitive that I should adapt a narrative device to present the findings. Consequently, I chose to present the learning in the form of a play. It begins with a prologue, has three main acts, and ends with an epilogue.

The prologue presents backstories, participating teachers identified as significant to them. Act One traces teachers' 'passions and pathways into teaching'. Act two traces teachers' relational insights. Act three traces teachers' contextual insights. The epilogue completes the story presenting the artefacts teachers chose to represent being teachers or teaching. Four recurring narrative threads weave through the sections of the play. These threads are: learning about the self; learning about students; learning about pedagogy; learning about the culture and community of the school. These threads create a coherent tapestry stitching the scenes together.

# Teachers' Storied Lives

## Prologue

Long ago...When We Were Girls

### **6.3 Prologue: Long ago ... When We Were Girls**

A prologue provides entry to a piece of work. It is the point where we first meet some of the characters relevant to the unfolding story. It is defined as ‘a separate introductory section of a literary, dramatic or musical work: an event or act that leads to another’ ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com) 23/01/15). The prologue presented below provides some introductions and presents signature moments resonating with some of the characters and with the evolving story. The unifying theme, for the prologue section is the backstory.

### **6.4 Backstories**

A backstory is defined as ‘a history or background created for a fictional character in a film or television programme: a brief prologue detailing our hero’s backstory’ ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com) 02/02/15). In this narrative inquiry the backstories teachers have shared are early memoirs resonating with their present selves. They provide a brief backstory detailing events our teachers identify as significant to them. These backstories also create a lens through which readers of this study can catch a first glimpse of some of the main cast of characters narrating some early scenes from their storied lives.

The backstory mode serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it provides an appropriate means to introduce narratives of teachers’ early lives. Secondly it allows me to introduce you to some of the nine characters in our cast of teachers. Thirdly, it sets the opening scene creating an atmosphere suggesting what might be important in this play. Fourthly, backstories are significant because they resonate through the fragments many teachers shared during the research inquiry. These fragments, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, identify access to children’s or teenager’s backstories as a very significant window through which teachers can better understand and respond to their students. As the research story unfolds we will hear teachers witness the extent to which backstories have helped them to both make sense of the reactive behaviour, and respond to the needs, of children and teenagers, especially those who struggle with the challenges of school life and life outside school.

## 6.5 Teachers' Backstories: Long ago...when we were girls

Our stories began long ago, when we were girls. The narrative threads of early experiences of people, places and events are stitched into the reservoir of our memories. These threads also weave through to the wider tapestry of our lives now as teachers, and as women. Tracing these narrative threads has enabled me to inquire into how teachers story their previous lives, as girls. It has also triggered memories for me of fragments from my own early story, of which I was not previously conscious. The Prologue begins to focus our attention on the stories we, and others, choose to tell about our early lives and how these stories represent us, and others.

### 6.5.1 Backstories: Caitriona at school

Long ago there was a small girl sitting on a hard desk, in the junior classroom of a two-teacher school, in a small town in Ireland. Her name was Caitriona. She is the eldest of nine children. This is her account of an experience that resonates with her.

#### 6.5.1.1 Narrative fragment: Budding teacher

**Mary:** *Did you always want to teach?*

**Caitriona:** *Yes, ha, ha, ha, ha. Yes. Yes.*

**Mary:** *Tell me about that, from when say...Thinking back when you were a small girl if somebody asked you what you would be when you grew up, would you have said 'I'll be a teacher'?*

**Caitriona:** *Yes, but, you know, it wasn't a positive thing that made me make that decision. It was a negative thing.*

**Mary:** *Ok, tell me about that.*

**Caitriona:** *I had a teacher. It was a two-teacher school and the múinteoir (teacher) in the junior side of the school was a lightning bitch. There was no two ways about it. We were traumatised from her. I got smacked across the back of the head one day for disrupting the class but I actually had had a wasp sting. I had put my head back against the wall and a wasp had come off the windowsill and he stung the back of my head. She wouldn't listen to me as to why I let a cry out of me, a roar out of me, and I got a whack for disrupting the class. And, another little girl in my class, who ended up being one of my best friends, was so terrorised by this teacher that she used to wet her panties every day and the teacher used to*

*rinse out the panties and put them on the radiator. And I just remember thinking 'when I am a teacher I'm going to be a nice one' (she laughs heartily).*

**Mary:** *That's huge.*

**Caitríona:** *When I am a teacher, I am going to be nice.*

**Mary:** *To me that's a huge motivation.*

**Caitríona:** *It is. I think I wanted to cancel her out, which sounds kind of strange. When I was small, I wanted to cancel her.*

**Mary:** *You obviously recognised the injustice of the situation.*

**Caitríona:** *Oh, she drove me mad (she sounds really frustrated) but I didn't have the courage to do anything about it, like, as a small girl. So I just used to cause trouble, diversion.*

### **6.5.1.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Budding teacher'**

I am struck by strength of the emotion Caitríona communicates as she remembers being in the junior school classroom. There is a palpable negative potency in her words 'traumatised' and 'terrorised'. The phrase 'lightening bitch' evokes dangerous power. It creates an image, for me, of electricity that may strike at anytime. It suggests danger and possible damage. Caitríona's fragment reflects a steely determination by a 'small girl' vowing to make a different impact 'when I am a teacher'. There is a clear tension between the avowed mission and the felt 'frustration' of the 'small girl' in the junior school classroom.

Caitríona remembers herself as a child intuitively understanding both that she wanted to be a teacher and how she wanted to be a teacher. 'When I am a teacher' frames the 'what' I want to be. 'I'm going to be nice' frames the 'how'. As I engage with her fragment, I am struck forcibly by the clear motivation she names when she declares that 'I wanted to cancel her out'. The motivation to be 'nice' as a teacher in the future is an end in itself but also a means to 'cancel her out'. The statement embodies a very powerful and very focused intentionality. Caitríona's goal was to erase the legacy of terror and trauma this teacher created for herself, for her friend, for her classmates, by creating a different legacy. She remembers the frustration, recognising the injustice of what was happening and 'not having the courage to change it, as a small girl'. As I engage with her narrative fragment, I credit Caitríona with being a truly courageous small girl as she employs

diversionary tactics to subvert the terror and trauma, unleashed like 'lightening' by her junior schoolteacher.

Her fragment provides a window into understanding later narrative fragments reflecting her acute awareness as a teacher of the frustration some children may be feeling and expressing in classrooms through reactive behaviour. Her narrative challenges us to understand that students' reactions in class may well reflect fear or frustration experienced in our classrooms or burdens carried by students from other spaces into our classrooms. Caitriona has taken a very negative experience, for her, with one teacher and transformed it into a source of motivation for becoming a teacher with a positive influence on children's lives.

This teacher embodies a passionate commitment to meeting the needs of children in a contemporary DEIS school. The spark that fires her has also been fueled by experiences in her family. She relates these to us in the fragments selected below focusing on influences that are significant to her and from which she has learned a great deal.

## **6.5.2 Backstories: Caitriona at home**

Caitriona opens a window for us, into some of her experiences of home life, in the following fragments. Through them she reflects on some challenging experiences at home and what she has learned from them. She reflects on how the lessons she learned helped her to understand the behavior of some children and respond to their needs, when she first began teaching in a DEIS primary school.

### **6.5.2.1 Narrative fragment: *Very lucky, in one sense***

**Caitriona:** *'I suppose I'm very lucky, in one sense. It sounds very silly to put it that way, but I come from a very challenging home life. My father was an alcoholic. So I was brought up in a home, which would be, very similar to the homes my children in school come from. So I understood the defensiveness and I understood the vulnerabilities and I understood the bolshiness and the tendency to push people away and to react. I knew where they were coming from. So I was very lucky there. I wasn't middle class guessing. I actually knew where they were coming from. So that's a huge bonus as far as I am concerned. So I had learned a lot of those defence mechanisms myself. I had managed to recognise my own vulnerabilities and some weaknesses. I knew why I did the things I did, even though I couldn't always stop it. I could see it in the kids. So that was a huge starting point'.*

### **6.5.2.2 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'Very lucky in one sense'***

Caitriona identifies herself as 'very lucky' as she introduces this fragment. This 'lucky' phrase seems to embody a tension between the uttered 'very lucky, in one sense' and the unuttered, but implied, 'not so lucky' in another sense. The 'very lucky' relates to how her own challenging experiences, and her reaction to them, helped her at the start of her teaching life, to make sense of the behaviour of some children who act out in school. She herself understands the reaction to experiences that trigger 'defensiveness', 'bolshiness', and 'the tendency to push people away'. Her capacity to respond to the children derives from her own understanding of her lived experience, not from guesswork. The phrase 'I wasn't middle class guessing' echoes a strong inference as to the negative impact of 'middle class guessing'. In another part of the recording she states the added vulnerability for a family, experiencing challenging times, of living in a small rural community. The inference is that there is no place to hide. I am hearing from her words that the 'guessing' adds additional burdens to already challenging situations for children, their families, and for their communities.

The negative connotation of 'middle class guessing' points to her disassociation of herself from both the identity of being 'middle class' and also from the 'guessing'. I catch resonances of the critique of 'middle class guessing' in later fragments relating to the judgement passed by some on children, families and communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. It is within such a community that Caitriona now teaches. Already we can identify the solidarity she expresses with the children and their families. The narrative threads weaving through her unfolding story will make this solidarity more evident.

### **6.5.2.3 *Narrative fragment: The secret seven, hidden treasures***

The experience of family life has also provided Caitriona with particular strengths that have served her well in her life and in her teaching role. In the fragment below she identifies clearly how the experience of the give and take in a large family can be invaluable in neutralising incidents that might otherwise escalate in the classroom.

**Caitriona:** *'The second thing was, I had seven brothers. As I kept telling the kids, 'see what you are doing there, we invented that'. So, they thought that was very funny, that instead of freaking the bean, I was going 'honey, don't even go there, we invented that'. They thought that was very funny. It neutralised a lot of situations'.*

#### **6.5.2.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'The secret seven, hidden treasures'**

As I re-read, and listen again to, this fragment I am reminded that Caitriona's strength of character has been honed as the eldest of nine children, with seven brothers and a sister coming up behind her. Caitriona's response to the kids at school, when they act up, is that 'we invented that'. 'We' here means me, my seven brothers and my sister. Her response captures her wickedly sharp wit, her pragmatism and her skill at deflection. Her canny response is underpinned by long experience in a large family. I imagine, myself a girl from a family of two children, that there are a great deal more issues to be resolved and negotiated amongst nine siblings, including seven brothers, than there are amongst a brother and sister as is my experience. I recognise how Caitriona the teacher uses the light touch of humour, and the persona of being incapable of being shocked, to deflect trouble in the classroom. She wisely does not go head to head confronting the students. Instead she engages her wit, shares a window into her experiences in her own family with the students, flags the behaviour, and moves swiftly on. She calls up the behaviour but wisely avoids 'freaking the bean'.

#### **6.5.2.5 Narrative fragment: My mother, myself, gatherer, fixer and feeder**

In the third and final fragment relating to her family life, she shares a sketch of her mother with us. She narrates a powerful moving account of her mother's warm-hearted nature and the impact her mother has had on her own life and the life of the family.

**Caitriona:** *'Oh, I am a fixer and I am a feeder. I am my mother's daughter. My mother gathers children, always has. Because our situation at home was really bad, only for her the nine of us would have been scattered around the country. She is amazing. To this day she is amazing. She has the biggest heart. You know she has that special thing that people have that when they walk into a room you are*



*automatically drawn to them. She is just larger than life, big loud voice, big loud laugh. She would be heard in West Clare. She gathers people, there's a fierce warmth, huge warmth. My mother could feed twenty. If you walked in the door she could feed twenty. There were always extras in the pot. You would often get up in the morning and there would be some young fellow sleeping on the couch in the front...That's just the way she was. And, I see it in all my brothers. They love my children as much as they love their own. They gather all the children in. Mammy gave us that'.*

#### **6.5.2.6 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'My mother, myself, gatherer, fixer and feeder'***

Caitriona embraces her own identity as 'a fixer and a feeder', modeled on the template of her own mother. I recall her warm interactions with the children in the school. I identify in Caitriona a reflection of the warmhearted mother she describes, who gathers the children. The 'larger than life' persona sketched of her mother, the mother with 'the biggest heart', 'big loud voice' and 'big loud laugh' mirrors the woman/teacher I got to know during the research process. I reflect on the fact that her mother is the heart and soul of her family and held it together through challenging times but still had the extra capacity to take others under her wing. Caitriona bears witness to her mother's big heart in her comment 'she could feed twenty'. I relate to that generosity of spirit in my own maternal family. I recognize it in my ninety two year old mother and I knew it well in my grandmother and my aunt, all raised in an east Galway small farming community with a strong ethic of care, within and outside the family.

Caitriona's final statement in this fragment is definitive and simple. She says, 'Mammy gave us that'. Her mother's legacy, inherited by her brothers also, is the capacity to love the children, including each other's children. I see that capacity in the engagement of this teacher with the children in her school. I hear it resonate through her later narrative accounts of being both a teacher and a mother.

### 6.5.3 Backstories: Hannah at school

May I introduce you to Hannah. She is sharing memories, from her early school years, with us here. She is the eldest of five children. She shares narrative fragments of her school experiences to help us understand what she sees as having shaped who she has become. These fragments provide us with windows into her early life, reflecting some of the passions and values that drive her today.

#### 6.5.3.1 Narrative fragment: *The girl with the lovely, long, fingers*

**Hannah:** *'I remember a teacher. I remember little random comments. I remember a teacher in second class correcting my copy one day and saying 'oh you have lovely long fingers, you should play an instrument'...Mam said 'well decide what you want to learn'...So I was in the car one day...and there was some violin concerto thing (playing on the radio). It's funny because now the last thing I would play is classical...I said, I would like to play the violin...She brought me around to a violin teacher around the corner. These are probably significant, actually, I hadn't even thought of these actually. So she brought me to a teacher around the corner. She happened to be a trad. (traditional music) teacher. So I went around to her and she taught me fiddle. So I was nine around then. So I had just come out of second class...So she was a huge influence. It's funny, it was that teacher...who said that about my fingers...Yeah, that was the start. That was the start, the first mention about my fingers. Then that teacher (violin teacher) was really significant...I remember what I think I learned from her was not the way she taught but it was that I learned a fascination for the music (her voice is animated). That was what I learned, that she seemed to really revere it. As a kid, I remember that, just being fascinated by her and by her interest in music and by her reverence for it'.*

#### 6.5.3.2 Tracing the narrative threads of *'The girl with the lovely, long, fingers'*

The positive signatures of three women, mentors and teachers, are threaded through Hannah's recollections in this fragment. I reflect on how a small 'random comment', about 'the lovely, long fingers' initiated a positive chain reaction, according to Hannah's account. It began with her first steps on her journey learning the violin and culminates today in her passion for traditional music. However there were other mentors in the chain of events. There is Hannah's wise mother who listened to the compliment, re-storied by Hannah, and advised 'you decide'. The third mentor was the violin teacher. Hannah stresses how significant an influence she was on her. I distinctly remember the moment in our dialogue

when Hannah's voice filled with emotion and passion when she said 'I learned a fascination for the music' from her. Hannah uses the word 'revere' and 'reverence' to signify the sacredness, the awe, her teacher embodied and transmitted for the traditional music. I am struck by the significance of these three supportive adults and their positive impact on a young girl's life. Hannah's story reminds me of the impact genuine compliments by teachers can have on children. It reminds me to pay attention to complimenting as a teacher, a mother, a daughter, a friend. There is no mistaking passion for a subject. Children, teenagers and adults recognise when teachers love their subject. This narrative thread tracing passion for the subject and for teaching, runs through the body of narratives of the nine participating teachers in this study. It will become more visible as we trace their pathways into and through teaching, later in this chapter.

### **6.5.3.3 Narrative fragment: I thought, he thought, I was great**

*Hannah: 'Then in fifth and sixth class I had a teacher and I don't know what it was about him. I don't know what it was about him. I had huge respect for him, huge respect for him. I think maybe he respected all of us, all thirty six of us out in Glenfall, in a small classroom. I just remember always feeling important. Like I remember he commented one day. I still remember this comment. I was making, we were making, clay stuff. It must have been sixth class at this stage, making cups... He commented on something that my cup didn't have a handle...I said 'but you know that doesn't mean it isn't a cup, it could still be a cup without a handle'. He said 'oh, you should be a lawyer'. I just remember that conversation maybe just because 'oh, teacher paid attention to me for a few minutes'. I don't know what it was but I remember that. Now I don't know if he thought I was great or not, but I thought, that he thought I was great. And like we would do Maths. I always had a knack for Maths. So me and one or two others in the class, would always get them really well, and we would present them perfectly on the page. He would send me up, I don't know what he used to do it for, I don't know if it was to make me feel important but he would say 'now you go up and ask the secretary to photocopy that page for me'. So I would have to walk up to the office and get her to photocopy my Maths and bring it down and give it to him...I would go home and tell me mam first thing 'Mr O'Flynn said my Maths page was deadly and he had to photocopy it'. He was just one of those people who was really genuine, I think. So if he gave you one second of his day it was a lifetime...Yeah. Like another teacher could give me way more time than him, but it could not have meant, like all his seconds were filled with such, they were just full, do you know what I mean'?*

#### **6.5.3.4 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'I thought, he thought, I was great'***

The word 'respect' echoes through the first few sentences of Hannah's fragment. She reflects that her teacher 'respected them all' all thirty six of them in the class. As Hannah's story unfolds for us we will see how building mutual respect through human rights work, in her school, is at the heart's core of her work as a teacher. Hannah remembers the precise words her teacher spoke when he commented about a cup being possible, without a handle. The response was a compliment to her intelligence 'you could be a lawyer'. Again his response to her mathematics homework was to have her go to the secretary to have it photocopied. She doesn't know if, or how he used it. However, she clearly understood that he was having her do a lap of honour to the office. Her comment that 'I thought, that he thought I was great' sums up the self-confidence that her teacher helped build in Hannah. It is a reminder of how students' self-belief is nurtured when teachers demonstrate that they believe in them.

Reflecting upon the skills and interests she later developed in her life and in her teaching, it won't surprise you, nor did it surprise me, that a deep reverence for traditional music, and a love of and confidence about mathematics and science, thread through her stories. The phrase 'I thought that he thought, that I was great' resonates from her own school backstory. It helps fire her own commitment to honouring and nurturing the children she now teaches in a DEIS primary school.

#### **6.5.4 Backstory: Hannah at home**

The fragment below provides Hannah's reflection on her mother's engagement with her as a small child, especially her mother's commitment to answering her persistent questions. This attention and engagement, as we will later see, characterises Hannah's relationship with the children she now teaches. It is also identified in her own passion for probing the 'bigger picture' as she calls it, and posing deep questions about the world. The fragment below emerges from a dialogue where Hannah identifies that her keenest interest as a teacher, and as a woman today, is in those experiences that offer opportunities for developmental growth.

#### **6.5.4.1 Narrative fragment: Hannah and her mother**

**Mary:** *'I can see that that's the hook for you, that developmental growth...Can you remember when that spark started firing?*

**Hannah:** *...I don't know where it comes from...When I was younger, and I was the oldest, so for three and a half years I had her to myself. So she said that you know the way other kids ask questions, she said I asked questions probably as much if not more than any kid, right, but my mother answered every single one of them.*

**Mary:** *Look what she started, (we both laugh).*

**Hannah:** *Every single one, so she always says 'it's my fault' (referring to herself), because she said she had the time. She said after that number two and number three came along and they asked questions but she didn't have the time. She said 'I gave them answers but they weren't as indepth' she said. You know if I asked 'why is the sky blue' she went as far as she could for five minutes. She would try and go on about it even though she mightn't have had a clue. As well my mother would be all about the other person as well. She would be a very good listener and she would be the one who I would go to, to talk. She would be a listener for a lot of people in her life. So if it's me and my mam hanging out, like, she would be listening to me intently, do you know what I mean? If I asked a question she would really take it on ... Yeah, so I asked a question and I got the answer so I keep asking questions. I am seeking answers and I keep getting them'.*

#### **6.5.4.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Hannah and her mother'**

As I listen back now to Hannah's voice and read her transcript, I am struck by the benefits Hannah lists as a result of receiving time and attention from her mother. Hannah identifies her mother as a really good listener. She satisfied Hannah's curiosity and by doing so stimulated more questions. When we pick up Hannah's story later we will see the qualities of attentive listening and of probing deep and wide questions as stitched into her identity and values as a teacher, a woman, and a human being. Her pedagogy is built on attentive listening and stimulating and satisfying children's questions. My comment 'look what she started' was a spontaneous response to the reflection of her mother's influence that I could clearly see in Hannah as a consequence of hearing her story. Her backstory, referencing her mother, made total sense to me of the woman and teacher I was getting to know through the fieldwork.

### 6.5.5 Backstories: Meg at home.

Meet Meg. She traces the line of her commitment to honouring and strengthening children's voices now back to her own mixed experiences of both 'being heard' and 'not being heard' as a child. She also traces her 'primary education' to a loving and creative mother. These are the narrative fragments from her childhood that resonate strongly with her now. The fragment presented below emerged from our sessions together and in particular to Meg's references to her deep commitment as a teacher to supporting children to articulate their voices.

#### 6.5.5.1 Narrative fragment: Giving children a voice

**Meg:** *'It's absolutely got to do with how I was reared. I had the good fortune, my mother had a great sense of social justice. She also actually grew up on Nice Tree Road. I grew up in privilege. I could have easily stayed there but I also had a traumatic childhood and it brought me to ending up living in Fisherman's Square... There were seven of us growing up and I wasn't heard, in the way I should have been. I was heard, definitely heard, because I was popular and yeah I was listened to on so many levels, but I wasn't listened to on some very important levels.*

**Mary:** *Ok.*

**Meg:** *And that is central to why, now having said that, yeah no it's definitely, but it's funny how I wouldn't have consciously said I am going into work in this area (teaching) because I want to give people a voice because I wasn't listened to. It never occurred to me.*

**Mary:** *Yes.*

**Meg:** *I went into this because I wanted to give people a voice, was what I knew I wanted to do'.*

#### 6.5.5.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Giving children a voice'

This fragment begins with Meg's mother. Meg depicts her mother as having 'a great sense of social justice' while raised in privilege. This empathy with those experiencing injustice has been learned by Meg at her mother's knee and has shaped Meg's own formation, as her unfolding story will demonstrate. I see in Meg's early choice to relocate herself in the inner city her identification with communities experiencing disadvantages. This is her community of choice, not of origin. I reflect on her choice of situating herself there as signalling an identification with those experiencing injustice. Perhaps her affinity with

communities not sufficiently heard or supported connects to her own experiences of not being heard or supported in some very important ways, as a girl. The relocation marks the beginning of her life-long journey with this community, especially her engagement with the children. It culminates later in her role as a teacher, in a DEIS secondary school, within that community.

The fragment resonates strongly with the priority Meg places on paying attention to children's voices. Hearing what children have to say matters deeply to her. It is at the heart of what motivates her teaching and her life. Supporting children to articulate their voices and be heard also resonates with her own backstory referencing both a 'privileged' and a 'traumatic' childhood. As I remember my engagement with Meg, I relate her strong commitment ensuring that children are heard to her own very mixed experience of 'being heard' on the one hand and 'not being heard on some very important levels' within her own family. We will see the threads sewn here weave through her evolving story identifying her passion to support children to articulate their voices. We will later also see these threads snag as Meg's emerging stories reflect the extent to which she witnesses some teachers feeling strongly threatened by children having a voice. In a later fragment Meg points to the significance of the educational path she choose to follow during a career break after many years of teaching. I place it here in the backstory section because reflecting on its value connects her to her mother and childhood.

#### **6.5.6 Backstories: Nicole at School**

Nicole now enters our prologue. She is the second eldest of eleven children. When first we meet her she is a pupil in a rural country primary school. The fragments she shares reflect her experiences at the time, experiences she remembers vividly. They are significant for the research story because they have shaped who she has become as a teacher, and as a woman. I represent reflections on her school experiences below through three short fragments narrated by Nicole.

#### **6.5.6.1 Narrative Fragment: Knot in my stomach**

**Nicole:** 'I went to a country school. I remember the knot in my stomach walking down the road. I never got it back, the confidence. My teacher, she wasn't a bad person but so academic, so strict. Definitely it wasn't the hitting, it wasn't the verbal abuse, it was actually just the atmosphere, so tight, so tight. I can even now going in, I can smell it, yah the fear, you know'.

#### **6.5.6.2 Narrative Fragment: Nothing lacking in me**

**Nicole:** 'Now, I am not saying it was all negative but, those last three years of my finishing (primary) was like, 'you are so thick, you are so silly'. I can honestly say that I spent the next twenty years proving I wasn't, because, I felt 'oh my god, am I'? Now I was in a class of ten. When I look back on it now, I am quite happy to say do you know what, that person, that teacher didn't address my needs. Yes, she taught the class, a phenomenal teacher in many aspects, but there were only ten of us...What I am saying is there is nothing lacking in me'.

#### **6.5.6.3 Narrative Fragment: Stressed out of my mind**

**Nicole:** 'And it's only from doing this (research) that it makes you think back to different things, do you know what I mean? I can remember going in really scared (she whispers) in primary school.

**Mary:** I can too.

**Nicole:** Like really, like stressed, like you know stressed out of my mind. I remember long division, stressed out. Even topics are in my mind'.

#### **6.5.6.4 Tracing the Narrative Threads of Nicole's fragments reflecting on school**

I am struck by how Nicole's experiences at school so graphically capture adverse conditions for learning and the negative impact on students of teachers who generate stress and fear. The narrative fragments Nicole shares with us are very powerful in a visceral sense. She describes how it feels in the body to be in such a classroom: the knot in the stomach, the smell of fear, voice reduced to a whisper, the tightness of the atmosphere, the stress. Nicole recognises her needs were not met by her primary teacher. Her confidence was adversely affected at the time.



As her narrative unfolds we will learn that the motivation to prove her own academic abilities, which were undermined in that context, has ever since fired her with a passion for learning. Nicole declares 'there is nothing lacking in me' at the end of the second fragment. I see in Nicole's unfolding narratives a glimpse of the small girl, whose needs were not met by her teacher, eclipsed now by the woman and teacher who has with persistence and courage taken on and succeeded in many academic challenges since. She has transformed her own narrative as a learner.

### **6.5.7 Backstories: Nicole at home.**

Nicole reflects on the influences in her family life that have shaped her values as a person, and as a teacher. She shares this fragment on a day when she has hosted a group of elderly people in the school. Together she and her domestic science students have prepared and served a full Christmas dinner and celebrated the presence in the school of elderly people from the community. We are in her little office sharing tea and Christmas cake. The two narrative fragments below identify influences from childhood that matter to Nicole. She identifies these influences as having helped to shape the teacher and the woman she has become.

#### **6.5.7.1 Narrative fragment: Significant adults with time, stories and songs**

***Nicole:** 'I suppose elderly people have played a significant role in my life. I have been very fortunate in that when I grew up I had an uncle who lived with us, and I had my granny down the road. The two of them, I would say, have been huge positives in my life. Learning from my uncle like songs, and from my grandmother...My mum was the only girl of my grannies children, who was near by. So I was extremely close to her, (my granny)...I suppose I could call her a friend, a counsellor, and very much someone to guide you. Someone who was really, really, guiding you and telling you stories. When I look back now and I think of her telling me stories at a very young age, I mean, as in life stories... just a brilliant listener, guided me through life basically... And you know I realise that's what I miss most about her is you could come home and even say 'I want to be a teacher' and she would sit down and just always seemed to have time for people'.*

### **6.5.7.2 Narrative fragment: Warmth seems to spring from her.**

*Nicole: 'Again, my mum is from a large family as well, there's fourteen of them. She is always baking, cooking, entertaining and just that warmth in the house. The warmth seems to spring from her. I don't ever actually remember, this is funny, I don't ever remember her saying she couldn't do something or couldn't go somewhere'.*

### **6.5.7.3 Tracing the narrative threads of Nicole at home.**

As she reflects on the influence in her life of her uncle, her grandmother, her mother, we learn that significant adults in her life gave her their time. They told her stories, they listened to her stories, they taught her songs. They were in fact her 'primary teachers'. Nicole fondly remembers her maternal grandmother as 'friend', 'counsellor', 'someone to guide you'. Nicole's narrative triggers memories of my own maternal grandmother, Bridget, with whom I had a very close relationship. I relished those Sunday's when, because she was too unwell to attend mass, I was allowed to stay behind to mind her. In retrospect I regard the time spent sharing stories with my grandmother as very precious to me and very valuable in terms of what I learned from her. Nicole aptly calls them 'life stories'. As she shares more fragments with us we will see that Nicole engages story itself as a pedagogical tool to teach domestic science to her students.

The association of baking, cooking, and entertaining with her mother make it unsurprising that domestic science later became Nicole's specialist subject as a secondary teacher. I am mindful that cooking and entertaining elderly people from the community, by providing a Christmas party for them, is what has consumed most of her energy on the day we shared the stories presented above. The fact that she set up tea and Christmas cake, for us to share, is a reflection of her own generosity. The phrase 'the warmth seems to spring from her' is a beautiful phrase she uses to describe her mother, but it also reflects the woman sitting opposite me in the little office where we share Christmas cake. Later, as she shares more reflections on her teaching life with us we will see the themes of food, time, story and relationship with students weave through her stories. I trace these narrative threads back to these early fragments about her own experiences of guidance, warmth, and attention from significant adults in her family.

## **6.6 Conclusion to the Prologue: Long Ago...When we were girls**

The prologue has set the scene for sharing with the reader the early stories of some of the participating teachers. The prologue begins with those teachers, four in all, whose narratives provided windows through which we, as readers, can see and relate to their reflections on their experiences as girls. Teachers appearing in the prologue included Caitriona, Hannah, Meg and Nicole. Their backstories thread through their contemporary narratives as teachers and women. As more fragments of their stories are presented in the three acts following, the reader will see more traces of their backstories in their current storied lives as teachers.

As I reflect on these women, and the narratives they have shared with us, I am struck by the impact that significant adults have had in their lives. In some cases the influence of adults has been positive, in others negative. Some of the adults referenced are teachers, others are within their families. Positive memories relate to adults, within and outside the family, who: showed respect for children; demonstrated warmth; took time with and paid attention to children; listened to, heard and responded to children; met children's needs. Negative memories relate to adults, within and outside the family, who: generated fear; created stress for children; didn't listen, hear or respond to children; failed to meet children's needs.

Caitriona and Nicole reflect on the stress, and distress, caused by their primary teachers who did not meet their needs or hear them. Their fragments testify that particular teachers created fear, even terror, in their classrooms for these girls. It is fascinating to see how these two girls fashioned themselves as teachers on a model explicitly different from the teachers they cited. They transformed their own negative experiences by embodying themselves as teachers who support, engage and express solidarity with the children and teenagers now in their educational care. I recall Caitriona's set ambition to 'cancel' her teacher out. I observe that Caitriona and Nicole have both, in their own ways, cancelled out those teachers who did not address their needs when they were young girls.

They have become the teachers they themselves deserved as children. They transformed their own narratives as learners in the way they developed as teachers. The experiences Hannah shares of teachers, who were significant for her, reflect positive support and encouragement for who she was as a small girl. Her fragments reflect a model of teaching that encourages, compliments and credits children, and builds their self-belief and confidence. It is extremely interesting that despite negative experiences of school, Caitriona and Nicole were motivated to become teachers such as Hannah was lucky enough to experience and emulate.

Drawing on their narratives of home one of the strongest messages is the impact of significant adults, particularly mothers. The stories of Caitriona, Nicole, Hannah and Meg resonate with depictions of their mothers as loving, creative and warm. Nicole's phrase 'the warmth seemed to spring from her' captures the significance of her mother in her family. Nurturing is referenced by teachers to their mothers, and in one case grandmother, through food, song, story, creativity and giving girls time and attention. Apart from Caitriona's brief reference to her father's alcoholism, there is otherwise absolute silence in relation to their fathers. Caitriona and Meg acknowledge in different ways the challenges of family life. Meg stresses the outcome of 'being heard' on the one hand and 'not being heard in some very important ways' on the other, as traumatic. Caitriona's understanding of the challenges faced by some of the children, she teaches now in a DEIS school, derives from her experiences of the impact of challenges in her family on her, and on her family members. Meg and Caitriona draw on both significant challenges and opportunities, experienced in their family life, to champion children in the context of being teachers in DEIS schools now. For these four teachers the right to be heard and to have your needs met seems to echo across their narratives of home and school and from their backstories to their current stories. The prologue is now complete. We now move on to focus on the passions and pathways selected teachers identified, as leading them to teaching.

## **Teachers' Storied Lives:**

### **Act One**

#### **Passionate Interests and Pathways to teaching**

## 6.7 Act 1: Passionate Interests and Pathways to Teaching

Through the fieldwork process I engaged with teachers and their stories. I listened attentively and sought to inquire about and understand what motivated these nine teachers to take a pathway to teaching. I explored their pathways to teaching by paying attention to how they storied the passionate interests they had as young women. As I did so I began to understand that a unique burning interest in each individual young woman became harnessed to the possibility of teaching. For some of the young women this harnessing of passion to pathway happened as an epiphany. For others, the journey to teaching was longed for but circuitous. For still others, entry to teaching was delayed. It was interesting to learn that a cohort of just nine teachers could exhibit such diversity in both the motivation, the means and the points in their lives when they took a pathway into teaching. I present five exemplars below for your consideration, representing the rich diversity of experiences these nine young women brought with them into teaching. The passions and pathways of the remaining four participating teachers Prologue are provided in the appendices (see Appendix Q). The stories of the passionate interests and pathways taken, provide us with richly textured narratives revealing deep insights into what motivates and matters to teachers participating in this study.

### 6.7.1 Victoria's passionate interests and pathway to teaching

May I introduce you to Victoria. When first we meet her she is, as she says herself, 'big into my Art'. She has just finished her Art degree. Teaching is not on her horizon. As this fragment below reveals her recognition that teaching was her passion, happened as an epiphany. This is how she describes her pathway into teaching.

#### 6.7.1.1 *Narrative fragment: Teaching found me.*

*Mary: 'Can I ask you Victoria, did you, when you were a little girl or a teenager or before your Leaving Cert, did you aspire to being a teacher from the beginning or did you accidentally end up being a teacher?'*

**Victoria:** *I didn't know I wanted to be a teacher. I was big into my Art. I was always drawing and things like that. I had a wonderful, wonderful, Art teacher. Blessed I was, in secondary school. She helped me with my portfolio. I applied (to college to study art) and I actually specialised in painting and sculpture...I went back to [my home city] to work, to get up the money. Through my job there... I used to design children's toys and paint them and things like that. They had an exchange trip with young disabled children in Holland. They asked me (to go)... and I said no. Then they said they would really like me to go. Then we came up with the idea of doing a mural in Holland. There was a whole load of us involved. When I got over there I just absolutely loved working with the young people, doing the mural. I had such fun.*

**Mary:** *So you weren't looking for it?*

**Victoria:** *No, I wasn't looking for it, but I think it found me, more than I found it. I came home and I just said 'I am applying for teaching'. I got a portfolio quickly, very quickly, together...I just said 'that's it, that's where I need to be, I need to be in teaching'. It was unbelievable how it happened. I never went looking for it... Teaching had never once entered my mind. Boy, I am very lucky that I got that chance. So I was meant to take that year off. I was meant to be in [my home city].*

**Mary:** *There are no accidents.*

**Victoria:** *No, there are no accidents. Seriously, this is where I am supposed to be'*

### **6.7.1.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Teaching, it found me'**

As I engage with Victoria's narrative I am struck by the element of her surprise that teaching found her. The pathway to teaching opened up for Victoria in a *eureka* moment. Though totally unplanned, she recognised immediately through the experience of teaching young disabled people Art, that this was the pathway forward for her. Her clarity then resonates with her commitment now to engaging with young people in teaching Art in a DEIS secondary school. She knows that she is in the right job and in the right school now. We see that Art and young people are her twin passions. Her narrative fragment also identifies the importance for her of having had an adult, in her case an inspiring Art teacher, who believed in and supported both her and her Artwork. Victoria has herself in turn become a similar mentor for her own Art students, as we will understand better as she shares more of her story with us. She looks back on herself as 'lucky' to have got the chance to teach, a feeling she continues to express today as a teacher. The deep conviction of her final words in this fragment, resonate with me when she states 'this is where I am supposed to be'.

## 6.7.2 Julia's passionate interests and pathway to teaching

Julia now joins our cast of nine teachers. She majored in theology at college. Biblical stories, so full of rich imagery and concepts, fascinated her and led her to study theology. English was her second subject and is her speciality now. Teaching found her too.

### 6.7.2.1 Narrative fragment: *Following the storylines*

**Mary:** *'When I asked you about what your second subject was, you said religion and you said it was the motivation to go into teaching. Can I ask you about that?'*

**Julia:** *Well, my family were very religious...*

**Mary:** *Sure.*

**Julia:** *When I told my mother I would like to study theology she was terrified. She thought 'everyone is going to think I bullied you into this'.*

**Mary:** *Ok, and it was a spontaneous decision on your part?*

**Julia:** *I was just interested, you know. I mean the stories are amazing and just all those concepts and thoughts. I was just very, very, interested in it. And then on the course that I studied, there was an opportunity to teach religion to primary school students who were preparing for their First Communion. So that was really where the idea of teaching came to me. Then of course we did study English... as part of our course as well. So that's how I came into English, but it was really through religion'.*

### 6.7.2.2 Tracing the narrative threads of *'Following the storylines'*

Julia's burning interest, her passion, is story. Her fascination for the amazing stories of religion, exploring complex concepts and deep thinking, brought her to study theology initially. As her own narrative fragments unfold we will see that 'story' itself is at the heart of her passion for teaching. Story is the vehicle through which she herself explores concepts and deep thoughts and makes sense of the world. Like Victoria, she too recognised, when placed in a classroom to teach children for the first time during her theology course, that a teacher was what she wanted to be. Biblical stories embodied the values with which she was raised and paved the way for her study of theology. We will see that stories are the vehicles by which she now engages with teenagers, as a secondary teacher of English, and through which she helps them explore their values and develop



their abilities and insights. We will discover, that for Julia, sharing the joy of stories with her students provides her with the passion to teach.

### **6.7.3 Sophie's passionate interests and pathway to teaching**

May I introduce you to Sophie. Teaching was not part of her initial plan. Teaching found her too, as it found Victoria and Julia. In our narrative sessions she identified the twin passions that conspired to lead her into teaching, basketball and her ability at Mathematics. These passionate interests brought her to work with a particularly challenging student and led her ultimately to teaching Mathematics at the secondary school where she began as a basketball teacher.

#### **6.7.3.1 Narrative fragment: Basketball, mathematics and Ciara.**

**Sophie:** *'There was one girl in the school. Ciara was her name. She was absolutely notorious, the bane of everybody's life. I had arrived to the school, brand new, totally shocked. I know that sounds awful, but I was totally shocked because I didn't realise there was another world outside my little world...Right, well, Ciara had been thrown out of every class. Teachers just wouldn't put up with her. She was hitting other students. She was threatening teachers. She was lifting chairs and throwing them across the room. She was notorious. I went in. I was doing basketball. Low and behold, guess what Ciara loved, basketball. I was only a basketball teacher at the time. The principal then heard I had Maths and asked me would I do one-to-one with her in the Maths. She needed to get...he wanted her to get some piece of paper to say she had been to school and achieved something. I did one-to-one with her in Maths. The irony was we were working in a small little office like this and I would say 'right, I want you to go home now and do those tonight. I want to see them tomorrow'. And she would say 'oh my God Miss, are you giving me homework'? She would nearly be excited because she was getting homework, because homework was not the norm in the school at the time. She would be in the next day and say 'Miss, I have got my homework done' and it went on like that. But I controlled Ciara with the basketball.*

**Mary:** *Ok. That was the key?*

**Sophie:** *If she sort of kicked up at all, I would make her sit on the bench, while the others were playing.*

**Mary:** *That's torture for a basketball player.*

**Sophie:** *And always, it nearly killed her, right, nearly killed her. Then she would be fighting with me saying 'I am going home...' and the language out of her, she would be storming out. I would say 'fine, off you go'. Anyway it worked. Ciara...she did extremely well in her Maths. Sorry, but I am boasting, she got an 'A'. What I discovered was, one, she was the first person in her house ever to take a State exam. Two, she didn't understand the wording in Maths, what it meant. But when I said to her 'if you are going up to your granny and you are buying five bunches of flowers at 2.99, how much money would you be taking', she was able to do it like that, (snaps her fingers). So when you put it back into her personal life...*

**Mary:** *Her world...*

**Sophie:** *...She was well able. Once you broke that barrier down then you could introduce the words and say 'well all that means is...'*

### **6.7.3.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'basketball, mathematics and Ciara'**

Sophie begins sharing this fragment signaling her pride as she recollects her engagement with the notorious Ciara. As I listen again to the recording I catch the scale of the challenge to teach Ciara Mathematics, in the context of the level of her 'acting out' behavior. It is interesting that the principal identified Sophie as capable of taking on this challenge, though she was not the Mathematics teacher, 'just the basketball teacher' at the time. Maybe he was discerning enough to see that basketball was a shared passion between Sophie and Ciara. Maybe he also saw that the relationship building through basketball might become the support structure for other learning opportunities for Ciara. Two things are clearly apparent in Sophie's approach to working with Ciara. One, Sophie uses the discipline of sport, relating good behavior with participation in the game and bad behavior with the bench, as a management strategy to set boundaries, on what was and was not acceptable to her in Ciara's behaviour. This was a blueprint for a working relationship based on taking responsibility. It is in this context that Ciara is both given homework by Sophie and she also turns it in.

Secondly, Sophie herself loves and understands Mathematics. She understands that effective teaching of Mathematics is about communication. It is about helping a teenager understand the nature of the problem needing a solution and identifying the steps by which to resolve it. Her phrase 'all that means is' punctuates her ongoing narratives about teaching Mathematics. She simplifies, clarifies and relates the Mathematics problems to the real world of her students. The engagement with Ciara, challenging as it was, helped her identify that teaching Mathematics was what she was meant to do. She then went

back to study, to take the Higher Diploma in Education to qualify her to teach at secondary. Sophie then returned to the same school highly motivated to teach Mathematics by connecting it to the real world of the students. This was and is her underlying mission, as her narrative fragments will continue to reveal. The underlying passions for basketball and Mathematics led her to Ciara. This ‘notorious girl’ is remembered with pride and it is through Ciara that Sophie’s pathway to becoming a Mathematics teacher, in an inner city school, opened up. As I reflect on Ciara’s success I imagine what it must be like for a young girl herself and for a family, to witness her being the first person in the family to pass a state examination. As a teacher myself, I identify with the pride Sophie expresses today in recollecting Ciara’s achievement at Mathematics. The satisfaction for Sophie in supporting Ciara to reach that successful outcome resonates through the fragment and affirmed Sophie’s confidence in her capacity to teach Mathematics.

#### **6.7.4 Rachel’s passionate interests and pathway to teaching**

Let’s welcome Rachel to our cast of teachers. Her route to primary teaching was circuitous. However as she shares her story she acknowledges that she was blessed in having wonderful mentors to guide her on her way.

##### **6.7.4.1 Narrative fragment: Arse about Elbow**

**Rachel:** *‘I suppose, I came into primary school teaching a bit ‘arse about elbow’ kind of way. I always liked primary school teaching. I had an aunt who was married to my mam’s brother. She was a teacher. I used to go into her class when I was in secondary school. I would go in during June and help out with her class. But, when I was in secondary school, I only did pass Irish. So it (primary teaching) wasn’t an option for me then, when I was doing my leaving cert. So I went to UCD. I did an arts degree there...I did a Masters...I trained as a secondary school teacher...Then during that year my mam died. So I went to America that summer, over to my sister. I came back and kind of thought there would be a job waiting for me. As it happens there was a job waiting for me but it was as a primary school teacher. A neighbour of mine was a principal of a school... She was having trouble filling a position for a senior infant class. So she asked me would I like to sub, until she found somebody. I did that...So I ended up staying there. I stayed there for four and a half years. Whilst I was there that neighbour, who was the principal, retired. The year after she retired she approached me. I met her on the road, outside the house, on one of the days and she said to me, ‘so when are you going to do your Irish and get this sorted, get the primary school teaching sorted’.*

**Mary:** *So it was still a gap?*

**Rachel:** Yes, I still didn't have the primary school bit. I was a qualified teacher but I wasn't a primary teacher. So she set about starting to teach me Irish. Then after about a year and a half with her, her husband, who was also retired as a secondary school Irish teacher, he took over my tuition.

**Mary:** So you were their project?

**Rachel:** Yes, I was their little extra daughter. They had four daughters and I was their extra daughter. So I used to go over every day. They were so good to me. They took me over Saturday mornings and Sunday mornings and we would do the Irish. So I did the Leaving Cert (certificate). I got a B...So this was still while I was working in [the primary school] and the summer after I got the Leaving Cert., and the Irish, I applied to (a teacher education college) to do the post grad. (in primary teaching). So again Phylis and Fred were really good to me. They prepped me for my interview and did all that...'

She goes on to comment about her mentors:

**Rachel:** 'Actually they have been absolutely amazing to me. They totally adopted me. And I would be going 'oh I have to go over to do my Irish'. And every day after school I would go over and I was thinking 'oh, I don't want to go'. But as soon as I got there, I always enjoyed it. You know we just had a cup of tea and did the Irish exercises. It was literally back to basics, basics... They were super. They kept on. And when I got into [teacher education] they would check my lesson plans, go through them for Irish. They have just been absolutely amazing. So they would be huge mentors and an inspiration to me. They have been amazing. And like they have been so good and they are not boastful at all. I know they would be hugely proud of me as well'.

#### **6.7.4.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Arse about elbow'**

The path to primary teaching was a long and challenging for Rachel. She was already a qualified secondary teacher, with considerable primary teaching experience, but without Irish she could never qualify as a primary teacher. Her mentors provided the inspiration and at every stage of her journey the personal and educational support she needed to achieve her goal. The words Rachel chooses to express her place in their lives signifies how close she felt to them, 'I was their extra little daughter'. The time in her aunt's primary classroom may have been very significant for Rachel as she says she knew innately that she wanted to be a primary teacher. She certainly had to dig deep and persist to find her pathway to primary teaching.

## 6.7.5 Jessica's passionate interest and pathway to teaching

Jessica's passionate interest is in music. We will learn about this in the relational section of the findings. Here we track Jessica's pathway to teaching.

### 6.7.5.1 Narrative fragment: *There was no feeling in the world compared to that*

**Jessica:** *'This isn't for me. I just felt, ok, I will get an Arts degree, maybe, if I am lucky. I hated what I was doing with the Italian and the Latin because there was very little emphasis on the speaking part...So I just said no. This can't be sustained. So at that point I just stood back and I said, 'what do you want to do'? ... Maybe two years prior to that I had done an awful lot of babysitting really throughout secondary school, but one family in particular, I really enjoyed looking after them and minding them. I always liked being around children and I enjoyed the fun and the interaction. They went to a local Gaelscoil (Primary School through Irish). So when I was having this sort of a crisis in second year, one of those mothers was very good to me and she would talk to me a good bit about what I could do or look at other plans. To make a long story short... I went and worked in the Gaelscoil on a voluntary basis and I just loved it (her voice slows and she stresses the words)...*

**Mary:** *And what was it about, say, when you went into the Gaelscoil, tell me in what way it was obvious to you?*

**Jessica:** *Oh, it was just, it was as though, I suppose it was kind of like, what's the word, it was almost like, everything just fell into place. It just felt this is so right. I remember sitting down with a group of children and I was actually teaching them a little bit of Italian because the principal at the time said, sure you can do a bit of that because you have Italian. I just felt this is so right. I remember I just loved the buzz I got out of teaching them and showing them. I loved the dynamic. I loved the way the school was structured. I loved the way the teacher was...So I liked that feeling, I suppose, of being responsible and in control of your own work, the shape of it. I also liked then that you were part of a team. But it was just that whole thing of just teaching. It was really just the way I felt when you would show somebody how to do something that they didn't previously know how to do. There was just no feeling in the world compared to that. So, that was for me, I just knew it with them.*

#### **6.7.5.2 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'there was no feeling in the world compared to that'***

Like Rachel, Jessica's path to teaching was circuitous. She took an arts route to study and found it was not for her. Her babysitting brought her in to contact with children and she recognized her own ease and pleasure in minding them. She identifies the mother of her charges as sympathetic to her concerns to find a way forward for herself. Here we see another mother, a good listener, being a support to Jessica along her way. Jessica's description of how strong her recognition was that this felt right to her, this teaching, resonates with Victoria's eureka moment in Holland. The lure for Jessica is in the joy of helping somebody understand something they didn't previously know how to do. This is what attracted her to teaching then.

#### **6.7.6 Conclusion to passions and pathways to teaching**

It was really interesting to begin to understand the diversity of interests that brought these teachers to teaching. In fact, two only, of the nine participating teachers in this study, took a direct route from third level education straight into teaching in their particular sector of education. The journey for most, seven of the nine, was more circuitous. Five journeys are depicted above the remaining four are available in the appendices (see Appendix Q). The narratives are significant because teachers identify them as such, and because they teach us about how these teachers perceived teaching. These pathways have added significance because they have shaped, and in some cases clearly continue to shape, being teachers now.

## **Teachers' Storied Lives:**

### **Act Two**

#### **Being Teachers**

#### **Relational Insights**

## **6.8 Introduction to Acts Two and Three:**

The intention driving the exploration of teachers' insights, in Act Two, Being Teachers: Relational Insights, and Act Three, Being Teachers: Contextual Insights, is to deepen our understanding of teachers by studying the learning they identify, through their stories, as having been most significant for them. By inquiring into their storied lives we have an opportunity to better understand their perspectives and to expand our awareness about 'being teachers' in DEIS schools but also about being educators ourselves.

Act Two, Being Teachers: Relational Insights, presents the first and the longest act in our play. Relational insights occupy the most extensive section of the findings because of their predominant presence in the narrative data. This act inquires into the opportunities and challenges teachers report as shaping how they learn to negotiate relationships with students.

Act Three, Being Teachers: Contextual Insights, explores teachers' understanding of the context in which they teach and the extent to which they understand this context as shaping and/or being shaped by them. The intention in this section is to use participating teachers' insights as a lens through which we can engage with the possibilities and challenges of teaching in DEIS schools and other schools elsewhere serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages.

## **6.9 Act Two: Being Teachers, Relational Insights**

Act Two reflects on relational insights shared by teachers in their stories of being teachers. Teachers' insights predominantly focus on relationships between teachers and students. Consequently, their insights reflecting on other relationships with parents, colleagues or other members of the school community are reserved for the Contextual Insights in Act Three. The decision to place them there supports my intention here to create and reserve a narrative inquiry space with sufficient depth, width and breadth to facilitate a deep and thorough exploration of teachers' understandings of relationships between themselves and their students.



In inquiring into these relational insights my objective is to encourage the reader to reflect on how they understand themselves as educators and how they understand their students. Doing so engages us with challenges and possibilities inherent in nurturing mutual relationships with students. The learning available to us, from teachers' storied lives, provides possibilities for sensitising us as educators. Teachers' relational insights highlight tensions between opportunities for teacher development, creativity and satisfaction, as well as profound personal and professional challenges for teachers inherent in managing relationships with students.

### **6.9.1 Being Teachers: Negotiating relationships with students**

This section explores insights teachers derive from their experiences of negotiating relationships with their students. The teachers participating in this study argue that developing constructive relationships between themselves and students is the key to successful teaching and learning. Teachers interpret positive responses from students, and their own positive responses to students, as evidence that teacher/student relationships are working well. From their narrative accounts we will observe that teachers value positive feedback from students and they report it as providing meaning and motivation for their continuing interaction with students.

Teachers also depict the relational space between them and their students as one that is highly charged with energy, complex interactions and diverse personalities. This relational space is the crucible where possibilities are forged for a continuum of experiences ranging from: creativity, fun, excitement, growth and enlightenment; to impotence, drudgery, apathy, stagnation, ignorance; anger and everything between.

#### **6.9.1.1 Narrative Fragment: *I love the bones of him, same as I love the bones of you***

*Caitriona: 'My keys, I have a big huge set of keys. Now you couldn't lose them but I am forever losing them. And I used to have, you know, one of those little pixie photo pictures on it and my three children were on it...They were on it and Tim was on it as well, my husband. And this boy was looking at the picture one day... And he said 'who is that'? And he said 'are you married'? And I said 'I am'.*

*And he said 'are they your babies'? And I said 'they are'. He said 'who is them's daddies'? And I said 'he is their daddy as well'. And he said 'three of them have the same daddy'? And I said 'yeah'. And he said 'oh, and are you married'? I said 'I am'. I said 'I love the bones of him, the same as I love the bones of you'. Could you believe it every single day after that when we were going down the corridor he would look up at me and say 'do you love the bones of him'? And I would say 'I do, same as I love the bones of you'. And he kept checking because if I loved the bones of my husband still then it meant I still loved the bones of him (her voice fills up with emotion). He checked in with me every single day, asking did I love the bones of my husband still because if I did it meant I still loved the bones of him. Now he is up in fourth class and I meet him on the corridor (she laughs heartily).*

**Mary:** *That's wonderful.*

**Caitríona:** *It's just scary. It's absolutely scary.*

**Caitríona continues:** *The little girl then who had the reaction to the picture. She said 'who's that'? I said that's such and such. And then she pointed out my little girl and she said 'who's that'? And I said 'that's my daughter' 'It's not' she said 'that's me'. And I said 'is that you'? 'Yah' she said 'that's me'. And every single day she looked for my keys [saying] 'where's the picture of me'?*

**Mary:** *She wanted to be in your space, in your special people circle.*

**Caitríona:** *Isn't it amazing, like? I think it's just wonderful. It would tear the guts out of you. It would tear the guts out of you (she gets emotional)'.*

### **6.9.1.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I love the bones of him, same as I love the bones of you'**

The fragment above presents two responses to photographs on a teacher's key ring, one from a little boy, the other from a little girl. The boy wants to know about her family, her children, her husband. This child cross examines her thoroughly so that he can understand the relationships between her and her family members, depicted in the photographs. Her response is to invite him into her circle of intimates. The phrase she utters is profoundly beautiful because it conveys an invitation to the young child to be part of her circle of loved ones saying 'I love the bones of him same as I love the bones of you'. The little boy frequently checks the status of the teacher's relationship with her husband in order to reassure himself that he is continuing to be loved. I draw from Caitríona's insight her conviction, expressed repeatedly through her narratives, that the children want to get to know you and that you have a great deal to gain yourself as a result of letting yourself be known to them. When she says 'it's absolutely scary' she is expressing awe at the level of emotional connection between the children and herself. She is moved at the recollection.

This child matters to her, and she knows she matters to him. She interprets the child's response as indicating that, in her view, children want to get to know us personally, as women, as mothers, as people, not just as their teachers. I interpret the value she places on relationships with the children, and the respect she demonstrates and expresses towards, them as a signature of who she is as a teacher.

In a similar way the little girl insists that the picture on the teacher's key chain is 'me', and not the teacher's daughter. Caitríona's response is insightful. By posing the question back to the child 'is that you' she acknowledges and supports the child's desire to be the girl in the picture. Again this teacher has opened up the space for the little girl to feel that she is so important to the teacher that she is possibly photographed on her teachers' key ring. She finishes the fragment stating 'isn't it wonderful' and 'it would tear the guts out of you'. There is an interesting tension between these phrases. The 'wonderful[ness]' on the one hand and the 'tear[ing]' on the other hand. Caitríona's emotional response in telling the story, and my own emotional response to hearing it, suggests both the heartfelt joys and the heartrending nature of teaching. Victoria's fragment below resonates with Caitríona's above in the conviction that students want to get to know you. Both these teachers believe the best basis for supporting students' educational lives is to build personal relationships with them. Interestingly Caitríona is a primary teacher and Victoria is a secondary teacher. However, they both share the conviction that letting students into your life benefits you, as a teacher, a woman and a human being.

### **6.9.1.3 Narrative Fragment: Being a part of a young person's life**

*Victoria: 'I think what is important to me is just being a part of a young person's life. I absolutely love it...I always consider myself a strict teacher but very fair. I don't go into the classroom as if I have power over them. I like to build a relationship with them. They know that. So we set rules together. They know what to expect of me and they know what I expect of them. It's a kind of a two-way relationship and it has worked for me. What is important to me is that relationship with them. The only way that I could get that relationship was getting involved with them outside of the classroom. So I am very much not just a classroom teacher but you will see me around the school everywhere involved in extra curricular activities and things like that. That is where I have found the most benefit... You have to get to know them and you have to allow them to get to know you to see that 'God, teacher has a sense of humour, teacher can laugh, teacher can dance'. And it's ok for them to laugh because it's so unusual for a student to go 'oh my God, Miss Flynn is doing hip hop, wow'...*

*My relationship outside...filters back into the classroom...If a student asks me for extra time on anything I will say yes and they know that about me...They need to know that you are there for them, you know’.*

A little later in the dialogue, she reveals more about her beliefs in the benefits of being in relationship with students, especially outside the classroom.

**Mary:** *‘And tell me about the ‘Style Design Quest’ just to capture that moment because that’s where you started*

**Victoria:** *That was just amazing. That’s where you knew as a teacher that your job was not only in the classroom. That was just fabulous for me. We did sets, we did dancing, we did costumes. There was make-up and it was just a whole performance piece that we all had to move up...It was a whole community, like, all coming together. It was done in extra time. There were teachers who came in at half past five (am) to make us breakfast because we had to leave by six (am). It was just the whole thing that everyone was behind you. You would drive up to Galway with these kids and they would stay with you. They never wanted to leave you (amazement in her voice). It was ‘no, like, we will stay with you’...I mean and not just for the Style Design Quest. I took students to Paris. It is one of my best memories of my life. I absolutely adored them...Again they wanted to be with you, (amazement in her voice). They wanted to stay with you. It’s like they never once wandered off...It’s like ‘we are talking to Miss Flynn’. They were chatting. They actually want to get to know you...The only way you will get good results and be able to teach well in a class is if you have that relationship with the students. And the only way to have that relationship with the students is to become involved not just in the classroom but in their educational lives’.*

#### **6.9.1.4 Tracing the narrative threads of ‘Being part of a young person’s life’**

What strikes me strongly about Victoria’s fragment is the passion with which she expresses her joy at being involved in young peoples’ lives. She speaks about her experiences with her students on a trip to Paris as ‘one of the best memories of my life’. This signifies that for this teacher, these experiences with her students are personally precious and rewarding. Victoria takes pleasure in building up the relationship with the teenagers. In the classroom that involves ‘set[ting] the rules together’, a reciprocal act outlining rights and responsibilities. However engagements outside the classroom offer far more mutual freedom for her and her students. Victoria gets to know her students and they get to know her in a different context and on different terms. There is freedom to

have fun, to laugh, to dance together. Victoria creates an almost visual image of standing back watching herself through the students' eyes when she says 'oh my God, Miss Flynn is doing hip, hop'. Victoria is glad to be seen as human in the students' eyes. They see she has 'a sense of humour...can laugh...can dance'. In turn her engagement with the students, in preparing for the Style Design Quest, involved making costumes together, creating sets together, doing their make-up. While the work is creative, congruent with the interests of an Art teacher, it also brings this teacher and her students up close and personal. She relishes this. Meg also loves the relational engagement with students as described below.

#### **6.9.1.5 Narrative Fragment: Having a RAP, what you get back**

**Mary:** *'What do you get back from them?'*

**Meg:** *What do I get back...well this morning, it's very funny this. I teach citizenship education, CSPE<sup>6</sup>. The kids do a report on an action project, which is a wonderful project. Sixty per cent of their subject is based on a report on an action they do and we do service to the community as the action. The report is called a Report on the Action Project, but short for it is RAP... They are third years and they are sitting a State exam in three, four months, time. I said 'come on lads, let's work on our RAPs'. And I just heard from the back 'I will have mayonnaise on mine miss'. I just thought 'I love this job'. And this other kid says 'no, I prefer a chicken fillet roll'. I just said 'this is why I teach'.*

#### **6.9.1.6 Tracing the Narrative threads of 'Having a RAP, what you get back'**

This fragment captures the spontaneous fun created by students that can light up the classroom at times. What is interesting about Meg is the degree to which she appreciates these moments. The wittiness of the teenagers creating the pun between the serious business of the 'RAP' and the lunch 'wrap' with various filling preferences, explodes onto the classroom scene. It catches Meg totally by surprise and she is rocking with laughter re-storying it to me. Moments like these remind Meg 'this is why I teach'. In my own experience as a teacher I have found that the recollection of 'magic moments' with students creates a reservoir from which I draw inspiration and enthusiasm as a teacher. My memory of Tim, the boy who bagged spuds for his father and wanted me to spare my hands, is one such (see Appendix L). The value is in the relational significance of the

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<sup>6</sup> CSPE is Civic, Social and Political Education

moment for the teacher. The moment cited above by Meg was spontaneous, it came out of the blue. It stopped her in her tracks, created shared laughter and reaffirmed her conviction about being a teacher. Teaching holds both the delightful possibilities and testing challenges of the unexpected.

#### ***6.9.1.7 Conclusion to negotiating relationships with students***

The insights, distilled in this sub section, highlight how teachers perceive and appreciate students' interest and desire to relate to them as human beings. The selected fragments also reveal both the desire and willingness of Caitriona, Victoria, and Meg to be known to their students. There is a reciprocal interest expressed by these teachers in both knowing their students and in being known to their students. This awareness expressed by these teachers, and their openness to investing in and negotiating relationships with students, reveal teachers' values and motivations. They are motivated and energised by engaging with students. I discern from the insights shared by Caitriona, Victoria, and Meg their appreciation of what they get back from investing in relationships with their students. Their fragments reflect the fun, energy, warmth, passion and excitement they experience by virtue of engaging in the educational lives of the children and teenagers they teach. Their insights challenge us as educators, to take stock of what we gain personally from engaging with students, as a relational dividend of teaching.

However, references to hearts, breaking hearts and full hearts, have punctuated many of the teachers' narratives already cited and will continue to punctuate many of those fragments that follow. These resonances of the heart signify that for many of the teachers participating in this study, teaching tugs at the heart. The next section will extend our gaze to the challenges inherent in attempts to renegotiate relationships between teachers and students when tensions or fractures develop between them. This section counterbalances the heart warming benefits teachers have reported from their experiences of teaching with the heart-rending challenges also inherent in being teachers, being women and being human.

## 6.9.2 Being teachers: Renegotiating relationships with students

The following section focuses on fractures in the relationship between teachers and students and efforts to intervene, for the most part by teachers, to restore relationships. It primarily reflects teachers' insights into their efforts to regulate their own behaviour in situations where tensions arise with students.

Many teachers narrate incidents where students extend extraordinary forgiveness to them in circumstances where these teachers might not have expected it. We, as readers and educators, can learn a great deal about the amazing possibilities and challenges of being teachers, women and human beings from how teachers tell their stories. Teachers' efforts to redress their own breaches include reassurances, apologies, chocolate, teddies and breathing. These gestures and symbols are intended to contribute to creating some degree of resolution in the fractured relationship with students.

### 6.9.2.1 *Narrative Fragment: The kids I work with are so forgiving*

*Meg: 'And the other thing about the kids I work with is they are so forgiving. You know you lose your temper with them. I lose my temper with them. I don't shout out of frustration but I would get cross with a child or I could be impatient but they always allow me to say sorry. And they always say 'you are all right Miss' (she laughs shyly), do you know, extraordinary, extraordinary (she wells up with emotion). I have been blessed. I have been really, really lucky. My life has been absolutely enriched by these kids'.*

### 6.9.2.2 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'The kids I work with are so forgiving'*

In the short fragment above Meg speaks about the generosity she experiences from students she teaches. I note the change in her use of pronouns in the shift from 'you know you lose your temper' to 'I lose my temper'. This shift is self-corrective as Meg assumes full responsibility as the 'I' who is losing her temper. I note her willingness to say sorry, to redress her own behavior, to set things right with the students, to make amends. She is sending a strong signal to them that it is not acceptable for her to lose her temper with them. Meg apologises. She is role-modelling good behavior by doing so.

She is moved emotionally by the generosity of the children in allowing her to say sorry and in responding to her with such openness as to say to her 'you are all right Miss'. I witnessed the depth of Meg's emotional response as she re-storied to me their willingness to forgive her. She counts her blessings as a teacher in the generosity of these 'kids' towards her. The phrase 'you are all right Miss' resonates with me from this fragment. It is a powerful acknowledgment from the kids that their teacher is 'all right'. They are signaling to her that the relationship between them remains intact. They can move on together in relationship. I am challenged by both Meg's honesty about her own behavior and with how deeply she values the openhearted responses of the students' responses towards her. Meg culminates this fragment with a definitive statement that 'my life has been absolutely enriched by these kids'. The emphasis is on 'these kids' in the inner city, in a DEIS school.

There is an interesting subtext at play here beneath the obvious stated positive impact of some students on these teachers. These teachers see themselves as needing improving. They don't pretend that they are perfect. Meg's fragment reflects the richness students have brought to her life. However it also speaks to the need for teachers to be discerning in recognizing their responsibilities and in intervening to rebuild relationships with students, when teachers get it wrong. The sub section below expands on this theme.

### **6.9.2.3 Narrative Fragment: We all need chocolate**

**Nicole:** *'Like even last Friday I had a disastrous day with first years in that they were burning curries all over the place. If they didn't burn the rice, they burned the chicken. I said 'guys we just have to sit down'. There was a box of milk tray in my storeroom. I am not into chocolates at all but I said 'do you know what I am going to do, open this box of chocolates, it is a momentous occasion' (she laughs). And they were looking at me and going 'you are after eating us'. And I said 'I am after eating you and giving out to you for surely an hour and twenty minutes. So I really am apologetic. So right, we are going to stand at our tables and we are going to take a chocolate'.*

**Mary:** *Here is a peace offering?*



**Nicole:** Yes, here is a peace offering. I said 'is there anything positive we can say about today' (she laughs in despair, remembering). Someone says 'well I cooked the rice'. And I said 'ok, excellent'... I was just going 'look guys it's Friday and I don't want this to end up as a negative experience. So we are just going to have a laugh about it. So we will just have to go back to that again on some other dish because we weren't able to coordinate all aspects but at least you got the rice, you got the chicken, you got the sauce'.

**Mary:** But, we all got chocolate, (I laugh).

**Nicole:** Yeah and we all got chocolate, (she emphasises it and laughs). And they are going 'are you sure you want to give us chocolate'? And I am going 'I think we all need chocolate' (she emphasises the three words).

**Mary:** But I hear in that an incredible openness to accept that there are disasters but nobody is to blame and you just regroup'.

#### **6.9.2.4 Tracing the narratives threads of 'We all need chocolate'**

In this fragment Nicole shares with us the scene of what she calls a 'disastrous day' in the Domestic Science room, with her first years. I envision an inferno of heat, heat from food being burned left, right and centre, heated emotions. I have learned from familiarity with Nicole's narrative fragments and from spending time listening to and learning from her, that food is a medium through which she communicates. In this case chocolate is the medium and the message is peace and reconciliation. Nicole acknowledges that relations have been strained during the Domestic Science class. The learning outcomes have been very modest indeed. She takes responsibility for having given out to the students, and she apologises to them. By saying 'we all need chocolate' and distributing the goods she is confirming her apology in action. However she is also acknowledging the truth. She is feeling the strain and frustration of the session and she suspects her students are also feeling it. She is making a gesture that attempts to rescue something positive from a poor experience on a Friday afternoon, so that first years go home with a memory of chocolate and an ability to laugh off the experience. I detect in the freedom of the students to say 'you are after eating us' and 'are you sure you want to give us chocolate' the permission given in her classroom for the students to respond honestly to Nicole. There is friendly teasing here.

I was struck forcibly by the phrase 'we all need chocolate' when Nicole shared this narrative with me for the first time. Nicole intuitively responded to the reality of burned curry with a sweet alternative to alter the flavour and aroma of the afternoon. I note my

own response as I reply to her that ‘we all got chocolate’. It as though I imagined being there in her classroom receiving chocolate as a palliative, as though I was in fact one of her students.

The phrase ‘we all need chocolate’ resonated in my mind as I drove from Dublin to Limerick where I live (more than a two hour trip). I have been thinking since about the wider implications of Nicole’s insight about our need for chocolate. I read it as a metaphor for comfort, pleasure, a boost of energy, a sweetener especially when things go sour. I think Nicole’s intuitive response to offer chocolate and laugh off the disaster of burned curries is simple and profound. We learn from her response that as teachers, as women, as human beings we may need to lighten up, we may need to acknowledge and then let go of disasters in the classroom, as in life. We may also need to mend the bridges we burn between our students and ourselves.

Though curries might be beyond rescue our relationships are not if we develop discernment. The capacity to understand the need and the appropriate time, to give and receive chocolate seems to me to be a good litmus test for reflective teaching and reflective living. Nicole’s fragment reflects both emotional intelligence and the ability to take effective action in a tense situation such that students go home, on a particular Friday evening, with a good taste in their mouths literally and a lighter feeling in their hearts. In reflecting on Nicole’s fragment I suspect that altering the flavour of the afternoon may have been as important for her, as for her students. Which of us teachers wants to carry home the burden of a disastrous day to flavour our weekend away from school? Nicole has rescued something valuable from the experience. She has opened up positive lines of communication for the next cooking encounter with her students. She too leaves school with the taste of chocolate in her mouth. There is deep value in what we can learn from her.

#### **6.9.2.5 Narrative Fragment: From ‘outright defiance’ to ‘caught being good’**

*Jessica: ‘We have a new pupil who just started and it is quite unsettling because first of all the time of year that it has happened at (mid October) and also because this pupil hasn’t really been in education for quite some time and there are big gaps in his education .*

*Mary: Ok, and what class level is he coming into?*

**Jessica:** *Fifth and sixth.*

**Mary:** *That's hard for him.*

**Jessica:** *Yes, it is. It is very difficult. It is even difficult for him because not alone does he have to struggle with the academic side and he is very weak. He would barely recognise some of the letters'.*

She continues commenting on having been out sick for a few days and struggling to find the resources in herself to deal with this child

**Jessica:** *'You kind of have to be one hundred per cent, I think in this job. It's not good for anybody if you are not. So anyway yesterday was 'one of those days' as they call them. And he, I just found having to try and deal with all of that yesterday was particularly challenging...So not only does he have to deal with the academic side, he just isn't used to school at all, as in he does not know how to function within a classroom. So if you are telling him to take out your book or take off your jacket that was alien to him...I was met then with some sort of, I don't want say outright, it felt like it was outright defiance because he wouldn't do it. And you see I haven't come across that in so long... It just felt like you were being dragged all the way back there (voice full of emotion) and I, the stress levels were rising a little bit. Then I just kept trying to say to myself 'no, come on now, you know how to do this. This isn't the way. Getting annoyed and angry with him, and getting angry yourself, isn't going to help the situation. So then, it's just when I got a bit of breathing space and actually I did a little bit of breathing, I said 'ok, we will do what we know works'. And you know after all you have to see it from his point of view. He has come in and this is so alien to him and me up there giving out or telling him he is not to doing this, that, or the other right, isn't going to help anything. So I was glad I kind of had that moment because then I was able to sort of apply the strategies that do work for kids like him. And I relied then, I started using the system that we have in place, the rewards system with 'the caught being good cards' and I assigned a mentor to him'.*

#### **6.9.2.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'From 'outright defiance' to 'caught being good'**

In this fragment Jessica reflects on the struggle to find in herself the appropriate resources to support a boy whose behavior is challenging to manage in the classroom situation. She begins by contextualising the narrative for us against a background of the boy's intermittent attendance at school and his late arrival to fifth and sixth class.

She makes us aware of the learning difficulties he experiences and his unfamiliarity with the culture of the school and her classroom. However, she is deeply honest about the fact that when as a teacher you are faced with what feels like 'outright defiance' from a student you have to dig very deep within yourself to find the resources to respond rather than react. Jessica struggles with describing the boy's behaviour as purposefully disruptive by saying 'I won't say outright defiance'. Instead she corrects herself owning her feeling that it 'felt like' outright defiance to her at the time. She is distinguishing between the actions of the child and her own feelings in response to his actions on the day. In my experience as a mother and as a teacher I have found this to be a valuable distinction.

Jessica admits to her own rising stress levels and a sense of slippage in herself. She refers to this as 'being dragged all the way back there'. Jessica is an experienced teacher. Her narrative, charting her internal monologue, steering her emotions to calm and her rationality towards a strategy, is insightful. She reminds herself and encourages herself to 'come on now, you know how to do this'. She knows from experience and from continuing professional development training that she has the resources and skills to sort this out. She chooses to pull them out of the bag. Her thinking follows a logical and an intuitive sequence. Firstly, she tries to see the situation from the boy's point of view, the alien landscape the classroom presents to him. Secondly, she recognizes and accepts the futility of 'giving out' as a reaction that will neither help the boy, nor herself. Thirdly, she recognises her need to breathe deeply, to calm her body, her mind, and her emotions in order to find the personal resources to cope in the situation. Fourthly, she remembers and begins to implement strategies she knows work for students, such as this boy, shifting her approach from a punishment/blame model to a reward model, providing him with the support he needs and deserves.

I feel exhausted after reading and re-reading this fragment and writing my reflections on it. Why? Because I hear the emotion in Jessica's voice. I understand the energy it took from her, on a day when her energies were already depleted, to navigate her emotions from stress to calm, from seeing the child as causing problems in the class to finding solutions for him. My experience as a teacher in DEIS schools resonates with Jessica's that on some days, in certain situations, the emotional energy required to respond

constructively and supportively rather than to react is a huge personal and professional challenge.

Jessica is honest about the supreme effort it takes at times, when in the eye of the storm in a classroom situation, to find the place of calm within yourself from which you can rebuild a constructive relationship, supporting the student and reducing stress for everybody. We know from Jessica, Nicole and Meg already, and we will learn from Sophie shortly, that there will be days when students or teachers lose control or act in ways that obstruct relationships between them and their students. The learning for us readers is not so much in the breach but in the willingness to do the repair work. The teachers story challenging times and their courage in restoring relationships with students. They struggle to regain composure, take responsibility for their own behavior and implement strategies to manage their own behavior and to support students to manage theirs. They are human, they are women and they are challenged to dig deeply as teachers.

#### **6.9.2.7 Conclusion**

Meg reflects on the generosity of the students she teaches. She is moved by their kindness towards her in circumstances where she might have expected a very different response from them. Meg's story help us to inquire into how teachers value signals students give us, in one form or another, that 'you are all right Miss'. Two other teachers, Nicole and Jessica, trace their efforts to restore calm in themselves and in their relationships with their students after stressful encounters in the classroom. They reflect on the transition from a situation of crisis, to acknowledging their role in the crisis and finally to intervening to seek to resolve the crisis. Their accounts, tracing their emotional and cognitive journeys from reaction to response, mirror changes in the horizons of their understanding as teachers and as human beings. The narrative accounts of the teachers represented in this sub section, provide us with an opportunity to better understand some of the challenges teaching poses for teachers as human beings as well as some of the strategies they have found to be effective in renegotiating relationships with students.

### **6.9.3 Being Teachers: Aspirations for relationships with students**

The sub section following traces teachers' insights capturing their visions for how they would like to relate to students and be teachers. I place the focus on teachers' aspirations here intentionally, following earlier subsections on negotiating and re-negotiating relationships with students. I do so because teachers' aspirations have been shaped by their lived experiences in relationship with their students. The aspirations of participating teachers are the product of at least ten years of lived experiences being teachers in a DEIS context, for most, if not all of that time. The aspirations of some teachers have emerged over a much longer period. These teachers articulate clear personal and professional visions about how they would like students to experience being in their classrooms and being in their care. Exploring the aspirations of these experienced teachers will help us to test relationships between our visions, missions and motivations as educators.

#### **6.9.3.1 Narrative Fragment: *That they feel valued and valuable***

*Mary: 'I suppose it tempts me to ask you know, what your hope is say for the children, in terms of your role overall?*

*Caitriona: That regardless of what is happening in their lives that when they come to school they feel valued and valuable. They are valuable. They are deserving of respect and love and consideration and mindfulness. That they learn, if nothing else, that there are people who care, and they don't have to be family, and they don't have to be blood. That there are always people...If it is only someone to button your coat or zip your coat up on a day in the yard when it is cold or tie your laces or give you an old cuddle when you are feeling miserable or for somebody to recognise that you are feeling miserable'.*

#### **6.9.3.2 Tracing the narrative threads of '*That they feel valued and valuable*'**

Caitriona's response to my question, about her hopes for the children, reveals her vision and mission as a teacher. The heart's core of her vision is that the children feel valued and valuable. The narrative threads stitching through her fragment above illustrate a strong pattern of ethical values underpinning her vision for how she wants the children to experience being at school and being with her as a teacher. She is clear, articulate and unambiguous in stating that children deserve to be treated with respect, love,

consideration and mindfulness, in school. She frames her vision for how children should be treated against the background of what children deserve. In doing so she articulates a rights based vision for children's education.

She embodies this vision in an ethic of care, bedding down her values through her interactions, conveying clearly to the children the message that 'you are valued and valuable'. Her ethic of care is visible-in-action in the zipping of coats, the tying of laces, the giving of cuddles. She recognises the importance of these small gestures for the children so they understand they are both 'valued and valuable' to her. The fragment reveals her aspirations and the values shaping the relationships she wants to build with the children. The narrative provides a clear window into her philosophy of education. It also provides a window into her heart. It helps us, as readers, to make sense of who she is as a person, a woman, a teacher. It also captures for us snapshots of how she embodies her vision through her actions as a teacher attending with care and attention to small, but highly significant, daily interactions with the children.

### **6.9.3.3 Narrative Fragment: I see you, I hear you**

**Caitríona:** *'I think you have to be very warm. I think you have to be very empathetic. I think you have to be able to switch off your own house. I think you have to be coming in with the belief that these beautiful people are relying on you and that you need to be there to hear them and to teach them holistically and to understand where they are coming from.*

**She goes on to say, a little later:**

**Caitríona:** *Oh, they know when you like them.*

**Mary:** *They can read it.*

**Caitríona:** *They feel it. They can see it in your eyes. They can see it in your body language. They can see it in those ten seconds you take to say 'hi' and check out how is it going? And that's all it takes out of your whole day.*

**Mary:** *Yes.*

**Caitríona:** *And just to notice when somebody is a bit peaky looking or if they are out on a windy day and their zip needs to be put up or their lace needs to be tied or they are sitting out in the shed on their own...Just those ten seconds to say 'I see you'.*

#### **6.9.3.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I see you, I hear you'**

Caitriona speaks about the need for teachers to be warm and empathetic. The ability to be capable of being that way requires a strategy in her view. She speaks of the need to leave your family concerns at home in order to be capable of the warmth and empathy needed to be fully present as a teacher to the children at school. She identifies the need to take responsibility understanding that these 'beautiful young people are relying on you'. For her being present as a teacher implies being able to 'hear them' and 'understand where they are coming from'. Her focus on being able to hear and understand the children echoes Meg's earlier concern about children's voices needing to be heard and the serious implications for children when their voices are not heard. Caitriona's respect for the children is also reflected in the extent to which she recognises and honours their emotional intelligence. She acknowledges that children can read the level of a teacher's interest and affection 'in your eyes, in your body language'. They can also feel it. She reminds us, readers, researchers, educators, that all it takes is ten seconds to communicate to a child that 'I see you'. That is a valuable reminder to us as educators.

#### **6.9.3.5 Narrative Fragment: I have the belief in you, please just stick with me**

*Nicole: 'There was this one particular student and she was really weak now, really, really weak. And people were going 'oh, she should have done the Leaving Cert Applied' (LCA). So one day, I just got really exasperated listening to this so I said 'listen, there is no point in saying [at] every meeting we have, that this child should have done LCA. It's too late now. She is doing Leaving Cert. So what are we going to do with her now? Please help her (animated)? Don't keep talking about what she should have done, could have done, would have done'.*

*And I was teaching her and I was going 'right, I am going to tell you a very honest thing Julie, 'you are not the brightest in this class. Please don't take that the wrong way. However on the positive side you come in every day. You do your homework. I need now to show you the skills to get the answers down and put the learning in a way that you can manage it to be able to go in and do the Leaving Cert.' I said 'I really put my hand on my heart and I don't want you to take that as an insult'. I said 'you work ten times harder than the brightest people in the class'.*

*And I remember giving them all a Christmas card and I was trying to put something personal in each one. And on hers I remember putting 'the*



*cream always rises to the top'. And I said 'just keep sticking with it. I believe in you, please, just stick with me'.*

*And I think it was two years ago...Somebody in [a college] was doing research...and they came into me. They wanted to interview me. And I said 'why'? They said apparently you have influenced one student massively. I was going 'I wonder who this is?'*

*And it was actually Julie, who was in college...And of those eighteen students in her class that year she was, academically, the weakest. Yet she is now doing Special Needs Assistant (SNA) down in two schools in our area. I am going 'isn't that brilliant, you are doing what you want? ...I thought to myself sometimes you don't realise the impact maybe that you make on students. That's why I think, going back to the process again, the little daily interactions, try your best to have them positive and just try to guide them. Do you know what I mean, it's not that every student in your class will get A's'.*

#### **6.9.3.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I believe in you, please, just stick with me'**

Nicole berates the 'should have, would have, could have' responses, to her student Julie, by colleagues. Nicole has a 'here and now' philosophy and recognises that hand wringing will not help Julie get the results she deserves in her state examinations. I admire Nicole's willingness to support her student, whose current academic performance is weak. I also admire Nicole's willingness and courage to challenge her colleagues to get off the fence and on with the job of supporting this student to develop her strengths.

There is utter simplicity in this teacher's vision and mission. Nicole articulates the problem simply as 'she needs guidance'. She also sees the solution as simple and asks her colleagues to just help 'guide her' student. Her words here resonate for me with those in her fragment in the prologue, sharing her personal experience of schooling. I recall her reference to the 'tight' atmosphere of the classroom and the absence of guidance and support such that her own educational needs were not met then. It seems to me that there is a distinct relationship between Nicole's experiences as a student where her needs were not met and her focus on supporting and guiding students such as Julie to ensure that her needs are met by Nicole, and also by her colleagues.

I am aware of Nicole's belief and experience that building students' skills through repeated practice transforms both the skill level and the confidence of students. Nicole is the teacher who is willing to say 'I believe in you' and to follow through with actions to both demonstrate her belief in action and build both Julie's self-belief and her skills.

Nicole has had the pleasure as a teacher to learn, in recent times, that her influence on Julie was hugely positive. Who is better equipped than Julie to understand the supports students need to flourish? She is now assisting students with special educational needs, guiding and supporting them to build the confidence and skills necessary to derive the best outcomes they can from school. Nicole finishes her fragment articulating her own vision and her mission 'to try to keep the daily interactions positive' and 'just try to guide them'. This is a simple but profound mantra. The word 'try' in both phrases acknowledges both her intent and the fact that she knows that there are no guarantees about outcomes.

#### **6.9.3.7 Narrative Fragment: You don't want to just teach them, you want to reach them**

**Mary:** *'I suppose my principal motivation today is to really ask you what matters to you really as a teacher, what counts in a way?*

**Jessica:** *I suppose what matters is, that you want to have a positive effect on the lives of the children that you are teaching. I suppose you don't want to just teach them, you want to reach them and touch them in a positive way and in a way that ...will equip them for life really, so that they will have a better life as a result of being under your care...through education. I suppose that is what ultimately matters. It also matters very much to me that they would be happy while they are with me, you know, especially because of the context in which I teach, it being DEIS...That's what I would take from looking at how needy, how much in need, these children are. I think it's the hormones now (she is referring to being pregnant) because I am probably going to start. I get emotional if I think about it, do you know, when I think where they are coming from (she laughs, becomes emotional).*

**Mary:** *I don't have that excuse.*

**Jessica:** *I just feel they have very hard lives. It is very sad. I just think that would matter to me'.*

### ***6.9.3.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'You don't want to just teach them, you want to reach them'***

Jessica's opening remarks crystallise her vision and clarify her mission as a teacher. Her objective is to touch the lives of the children she teaches in a positive way. The depth of her ambition is beautifully captured in her expression 'you don't want to just teach them, you want to reach them'. Her vision is wider than pedagogical concerns alone. It is deeply personal and it speaks to reaching children, touching their lives through education in a way that shapes them positively. It matters to her that the children are happy when they are in her care. She is acutely aware of the difficult challenges shaping the lives of some children in DEIS schools as a result of the challenges experienced by some families within communities experiencing disadvantages. She aspires to providing a happy space in her classroom as a palliative to 'how much in need these children are'.

I am reflecting back on Jessica's emotional response to saying this, and to my own response in listening to her saying it. I know my own emotional response connected, not just with the truth she was uttering but, with my own memories of seeing the acute needs of some children for myself, up close and personal, during my years as a teacher in DEIS schools in Limerick (initially) and later in Dublin. An image comes to my mind now, in writing this piece, of torn canvas runners on the feet of a small boy on a bitterly cold January day, in the schoolyard. The torn shoes are a metaphor for me of influences that were tearing through his seven year old little life at the time.

I understand from my own experiences, Jessica's desire to both teach and reach children and to try to ensure that they might feel happy and secure in her classroom. Elsewhere in our conversations, Jessica sees the task of providing the children in her care with secure boundaries in school as fortifying them for the future in a way that she hopes will safeguard them and build their resilience. Rachel's fragment below echoes similar sentiments where the happiness and safety of students are clearly her priorities too.

### **6.9.3.9 Narrative Fragment: I want them to be happy and feel safe**

**Rachel:** *'I would always say that my thing is that obviously I want the children to learn when they are with me but I want them to be happy and to feel safe. That would be one of my motivations as a teacher and I suppose as a teacher in a disadvantaged area...That's what I want, just that they are happy...I have this fellow this year and he is a spacer. He is so happy and I love having him in my class because I would love to see what it's like in his world, just to get into his head. He has all his sounds and he has got his blending and you are kind of going 'how does that go in' because he is just not with me. He is just like in his own world but he is happy and when they are happy they are doing well.*

*Like that other boy, when he was happy and doing well and in good form it would make your day. A smile from him would make your day. If you saw him upset on the other side, that could take from your day. That could really just break your heart. On days like that you go, like, I remember just going home to my husband and going 'could we take him, could we take him, what would we have to do to take him, nobody would know' (we both laugh).*

**Mary:** *Yes, primary teacher kidnaps kid!*

**Rachel:** *I think just making sure that they are happy and they are safe, so you can kind of get to them. So they just know there is someone who cares. I would always have had that relationship with him...that when he was always in trouble, like he would often come to me or be sent to me...It is just even having someone who is an advocate for them. You know, that there is somebody who will be always on their side, no matter what.*

### **6.9.3.10 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I want them to be happy and feel safe'**

Rachel's aspirations for the children's happiness and safety, as well as their learning, resonates with Jessica's mission to 'reach' as well as to 'teach' children. She refers fondly to a little boy in her class as a 'spacer'. She loves having him in her class and uses him as an example of her belief in action that when children 'are happy they are doing well'. Rachel's fondness for this boy, the 'spacer' and 'that other boy' reveal the degree of her personal as well as her professional investment in these children. In relation to the second boy she admits that 'a smile from him would make your day'. Conversely to see him upset 'could really just break your heart'. Her own emotions as a teacher, a woman, and a human being are affected by the emotions of the boy evoked by the challenges of his life. She is emotionally invested in him. Rachel admits that there were moments when her own heart was so sore from seeing this boy's distress that her instinct was to rescue him, take him home. I imagine the headline 'primary teacher kidnaps boy'.

Reading back on my reply now, I realise that Rachel was expressing emotions I recognised and had felt in relation to a small number of very vulnerable children I taught in DEIS schools in the nineteen eighties. In response to my perception at the time, that the challenges they were experiencing in their lives were extremely arduous, my instinct was also to rescue them. However, I recognised that my job was to support them in school to the best of my abilities as a teacher.

Rachel's narrative echoes similar aspirations to those of Caitríona, Nicole and Jessica, about reaching children who are currently lacking support and communicating to them the fact that 'that someone cares'. Hannah's identifies below how her understanding of children's needs has altered her vision and mission to teach over time. She shares the vision of 'reaching' as well as 'teaching' the children, for whom she is responsible, with the teachers named above in this paragraph. Later we will see several participating teachers reflecting on the need for them to be advocates for some children in a particularly proactive way as well as providing a safe space for all children to be at ease so that they can be themselves and therefore realise their best possibilities for learning.

**6.9.3.11 Narrative Fragment: They needed their needs, their emotional and social needs, to be met first**

***Hannah:** 'So I kind of found my area, you know...I did a Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) course, you know, the summer course and you get three days off, Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days. I did one on the Walk Tall curriculum a couple of years ago, three years ago. I remember coming out of that and feeling never mind the rest of the subjects, I am just going to teach SPHE I don't care what else misses its time'.*

She continues a little later by saying:

***Hannah:** 'Like, I remember that summer looking back on the class I had had the previous year and all their needs. I felt what was I doing? I looked back on the times I tried to do a report in Geography and I wondered what was I doing that for, you know. They needed their needs, their emotional and social needs, to be met before you could do any of this other stuff.'*

### **6.9.3.12 Tracing the narrative threads of ‘They needed their needs, their emotional and social needs, to be met first’**

Hannah has found a pathway through Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) providing her with one avenue to support children’s needs. Her experience as a teacher in a DEIS school and the benefits she attributes to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) have led her to the conclusion that ‘they needed their needs, their emotional and social needs to be met before you can do any of the other stuff’. She is convinced, based upon reflecting on her own experiences of teaching in a DEIS school, that the development of emotional and social skills are a pre-condition for learning what is mandated by the curriculum. Hannah uses her training in Human Rights and in Mindfulness practices to support the emotional and social needs of students in her classroom and in her school, as well as in supporting her own personal development. Many of the teachers participating in this research study concur with Hannah about poor levels of social and emotional skills amongst some of the children they teach in DEIS schools. In the third section of the findings, focusing on Pedagogy and Schools, I will bring together some of the whole school approaches teachers have found effective for building emotional and social skills as a scaffold to support student learning in general and particularly the needs of vulnerable students.

Hannah’s vision and mission has expanded over time such that she sets the objective of meeting the social and emotional needs of the children she teaches as a precondition for learning ‘the other stuff’, the stuff on the official curriculum. Meg’s fragment below articulates her vision about the potential of education to save lives.

### **6.9.3.13 Narrative Fragment: It doesn’t have to be this way**

**Meg:** *‘And yesterday unfortunately one child, her doctors told her she is pre-anorexic and another child who has been cutting and has been suicidal, they ended up in the corridor having a fight over one looking the other up and down in a strange way. I wasn’t in yesterday but when I heard about it, I really want to meet those kids now, they are suspended for a day, so that I can talk about their education and how that will save them. And it’s wonderful because Jimmy was this lad I remembered from my early days...’*

**Mary:** *I am remembering him now, through what you said before.*

**Meg:** *From my first week in teaching, Jimmy taught me 'I am a teacher, I am not a fucking social worker'. So I can't wait to meet these two children tomorrow to say, one 'how are you' and two 'it doesn't have to be this way. If you just learn to be nicer to each other in the classroom you will get a good education and you can sort out the other crap outside'. But the wonderful thing about what I do, what we all do here, is we educate and the kids educate us as well. It is so clear actually, it is so clear. We are here to help these kids progress in life and right now the tool for progression is education. It's a great feeling because it gives me boundaries as well'.*

#### **6.9.3.14 Tracing the narrative threads of 'It doesn't have to be this way'**

Meg shares a painful scenario about reported hostilities between two very vulnerable female students. One teenager is struggling with pre-anorexia. The other student is engaged in self-harm and has suicidal ideation. They take their personal struggles out in hostilities towards each other. Meg was not in school the previous day, but the incident has been reported to her as a member of school management. She has a responsibility to support these students to find a resolution.

What strikes me about Meg is the eagerness she expresses in wanting to meet the students. There is urgency in Meg's reflected in how she says 'I can't wait to meet these two children'. Why would she be eager? She explains that she wants to tell them that there are better ways of relating to each other and 'it doesn't have to be like this'. She passionately believes that students don't need to end up in hostilities together in the school hallway. Instead, Meg believes that 'education can save them' and provide them with better choices. She believes it can teach them ways of being nicer to each other in the classroom and at the same time provide them with a good education. She sees education as expansive, capable of building resilience and offering teenagers perspectives and skills to equip them to relate to each other positively, not only in school but also in life.

In this fragment Meg remembers Jimmy, the student who factored in her first challenging day as a teacher and whose memory continues to guide her. In this context she remembers what he taught her about the boundary between being a teacher and a social

worker. He needed her to be his teacher. What she learned from him has helped her to clarify her role here in the context of intervening to help the two girls resolve their hostilities. Meg has learned about the boundaries between 'the crap outside' school and the possibility for a constructive relational dynamics in school based upon 'learn[ing] to be nicer to each other', opening up the possibilities for a good education. She understands now, based on what she has learned as a teacher, and sometimes as a consequence of difficult experiences herself, that her role and responsibilities relate to the educational lives of students and 'not the crap outside'.

However, she understands that having the ability to deal with the 'crap outside' is contingent on our ability, as teachers and as students, to develop positive respectful relationships inside school. Developing these positive respectful relationships is at the heart's core of her vision and mission as a teacher. Her vision and mission draw on her belief that education can and does save lives. This belief motivates her to teach and reach her students, especially those who are presently hurting themselves and hurting each other in school. She believes it 'doesn't have to be this way'. She believes education can teach us not just to be wise but to be otherwise.

#### **6.9.3.15 Conclusion**

The sub section above has distilled teachers' narratives exploring their aspirations for relationships between them and their students. These aspirations have been forged by teachers through years of practice in classrooms and schools, (ranging from ten years at least to twenty two years at most). Their narrative fragments provide us glimpses of the vision driving these experienced teachers, working in DEIS schools. Harnessed to these visions are insights making us aware of how these teachers translate their aspirations into practice.

The next section continues to trace the narrative threads of how teachers learn to navigate boundaries with students, learning about themselves in the process.



#### 6.9.4 Being Teachers: Learning how to better support students

This section explores how teachers learn to teach through engaging in efforts to support students. By reflecting on what they have learned through their interactions with students, teachers can discern improved ways to support students and negotiate relationships with them. Whether teachers end up learning from these interactions is dependent on the degree to which they become, and continue to be, open to the possibilities available to them in these relational encounters. All of the fragments grapple with the challenge for teachers of improving their capacities to better reach and support students. It is interesting to observe that each teacher who shares a story relating to an individual student, in this section, reflects on a student whose needs were complex and urgent at the time described. Teachers' narratives resonate with lessons they have learned from these encounters about themselves as teachers, about their students and about how best teachers can nurture relationships with students that stimulate learning. Some fragments demonstrate a keen awareness of the mutual possibilities for learning that are open to teachers themselves, as well as students, in the relational engagements of the classroom. Other fragments focus primarily on teachers' awareness of how students learn, without reference to what teachers might be learning about themselves, in the process.

##### 6.9.4.1 Narrative Fragment: What mattered was how I was as a teacher

***Meg:** 'Then that lad...who I had hit with the scissors...His mother was on the Board of Management, which was very unusual at the time. I mean parents on the Board of Management. I'm not even sure why she was on it...Education just wasn't a priority. She told the board of management or it filtered down somehow and I got told that there was sexual abuse going on in the home. So, I then knew this about the lad that I had been teaching. He was a very sweet lad but very dysfunctional and so was his brother.*

*I remember pulling him out of class one day when he was misbehaving and saying to him... 'look Jimmy, I know that things are tough for you right now but is there any way you would go back in there and just try'...And he turned around and went 'Miss, you are not a fucking social worker, you are a teacher'. He kind of called me on my boundary that I had crossed over. So that was a defining moment in my teaching life. It didn't matter what I knew about the child personally and socially. What mattered was how I was as a teacher. So it was a hard lesson to learn from a young lad. He was subsequently killed, two years later, by a jealous ex-boyfriend (of his mother's). I will always remember him because of it. So, I am just thinking about him now, (she fills up with emotion)'*

#### **6.9.4.2 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'What matters was how I was as a teacher'***

Meg picks up the story of Jimmy. He appears frequently in her narrative fragments. The report of alleged abuse, in Jimmy's home, filters down to Meg. Meanwhile she has to manage his behaviour in her classroom. She pulls him out of her class framing her plea for cooperation by saying 'I know that things are tough for you right now'. She learns quickly, from Jimmy, that she has crossed a line in making reference to his life outside of school being 'tough' right now. He responds with a strong backlash. He puts her straight reminding her 'Miss, you are not a fucking social worker, you are a teacher'. Jimmy was setting a clear boundary for Meg that his private life was strictly off limits to her. This teacher is deeply honest in admitting that this teenager taught her that she had crossed an unacceptable boundary with him. It was as she says 'a defining moment in her teaching life'. She learned from him that her responsibility lay solely in how to effectively be his teacher and support his learning, his educational life. He was telling her in no uncertain terms that his personal/private, his backstory was neither her business nor her responsibility. Meg carries this child in her heart. She honours him by remembering and implementing the lessons she learned directly from him about how to navigate the thin and fragile line between being a teacher and being a social worker.

This learning is vitally important for teachers when dealing with some children in DEIS schools whose lives are chaotic and traumatic, through no fault of the children. The task of the teacher is to support the educational life of the child or teenager. However, the boundaries between the home life and school life of children and teenagers are often permeable. Therefore, responding appropriately to children and teenagers in vulnerable circumstances requires deep discernment by teachers. Elsewhere Meg quotes the salutary line 'tread softly because you tread upon my dreams' (Yeats, 1902). That line resonates with me now as I think about how easily I can be tempted, as a teacher, a mother, a human being, to trudge rather than 'tread softly' on the landscape of the dreams of others, as well as on my own dreams. Meg is reminding us as readers, as educators, that it is our responsibility to develop discernment in how to be teachers so that we might, through education, help students to translate their dreams into realities.

The fragment following below continues to trace the tensions for teachers implicit in developing deeper understandings of their appropriate roles in the educational life of students. It troubles the definition of what being a teacher means. It grapples with the complex question as to how to intervene effectively and appropriately to support the educational needs of students, especially students who have been, or are, experiencing distressing or traumatic events in their young lives outside of school.

#### **6.9.4.3 Narrative Fragment: It made sense to me why she was feeling this way**

**Julia:** *'So Tracey (a student), we will say, was just a very, very, troubled girl...I mean she was beautifully presented. Her hair was immaculate and everything but her expression was just always so sad and angry. I suppose you could say it was quite difficult to have her in the classroom because no matter what you, or the class, were doing she was sitting there sad and angry. And yet, I knew her backstory. She had had a few traumatic experiences in her life. She had lost her father quite recently in very difficult circumstances. It made sense to me why she was feeling this way. So she did, she took up a lot of my time in the class. I made that special effort to reach out and try and get her to participate and be happy and find something that she could latch onto and make the connection with the subject as well. And I mean it just didn't work. In the end she underachieved. She came back to school. She did her Junior Cert (Certificate) last year. She did come back.*

**Mary:** *Do you feel a satisfaction in the fact that you made huge effort? Did that give you satisfaction as a teacher?*

**Julia:** *Yeah, absolutely, in knowing that...I don't want to be tooting my own horn at all, but I just feel confident, no not just confident, a little bit happier in myself that I know I did as much as I possibly could have done for her...*

**Mary:** *How did you do that, what did you attempt, how did you create that space for her, if you like, because obviously there was huge effort on your part compared to any other student in the class?*

**Julia:** *Well I suppose setting a standard for her because I know maybe in other areas she maybe would have been ignored in the classroom. She would have been given the option to put her head down and just opt out. I did challenge her in that. I knew she was very clever. It just wasn't going to be acceptable. But at the same time you can't just demand a certain type of behaviour and not back it up with support outside the classroom. You have to do that as well. So I did. I would have spoken to her about any issues she was having at school, not at home, but at school. I offered her support in whatever areas she needed it like extra classes. More often than not she wouldn't take me up on that but once or twice she did.*

**Mary:** *But the offer was there?*

**Julia:** *Yes, and she would have come to me from other classes a few times as well, just to not get in trouble, to have that break...*

*Mary: I think that is a huge tribute to you, knowing that you were a place she could be. In a sense, is that feedback valuable?*

*Julia: Very. It makes it worthwhile because you don't always get that. Sometimes kids don't realise that you are actually on their side and trying to help them out. So it was lovely to have one experience of it anyway'.*

#### **6.9.4.4 Tracing the narrative Threads of 'It made sense to me of why she was feeling this way'**

Julia reflects on her efforts to support her student, Tracey. Traumatic events had shaped Tracey's life. Knowing her backstory enabled Julia to make sense of why Tracey might be feeling sad and angry. Julia's response to Tracey is to resist the temptation to let her opt out of class. This teacher recognizes a clever girl in front of her and offers Tracey extra learning support, outside of class time. This narrative fragment is strikingly honest in stating the teacher's appraisal of the outcome of her efforts to support the girl and admitting they 'just didn't work'. Tracey ended up underachieving. However, as the fragment develops other insights emerge that demonstrate how Julia derives some satisfaction from her own efforts as a teacher, notwithstanding her student's academic underachievement.

Firstly, Julia recognizes that by setting a standard for her she communicated to Tracey her high expectations of her and recognition of her intelligence. Secondly, Julia backed her challenge to Tracey by offering her extra time outside class hours.

Though Tracey took up Julia's offer on very few occasions, she did know the support was there for her if she wanted it. We can't make assumptions about what this may have meant to Tracey. We only know the story from her teacher's perspective. Julia herself reflects satisfaction at having made significant efforts on Tracey's behalf. She admits she felt 'a bit happier' in herself because of the efforts she made despite the fact that the academic outcome did not meet her expectations of the girl's potential. Julia's efforts to support Tracey relate exclusively to offering to intervene with educational support. Julia is clear that 'traumatic' events outside of school are beyond her provenance. I interpret Tracey opting to come to Julia's classroom on a few occasions 'just not to get in trouble, to have that break' as the teenager taking the teacher up on her offer of support, though not necessarily in the form of learning support. I read this choice made by the student as recognition that Julia's classroom can be a place of refuge when the going gets too tough

at school. Julia finishes the narrative piece reflecting back with some satisfaction on the fact that she (the teacher) believes Tracey did know that she was on her side and 'trying to help'. Julia's narrative presents with great humility the reality that teachers' interventions to support vulnerable students don't necessarily turn out as teachers hope they will. However, it seems that for Julia, offering support and seeing her student avail of the support very occasionally, made the effort worthwhile for this teacher, in this instance.

#### **6.9.4.5 Narrative Fragment: What could we do to make Kevin feel better?**

**Hannah:** *'I just absolutely love that kid, you know (she laughs and her voice softens). And all the teachers, the teacher who has him now, I know he gets comments off other teachers 'how do you put up with him' because when he goes to P.E. (Physical Education) or G.A.A<sup>7</sup>. something after school, he is sort of a real messer...Like he would be running after the bus, showing off in the street. I think he tried to open the emergency flap on the outside of the bus one day and we had to talk to him in class about it. You know, he is just a real messer. He is too clever for his own good. He can't be sitting around, He would just get bored'.*

She goes on to describe harnessing the empathy of the children to provide a space in which this child, Kevin, might feel welcome, safe and supported when he first arrived in the school and into her class.

**Hannah:** *'Yes. I just was totally normal. You know the way you do, the way you would constantly keep an eye on somebody without anybody seeing that you have an eye on him. I constantly had an eye on him. You know, in September when you go back you would be very strict about the classroom rules and you harp on about those. So without making him a bit different like 'ok, we have to teach Kevin the rules', it was more 'let's all recap the rules'. Then I think there might have been another boy who joined within the previous year, during the school year, and somebody else had joined at the end of the previous school year. So when we had circle time they talked about how they felt when they joined... Well he just wouldn't sit in the circle for a while. But rather than him having to say 'I feel like this', they all talked about how they had felt when they joined. Then I was saying 'well maybe Kevin is probably feeling like that now and what could we do to make him feel better?' So even the first day in the playground the boys all said they would look after him. So I think he got into trouble the first day stamping in puddles but it was great for him. He was part of the gang then, do you know'?*

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<sup>7</sup> Gaelic Athletic Association, a national sports organisation.

#### **6.9.4.6 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'What could we do to make Kevin feel better?'***

Hannah opens this fragment with a declarative statement 'I just absolutely love that kid, you know?' In listening to the recording again I hear and remember, the heartfelt emotion in her voice when she shared this story with me. I remember a short silence following, charged with emotion, not just her felt emotion but mine too. I understood her emotional connection to this child. Yet, I didn't know this child and this was only my second session working with Hannah. I am amazed that I was already implicated in her emotional attachment to the child. I understood it. I respected it. I already empathised with the child, the teacher, and the connection she felt for him, though she had yet to open up their story to me. She gathered herself and then shared narrative fragments with me that might make me appreciate what it was that made her 'love that kid'.

It is really interesting that Hannah describes Kevin as 'a real messer' evoking a response from other teachers of 'how do you put up with him'? Hannah loves the 'real messer' in Kevin. She recognises that the child who might 'open the emergency flap on the bus' is a clever child, a child who gets easily bored. She understands his need for, and love of, structure. Hannah's approach to integrating Kevin into the class group could be examined through the lens of pedagogy. However, I have chosen to place it here in the relational section because it reflects her commitment to prioritising the emotional and social needs of this child through positive and discrete interventions. Her objective is to build his capacity, and the capacity of the children in the class, to develop supportive relationships.

Hannah is sensitive to how focusing on how Kevin might need to learn the ground rules of the classroom might make him feel different from the other children. Insightfully, she shifts the narrative from possibly 'ok, we have to teach Kevin the rules' to actually 'let's all recap the rules'. The emphasis is on a shared revisiting of the rules. She draws on the emotional and social experiences of children who previously experienced a late arrival to the class group in order to help all of the children empathise with Kevin's new situation. Her emotional intelligence and her teaching skills lead her to work with the children to help them develop a strategy addressing 'what could we do to make him feel better'? The

children are actively invited to engage in problem solving to find solutions to make Kevin feel really welcome. The children are therefore invested in the solutions. Consequently the boys propose that they will 'look after him' in the playground. I wonder how Kevin felt on that first day in the playground stamping in puddles? Hannah remembers that despite getting into trouble for engaging in that activity she understood from him that he 'felt part of the gang'. I am aware, from my familiarity with the full body of Hannah's narrative fragments, of her commitment to work on human rights and equality issues through her teaching. The awareness and skills she has developed through these commitments support her capacity to create the conditions making it possible for Kevin to enjoy a positive experience of inclusion, in an unfamiliar schoolyard, with children who rose to the challenge to support him.

Hannah also readily accepts that Kevin 'just wouldn't sit in the circle for a while'. She has the discernment to wait until Kevin himself is ready to participate. She accepts that he needs a settlement period to adjust to the new norms of participating in a new school, and in her classroom. Hannah's narrative resonates with those of many teachers participating in this study. Hannah, Meg, Jessica, Victoria, Julia, Caitríona, Rachel and Nicole have identified, in their own distinct but related ways, the need to attend to the presenting emotional and social needs of students experiencing distress in order to create the conditions in which these students can learn and they can teach. This begs the reader to question whether in fact you can 'teach' effectively if you cannot 'reach' students?

#### **6.9.4.7 Narrative Fragment: It is never supposed to cause stress**

*Nicole: 'Like on Monday there, a girl was stressed out after my class. So I made it my business to go and find her yesterday and to just say, you know, to have a little chat and see what things in class and there were lots of things going on at home...It is amazing with the children that have had you for three years up to Junior Cert., because they know you, the days you are good. Then when you are in a bad mood they say 'oh look at the face on you today, I bet you are in a bad mood, I bet you are in a bad mood Miss? But when they say it to me you say to yourself 'well you better get into a good mood' do you know what I mean? Even that just changes you, you know...That makes you more conscious, like, that I have to be a little bit mindful of the way I say something, you know, so that it doesn't cause stress, because it is never supposed to cause stress. You want to give them a kick up the backside to get them going on most things but not to cause them stress.'*

**Mary:** *Not to have them end up being burdened by it.*

**Nicole:** *No. You are going 'oh my God, this is just a small project' and you know 'put it in perspective and let's get through it'. And help them any way you can, you know that kind of way?*

**Nicole:** *Because I just think, even in my own life, when I got stressed I got nothing done. It's just there is no learning in it really'.*

#### **6.9.4.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'It is never supposed to cause stress'**

Nicole is aware that a girl in her class is under stress. Nicole seeks her out. She wants to understand what is causing the stress, 'have a little chat'. I observe that though Nicole is aware that 'lots of things are going on at home' for this girl but she doesn't go on to assume that these issues are the source of her student's stress. In checking to 'see was it things in class' causing the distress, Nicole is open to hearing that she might be part of the problem.

Nicole goes on to speak about the risk that students who don't know her well might not be able to distinguish between her intention to 'shake them up' giving them a metaphorical 'kick in the backside' and actually 'causing stress'. Reflecting on this Nicole contrasts how students who know her well may challenge her about her 'bad mood' while those who don't might be oppressed by it. Nicole responds to being challenged on occasion by students with an admonition to herself that 'well you better get in a good mood'. Her response reflects that she is both willing to learn and is learning from her students. She is concerned about those students who don't know her well enough to challenge her, those students who might be deflated or stressed by her words or gestures.

Nicole's concern for the 'stressed out girl' makes her more mindful of how she speaks to students in order to avoid adding to their stress levels. She is honest enough to check out whether she has had that effect on this girl. I am mindful that Nicole's intention is to give support, help students keep things in perspective, get them through and support their needs along the way. She finishes relating the 'stressed out girl' in her class to the stress she experienced herself as a girl in school. Her beliefs and her own experiences make her



conclude that 'it is never supposed to cause stress' because 'there is no learning in it really' when it does. Reflecting on her awareness of the possibility that she might be contributing to her students' stress levels makes her mindful of the need to continually check out with them about the effect she is having. This teacher does not take it for granted that the effects of her behaviour on students are necessarily benign.

#### **6.9.4.9 Conclusion**

The testimonies of participating teachers, represented in this sub section highlight the importance they attach to being aware of and responding to the social and emotional needs of their students. Meg, Julia, Hannah and Nicole recognise that children and teenagers need to feel comfortable, happy and safe in order to be in a position to learn. In distilling their shared wisdom it is helpful for us to reflect that in learning, as in life, 'it is never supposed to cause stress' as Nicole says. As teachers and educators we need to be vigilant about the possibility that we may be adding to the our students stress levels.

There is resounding agreement among participating teachers that students' learning is impaired by stress, therefore tackling distress is a pre-condition for student learning and therefore for successful teaching. In some of the fragments we see evidence of teachers' self-reflections providing a checking mechanism to assess their own influence on students and provide a space from which they respond rather than react to the needs of students. The sub section below addresses the implications of teachers' self-awareness for teachers themselves and for teaching.

#### **6.9.5 Being Teachers: Transitions in teacher awareness**

The findings so far have primarily focused on relationships between teachers and students. This sub section will turn our attention to exploring changes in teachers' awareness of themselves and what being teachers means to them now after at least ten years in teaching. The narratives also provide us with glimpses of ways in which, for some teachers, their awareness of their own purpose has altered over time. Sophie, Rachel, Julia, Meg, and Nicole, share their insights with us revealing transitions in their awareness. As readers we are presented here with an opportunity to reflect on changes in our own understanding about why we teach and who we are now as teachers and educators

### 6.9.5.1 Narrative fragment: I would be more aware in two ways

**Mary:** *'I was going to ask...have you changed over the years, how has teaching changed you?*

**Sophie:** *Yah, absolutely. I find, I would be more aware in two ways and one is not necessarily good. One, I would be more aware of the circumstances that the students in this school come from. I would consider that I would be a tough enough teacher but with a good sense of humour. Once the work is done no bother but I will press to get the work done. My whole thing is get them through their exams. I am not a religious person but I pray every single day to Padre Pio 'please let my students get through their exams? It's that important to me. It dominates my life, it's, you know.*

**Mary:** *And it's their ticket, isn't it?*

**Sophie:** *Oh of course it is. I know that, but they don't'.*

In the following extract Sophie explains other changes in her awareness that she signals as 'not necessarily good'.

**Sophie:** *'But the other thing I would say, there are other things that sort of get up my nose, that I begin to notice a bit.*

**Mary:** *So this is the other side of the change?*

**Sophie:** *Yes. I notice that they are not independent, that we do too much for them. This particular week they are after bringing in a fabulous lunch for the kids. I think it costs €1.20. Now I do morning duty, so I am out there at ten past eight in the morning until classes start. I see all the children coming in, and I would greet them as they come in. They are coming in with big huge chicken rolls and sausage rolls and coke and crisps and here is the lunch for €1.20. Now they spend a lot more, I can tell you, on their sausage rolls and their chicken rolls. And here is a really fine nutritional lunch that consists of their roll and they have a yogurt, and they have a drink and a bag of fruit and all for €1.20. The kids would tell you out straight 'but why should we go for that'? They say it out straight and 'you should be giving us that for nothing'. They are so used to handouts. I resent that. I do resent it. I say, oh my god there are other kids, I mean I know there are students who come into this school who don't have a breakfast, do you know what I mean? You just have to stand out there at break time and particularly the foreign nationals.*

*I don't mean to just pick on them but you will see them going to the fruit and they might pick up maybe five or six oranges and a banana and put them into their school bag for later, do you know what I mean? Now we don't pass any heed on that. But in some cases, that is their breakfast, that is their lunch and it could easily be their tea. So when you hear this and you see from one extreme to the other, it would break your heart.*

#### **6.9.5.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I would be more aware in two ways'**

Sophie's commitment to supporting her students to get their examinations is crystal clear in these fragments. She presses to get the work done and resorts to Padre Pio for support, even though she declares she is not religious. She understands the significance for her students' lives of getting their examinations. She knows that for the most part it is she who understands this 'but they don't'.

In these fragments Sophie expresses a clear tension between her increased sensitivity to the circumstances of some children and her expressed resentment towards the dependency she sees in others. She is keenly aware that for some children the provision of fruit at break time is a vital source of nourishment. She is sensitive to the fact that some students come to school without a breakfast. She identifies some foreign national students as particularly at risk among this group. She empathises with these students.

However, she identifies other students who have in her view become 'so used to hand-outs' that they have become dependent and are unwilling to pay for the healthy lunch provided at low cost by the school. Sophie, while on yard duty in the mornings, observes the lunches these children bring to school and is well aware that they are costly compared to the lunch provided by the school. Her discomfort is with the comment 'why should we go for that' followed by 'you should be giving it to us for nothing'. Sophie is honest in presenting the two facets of her changing awareness, over time. She is mindful that increased sensitivity may be a good thing but equally aware that resentment 'is not necessarily good'. I respect her honesty. I have been learning from it as I explain below.

Sophie's two dimensions of awareness trigger memories for me of a story I shared with some teachers who were willing to meet me and to consider participating in this research study. I mirrored the narrative inquiry process I envisaged for the study by sharing some narrative fragments reflecting some transitions on my understanding of teaching and of myself as a teacher. Amongst those fragments I shared a narrative about twin girls I had taught in my early years as a primary teacher (see Appendix M). I described my role as the negotiator between the donor of two Holy Communion dresses, and the mother of the twins, the recipient. I disclosed my angry reaction to the mother for taking the initiative to sell the dresses and replace them with the ones she wanted her daughters to wear on an important day in their lives, and in her life. My strong negative response to the event unsettled me. It forced me to reflect deeply about my own values and the assumptions I was making about the entitlements of those who give and of those who receive. Over time this story has taught me a great deal about myself and helped me unlearn some of my earlier assumptions. I have come to understand for myself that claims of supporting students or adults cannot be verified by interventions that diminish their choices and fail to engage them as active participants in developing solutions for themselves. Consequently, as a teacher I now understand that the question 'why should we go for that' is a perfectly legitimate question for students to ask

I am aware that expecting an affirmative answer from some students might be unrealistic, if these students have learned dependency inside the school system and possibly outside of it as well. Reflecting on the matter brings me to what I perceive as a better question 'how can I better collaborate with students to provide a nutritious lunch (or any other intervention) as a positive choice and in such a way that students feel enticed and empowered to avail of it'? Might my actions as a teacher, or our actions as teachers, speak louder than my, or our, words if we purchased and consumed the lunches we claim to be of such nutritional value and value for money for our students?

A wider question might be asked of educational policy makers, and school managers, about identifying and promoting the kinds of interventions in schools that provide effective supports for students while actively engaging and encouraging them to take full responsibility for themselves. Sophie's honesty about her mixed emotions can be

employed to assist us to ask better questions of ourselves and of the system in which we work as teachers. By asking better questions it's possible for us to alter our perceptions and expand the range of possibilities that might contribute to developing better solutions.

#### **6.9.5.3 Narrative fragment: Developing empathy between children**

***Rachel:** 'I suppose because I worked in home/school (Home School Community Liaison Teacher, HSCL) that gave me the confidence to do that and it also allowed me to see where the children are coming from. So that kind of made me more aware of, I suppose it gave me an awareness of my expectations and where they should be for the children. So not to kind of accept children to be disrespectful or to be lazy...but to kind of know they have come out of a chaotic house and where you can kind of cut them some slack and just knowing when you can push a child and when you can't, to be the best that they can be.*

*For me I suppose it kind of in some ways has moved away from actual learning of reading and writing and it is kind of developing, you know, little citizens and little people.*

*I would think even the feelings check-in, I think that is a really important thing just so that the children are learning how to develop and express themselves and you know that it's ok to say you are feeling sad. Somebody else might say something to them like 'you can come with me, you can play with me if you are sad' or 'I will mind him teacher'. So to develop that kind of empathy in children and the caring that they have for each other. I do think that is really important because you are working in a disadvantaged area. For me, it's really important that the children are happy in school and that they enjoy it'.*

#### **6.9.5.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Developing empathy between children'**

In reading Rachel's narrative fragments I am aware of the theme of empathy as a significant narrative thread weaving through her reflections. The role of HSCL has provided Rachel with a window into the home lives of some children, and their families. Consequently, she has been able to increasingly match her expectations of those children with her understanding of the reality of their lives. She describes this balancing as 'cutting them some slack' when they need it while still striving for them 'to be the best that they can be'. Her empathy as a teacher has expanded with her knowledge in the HSCL role.

Reflecting on herself as a teacher now, she recognises a significant shift in her priorities, over time. Previously, she understood the task of teaching reading and writing to be central to her mission to teach. Her mission has now expanded to encompass the full development of little citizens, little people. I sense from her enthusiasm, as I listen to her express this change in her understanding of her role, that she is excited for herself and for the children in exploring the possibilities together.

Rachel articulates the significance of the feelings check-in, at the beginning of the school day. It provides children with a space in which they can express how they feel. It also provides a space for children to develop the language through which they can express their emotions to each other. This morning practice provides her with feedback at the beginning of the day alerting her to children who might be feeling sad and consequently need extra support during the day.

It also provides a space where children are encouraged to respond to each other with empathy and support. Rachel is nurturing the empathy of the children towards each other such that the child who says 'you can play with me if you are sad' is supported in the environment of her classroom as much as the child who is feeling sad.

Rachel is keenly aware of how the impact of living in a disadvantaged community can impact on the lives of some children. She is building the social and emotional skills to help them cope with their feelings. She is also mirroring good practice by sharing her own feelings about events during the day that affect her. She is developing an environment within her classroom supporting children to respond kindly to each other. Her intention is to build the resilience of the children in order to fortify them to cope with the challenges not only of life in school but also of life outside of school.

Her chosen artefact, a colourful small beanbag ball represents what is important to her about teaching. It is presented in the Epilogue section of this Chapter, as Figure 8 'Speaking Object'. This colourful ball represents the feelings check as one of the important

ways in which she can learn how children are feeling at school. She is determined to provide a safe space in her classroom where children can feel happy, or be fully supported when they feel unhappy. She understands the value of citizenship and she is building a community of empathetic little people in her senior infant classroom through the importance she attaches to nurturing their emotional and social intelligence. Her own empathy as a teacher is palpable.

During the fieldwork I arrived on a winter's morning to Rachel's school and she invited me to her infant classroom to observe the rituals at the beginning of the day. A stream of little people ambled or bounced into the room, hung up their coats, placed their bags at their tables and gathered in a circle on little seats to begin the day with the feelings check-in. Rachel looked at me and said 'come on now Mary, come and join the circle for the 'feelings check-in'. It was a tone I recognised, the one used to encourage a reluctant child to join in. I was surprised to be invited. I was expecting to observe the session, not participate in it. I squeezed into a tiny seat feeling like a giant in Lilliput. Finally, with Rachel's help, we settled enough to begin. Rachel passed a speaking object from one of us to the other. It was a colourful little ball. This signalled our turn to speak. I remember feeling so nervous. I felt as nervous as I had previously felt before giving a public speech. I was really surprised by the strength of that feeling. When it came to my turn I said 'my name is Mary and I feel very nervous today because it's just my second time being in the school and I don't know anybody yet'. It was a true statement. I was stunned by how the exercise helped me recognise how I was feeling. I knew by the children's faces that they understood what I was experiencing. One little girl looked at me and said 'aah' very sympathetically. I knew Rachel understood too. Participating in the feelings check-in at the beginning of a full day working in the school set the tone for the encounters that followed. That tone was empathic. Later as Rachel shared her narrative fragments with me, some of which I have shared with you in this section, I understood what she meant by creating the conditions for developing empathy between children because I had experienced it myself in the feelings check, in her classroom.

#### 6.9.5.5 *Narrative fragment: I want to share with you how much I enjoy this*

*Julia: 'I can't actually imagine teaching any other subject, for me teaching is actually very specifically English teaching now I suppose because of the content. What I have been teaching has become so familiar to me, it's almost as if I personally know these different situations and characters and I enjoy sharing them with the students. I suppose the material, like one of the stories, one of the novels that we study is 'Of Mice and Men'. They enjoy it so much that actually I just find it really exciting to teach that story and to discuss the different situations with the students and see how they respond to them. So it's quite difficult for me to even imagine teaching another subject in that sense'.*

A little later she goes on to say:

*Julia:' I suppose how I feel about it has changed. I always enjoyed the teaching of English in that it was about stories and about how I respond myself to a story and how I express myself. I suppose then it became more about I already enjoy this and I want to share with you how much I enjoy this.*

*Mary: I suppose there is no hiding that is there, when a teacher really enjoys what they are doing? It think that is kind of infectious, it is kind of the key to getting students hooked in...*

*Julia: Or irritating, I think, sometimes to them, (she laughs).*

*Mary: Yes, I am too long out of the classroom to remember that is the truth too. You are more honest.*

*Julia: Sometimes, sometimes'.*

#### 6.9.5.6 *Tracing the narrative threads of 'I want to share with you how much I enjoy this'*

Julia is aware of transitions in both her awareness and motivation as a teacher over time. English provides her with a platform to help students study different characters and situations and to develop their own responses to them. The shift in Julia's perspective about teaching English is subtle. Her initial love of stories made teaching English her natural home. Julia was keenly aware of her own responses to stories and the way in which they facilitated her own self-expression. When she says 'how I feel about it has



changed' she is marking the shift from her consciousness of her own enjoyment of exploring stories to willingly sharing with students 'how much I enjoy this'.

Qualitatively this shift expands her motivation beyond developing students' understanding and responses to plot and character in stories and towards sharing the joy she experiences from stories. This shift creates an invitation to students showing them that the potential to 'enjoy' is available for you here in these stories. Julia is also revealing herself in sharing the joy she derives from stories. Her motivation to teach English has expanded with the changes in her feelings about what it is she is aiming to do in teaching English, that is, to share the joy she experiences through stories.

Julia has a keen sense of humour too. When I interject to say I suspect her enthusiasm might be infectious for students she is quick to respond that it may be on the contrary 'irritating...sometimes, to them'. Julia's view is forged in the daily reality of how students might, or might not respond, to the content of stories or to the possibilities for joy they might offer. She is realistic rather than naïve about how her own enthusiasm might translate to students. I experience a disarming honesty, a deep sense of humility and a healthy openness in her view about her possible impact on her students.

Julia's appreciation for stories prompts me to reflect on how stories have influenced my life. Fictional stories, philosophical stories and sociological stories have provided me with wonderful sources of inspiration and a springboard for reflecting on my life experiences, my experiences of being a teacher and my understanding of the world. Presently teachers' stories are the focus of my attention because of this study. They too provide me with sources of inspiration and opportunities to reflect on realities and ideas, especially relating to education, equality, teaching and learning. By engaging in this study, as I have purposefully designed it, I have chosen to share some of my own stories of teaching, and life, with the participating teachers. Teachers have entrusted me with their stories. I appreciate the learning embodied in their narratives and I am committed to distilling it with care and to honouring them. It is my responsibility as a researcher to excavate the stories and demonstrate the potential for learning embodied in them just as Julia does in

teaching English to her students. It is also my pleasure to do so. I hope that I can increasingly communicate that pleasure to you, the reader, as the research story unfolds.

#### **6.9.5.7 Narrative fragment: *They have taught me so much about myself***

*Meg: 'The wonderful thing is, journeying with the kids in the inner city, it's like I am as resilient as they are. So I would meet them head on and they would meet me head on but we really helped each other...I suppose this is quite a strong thing to say but I think I would be dead if, I don't think I would have wanted to stay on this earth, if I hadn't had to show up and give the kids what they deserve. It helped me. It gave me meaning. It gave me extraordinary meaning in my life, being in the inner city. Sorry I am getting emotional now (she fills up with emotion). No, but it's extraordinary. I think we get brought to where we need to be brought to... in order to learn about ourselves. So while people would say to me 'you are amazing you have worked in the inner city', they are amazing, they have taught me so much about myself, (she fills up with emotion again).'*

#### **6.9.5.8 Tracing the narrative threads of *'They have taught me so much about myself'***

Meg reflects on the synergy between her own resilience and that of her students. She attributes her own motivation in life with her responsibility to be present to 'give the kids what they deserve'. Her own journey relocating to the inner city herself, and being present to give the students, has enriched her. She says 'it gave me extraordinary meaning in my life, being in the inner city'. Meg is moved with emotion in taking stock of what she has received from these students. The awareness she has developed over a twenty-two year journey with them has convinced her that 'we get brought to where we need to be brought in order to learn about ourselves'. I intuit Meg's deep solidarity with the lives of her students and with the challenges life in the inner city poses for them. She understands that they and she need to build resilience together in order to face the challenges life may present to them.

Later, in the Epilogue, Meg presents her artefact, a ceramic cross carried by children. In seeing it the reader will better understand how building resilience and community underpin her philosophy of life and education. For now Meg's fragment offers us a window into how she deeply appreciates what her students have to teach her about herself. There is a palpable sense of mutuality about Meg's relationships with her

students. They are learning from each other in sharing the journey together. Her reflection resonates with Cairtriona's earlier comment about her own children and the children at school when she said 'they are improving me'. A strong commitment to 'giving the kids what they deserve' drives Meg. This commitment resonates with her comments in previously cited fragments about 'giving kids a voice', ensuring that they are heard, building their resilience.

I am moved, by hearing her reflections in this fragment. Her deep respect for the students she teaches is obvious as well as her own openness to learning. She teaches us that her own journey as a woman is intertwined with her journey as a teacher. As I explore more and more of her fragments I see that there is a growing correlation between her evolving self-awareness, her expanding awareness of the students' needs, her consciousness and commitment to self-care and her capacity to care for her students.

#### **6.9.5.9 Narrative Fragment: The greatest thing you can give a child is confidence**

**Nicole:** *'Oh no, absolutely not, I absolutely want to learn how to swim. It's just one of those stupid kind of things, it's just important to me as just a kind of little personal goal. And I often say this to my fifth years. They say 'have you got to the other side yet'? And I say 'no, I am still struggling' and that's the truth.*

**Mary:** *'But isn't that an amazing thing? I can't imagine any teacher I ever had being willing to express the fact that they were struggling with learning something. I think it's unusual for teachers to be in the mind-set of being a learner'.*

Later in the conversation I ask her this question:

**Mary:** *'Do you think that your own experience of school shapes who you are now as a teacher?'*

**Nicole:** *'Oh yeah, absolutely, most definitely. It wasn't really until we did this reflection piece that it has all come to the fore. It's even amazing that it is was after my degree and courses that I did after that made me reflect on the exact point you are talking about. I think that the greatest thing you can give a child is confidence because I think after confidence then whatever it is once they get a little bit of confidence, you know, they learn in a completely different way. I was just so hung up on feeling inadequate, afraid of making a mistake and not that I didn't try. I would try but I would have needed that encouragement to go that extra little bit'.*

Later still she goes on to say:

**Nicole** *'That's where I think sometimes teachers fall down, in that, I think if they stopped for a minute and said 'would a child that is having difficulty come back and ask me for help'?*

**Mary:** *It's a good question.*

**Nicole:** *I don't know and I know you can't answer for every single child. Some children are confident...I try to look out for those quiet ones who will do work but may not be, they never will cause a bit of bother but yet because they don't cause bother they don't get the same attention as the children who cause bother but they are not really academic either, they are in the middle. I was the middle person, do you know that kind of way, a struggler'.*

#### **6.9.5.10 Tracing the narrative threads of 'The greatest thing you can give a child is confidence'**

Nicole's reply to my question provides insights into who she is as a teacher. She is strongly committed to building students' confidence by demonstrating her belief in them. Her belief is manifested in practical ways, providing them with skills and experiences intended to both strengthen their abilities and their self-belief. Nicole draws once again on her own narrative as a student remembering that 'I don't know if I felt that from my teachers'.

Nicole is self-reflective. She relates her belief in the relationship between increased practice and increased self-belief to a current learning challenge for herself. One of her personal goals is to learn to swim. She recognises that she has not attained that goal so far because she has not put 'any effort in for the last six months'. Nicole understands the innate relationship between practice and progress. The fact that she shares her ambition to swim and her 'progress report' with her students reflects her honesty both with them, and with herself. They feel free to ask her 'have you got to the other side yet'. She feels totally comfortable to tell them 'no I am still struggling, and that's the truth'. I interpret her honesty as creating a space in which her students can say to her, 'I don't understand this yet, I need more practice, could you explain that again, I am still struggling with that'. Nicole's honest struggle with learning to swim is no reflection on her ability to learn. She

knows and admits that she needs to make a bigger commitment to practice. As a teacher she understands that repeated practice determines progress.

Nicole's confidence in her own abilities was not nurtured at school. In earlier fragments she pointed to the atmosphere at school as 'so tight' and the space as 'not an asking environment'. Nicole credits the narrative space provided by this research study with creating an opportunity for her to explore for the first time how her own experiences at school, being a student herself, relate to the teacher she has since become.

She admits 'it wasn't until we did this reflection piece that it has all come to the fore'. Consequently, she identifies building children's self-belief and nurturing their confidence, as the key to 'learn in a completely different way'. Nicole looks out for the quiet students, the ones who don't seek attention. They do their homework, stay under the radar in class. She is aware that they can get lost. They will not demand attention however they might desperately need it. She identifies with their struggles recognising that they mirror the struggles she experienced in school herself, as a student. She says 'I was the middle person, do you know, a struggler'.

I have learned a great deal from Nicole observing how she has turned her sensitivity towards the 'struggler' into one of her strengths as a teacher. She knows the student in the 'middle' needs more guidance, more practice, more support to build their self-belief and their performance, than other students do. She is committed to providing it. In her vigilance to make sure the quiet ones, who are struggling, get the attention they deserve she asks herself 'would a child that is having difficulty come back and ask me for help'? This is a really insightful question for us to put to ourselves as educators. The challenge is in the degree to which we are truthful in answering the question.

#### **6.9.5.11 Conclusion**

The sub section inquired into how teachers understand themselves and their motivation to teach. Their awareness reflects on a variety of experiences, predominantly their

experiences as teachers. Their stories, provide us, the readers, with an opportunity to learn how teachers' reflections on their experiences have shaped who they have become. These alterations in awareness are marked by shifts in teachers: priorities, motivations, skills, capacities to learn, values, experiences in school, life experiences and self-knowledge.

This section provided a space in which to explore the transitions in awareness teachers report as significant to them. Being aware of these changes in teachers' understanding and motivation helps us, readers and educators to better understand teachers and the contemporary challenges of teaching, especially in DEIS schools. The final sub section, below, focuses on teachers' understanding of self-care and the extent to which they exercise it.

#### **6.9.6 Being Teachers: Well-being and self-care**

The focus, in this section, will continue to be turned towards the self who teaches. Readers are invited to reflect, through the lens of teachers' storied lives, on teachers' reflections on well-being and self-care. In following this narrative trail, we explore teachers' awareness of sources influencing their well-being, sources providing energy, sources depleting energy and sources replenishing energy. Participating teachers recognise the differential impacts of teaching on their energy reserves. The fragments, presented below, provide evidence of this. They also provide reflections by teachers on strategies they have found to be useful, in supporting their own well-being.

Care can be defined as 'the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance and protection of someone or something' ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com) 06/08/15). I turned the question of care to teachers' self-care, in our conversations together, in response to the high levels of concern participating teachers expressed about their own well-being and the well-being of colleagues. Exploring these concerns, will allow readers to inquire into how teachers story the significance of self-care, reflect on strategies they have found to be effective in promoting it and assess the extent to which they report practicing consistent self-care. Teachers' perspectives mirror our own dilemmas as educators and as women, about work-life balance, quality of life, well-being and self-care.

### 6.9.6.1 Narrative fragment: People are willing to share the load

**Mary:** *'How do you mind your energy and how you can fill those batteries enough to come in and work at that level of energy demand?'*

**Rachel:** *I suppose, like, here we are very lucky that there is very much a team aspect to everything we do. Like I teach with two other girls in senior infants and we are very much a team. We plan together and any resources that we are getting we get for the team. So it kind of divides out the pressure because people are willing to share the load very much. There isn't, kind of I suppose, a preciousness about well 'this is mine and I am just doing this with my class and I am not telling you and I will be showing off'. That lessons the load'.*

She continues:

**Rachel:** *'And then, I suppose, I would find that I go to bed quite early at home. I would always have been somebody who loved my bed but I would find, like, last night I got home, I didn't get home, like I left here at six (pm) and I collected my husband from the train and it was eight o'clock (pm) by the time I got home. So it was a long day, yeah. It was thirteen hours since I left the house. So I was making pancakes and I was kind of buzzing up to that. But I had a shower and as soon as I came out of the shower I just hit the wall (she laughs). Jim was on the phone and it was too loud and I was just like 'you need to stop, you just need to turn off'.*

**Mary:** *Low batt., (battery), need to recharge?*

**Rachel:** *So, yeah, just doing things like going out for walks or meeting, like going to call into my friend or something like that you know, just chilling out'.*

### 6.9.6.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'People are willing to share the load'

Rachel responded to my question, inquiring about how she minds her energy, in two distinct ways. Her first response focused on her experiences at school. She reflects that 'here we are very lucky' in that teachers work as a team and share the workload. In sharing work plans, resources and responsibilities the load is lighter for each teacher. Rather than a 'this is mine' mentality, Rachel describes what I would call a 'this is ours' approach to working as a team of teachers at senior infant level. I found it uplifting to observe the shared enterprises between Rachel and her colleagues, on days when I was

working with her, at their school. I could see the benefits of the team easing the workload and breaking down the isolation traditionally associated with the solitary teacher in her classroom.

Rachel's second response focused on strategies outside of school relating to her own energy needs and her well-being. She says she 'goes to bed quite early at home'. In response to her description of a thirteen-hour day between leaving and returning home, needing to get an early night makes absolute sense. Her phrase 'I hit the wall' evokes end game, batteries empty and the need 'to stop to turn off'. She finishes by saying that going for walks, or calling in on a friend, are her ways of 'chilling' out.

Rachel is aware of arrangements at school that conserve energy through teamwork. She is also aware of how teaching depletes her energy at times and she understands the strategies that work for her, early to bed, walking, visiting a friend. Reflecting upon the length of Rachel's reflections on many other topics in our dialogues together, I observe that her responses to my question about self-care were strikingly brief. However, I would like to expand the question about self-care to include myself and other teachers, by asking do we push ourselves to the point where we 'hit the wall' before we recognise the need for rest and relaxation? I know my default position is to do exactly that. I have been trying to develop better habits in recent years but I struggle at times to intervene early enough to make a positive difference to my own well-being. I am eager to learn from participating teachers, in this research study, about how they manage their energy and what they have found to be effective in helping sustain them as teachers, and as women. Meg shares her strategy for well-being below and reflects on its implications for herself and her capacity to teach.

#### **6.9.6.3 Narrative fragment: *The stiller I am, the less afraid I am...the less mistakes I make***

**Meg:** *'I know that I am a better teacher when I meditate every morning. I know I am a better teacher when I choose carefully what I read and what I watch on television...The stiller I am the less afraid I am of the world and the less mistakes I make. Every time I meet a child, I mean I had a child over there who is really disengaged, just before I came in here.'*



*I just looked into his eyes and all I saw was pain. I thought he has to learn that he cannot do what he did. He was abusive to a teacher, verbally abusive. He has to learn that he can't do that but I also have to tread softly. Is it Yeats said 'tread softly for you tread upon my dreams'? So it's that balance and I can't nurture that balance in my working life if I am not taking care of that balance in my personal life'.*

#### **6.9.6.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'The stiller I am, the less afraid I am...the less mistakes I make'**

Meg's reflection identifies her ability to be grounded as a teacher with her capacity to be still. She strives to live mindfully by cultivating awareness in her life. She draws a correlation between her own level of stillness and her capacity to be present as a teacher, a woman and a human being who is less afraid in the world. She sees that developing this stillness in herself provides a resource making her less afraid in school also. When she is less afraid, she is consciously aware that she makes fewer mistakes. Meg provides us with an example of how this capacity for stillness guides how she intervenes as a teacher. As a consequence she is aware, that beyond the abusive behavior of the student she mentions, there is a teenager with 'pain in his eyes'. She is also aware that her role as a teacher requires that she responds equally to his pain as well as to challenging his abusive behavior towards his teacher.

Quoting Yeats, she reminds herself and us as readers 'to tread softly' for fear of treading on children's dreams. Meg is keenly aware that for her to have the discernment to 'tread softly' in her role as a teacher she has to cultivate balance in her own personal life. She develops this balance through the practice of being still through mindfulness. It is from this source that she draws her energy to teach and to live.

#### **6.9.6.5 Narrative fragment: Managing behaviour and managing to switch off?**

**Sophie:** *'You see this is what kills me. What actually kills me is the fact that the misbehaviour in the classroom and there are students continually hindering other students from learning, preventing them in every which way whether it is through messing, talking, laughing, not bringing in equipment. You don't have the privilege of the time to spend half of an hour, we have one-hour classes, half of that is taken up...*

**Mary:** *And...is that hard on your energy, on yourself?*

**Sophie:** *Oh it saps you, I mean I go home from here wrecked. Truth be known I go home to bed for an hour, every day. That's my switch off. Even my kids laugh at me when they hear me say it, they say 'are you all right mam'? I say 'yeah, I am just going to bed'. And he (my husband) would be ringing from work saying 'are you all right' you know? It's a switch off thing.*

**Mary:** *Well actually one of the questions I was going to ask you was how do you look after yourself so that is one of your tactics.*

**Sophie:** *Yeah, I switch off. I have to. I have to because, I mean, I have had whole nights where I wouldn't sleep. I might have had a row with students and I might be re-living it and saying 'was I wrong, was I too hard, what way are they going to feel, are they upset by it'? It just keeps going over and over in your head. And you are saying 'they are the children, you are the adult, did you over react...'*

**Mary:** *Is it different from other kinds of jobs in that sense?*

**Sophie:** *Absolutely, absolutely and I don't care if anybody says like 'ah no, I switch off and I do this and I do that'. I don't believe it for one minute. I can't'.*

#### **6.9.6.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Managing behaviour and managing to switch off?'**

Sophie recounts the challenge of teaching Mathematics in the context of the demands of managing student behaviour. She expresses her frustration with the fact that 'there are students continually hindering other students from learning' through a variety of means, 'messaging, talking, laughing'. A considerable amount of her energy as a teacher is diverted into managing disruptive behaviour rather than teaching the Mathematics Curriculum, which is her objective. In sharing this reality with me she twice repeats 'this is what kills me'. These are strong, charged words, capturing the effect of the misbehaviour of some students on this teacher.

I respond to Sophie's account by asking how this repeated misbehaviour by some students affects her energy, herself. Her reply is honest. She admits 'it saps you, I mean I go home from here wrecked'. Sophie deals with her depleted energy by going 'home to bed for an hour every day' as her switch off mechanism. She echoes the concerns of her children and her husband enquiring 'are you all right'? As she continues her narrative she recounts sleepless nights re-living a row with students and reflecting upon whether she was too hard in her response to them and wondering what impact the row might be having on

them right now. Sophie re-plays the incident owning that she is the adult in the situation, the students are the children, therefore responsibility for the outcome lies primarily with her. She admits that in these situations it is truly impossible to switch off.

I identify with the physical and emotional feelings Sophie expresses about how going home after a stressful teaching day makes her feel physically and emotionally. Her narrative resonates with some of my experiences as a primary teacher. An hour in bed might have recharged my physical energy to some extent however it did nothing to help me solve the relational and behavioral challenges facing me again next day in class. The degree to which I was able to draw support on and sound advice relied on the wisdom and generosity of experienced teachers on my staff. As it happens I was very lucky to know a few who provided some wise guidance. However, building the skills and resilience of teachers around these issues should not rely on random acts of kindness. We will see that some participating teachers, in this study, have reported the benefits they have experienced from focused support provided to their schools to help build their skills, confidence and capacities to manage behavior in the classroom.

Many participating teachers in this study speak candidly about the challenges, for them, of managing disruptive student behavior. Those teachers who report the least difficulties with engaging students, and managing challenging student behavior, work in schools with a whole school policy towards positive behavior. This will become clear in the 'Contextual Insights' in Act Three of this chapter. Some participating teachers, however, do not work in schools with such a policy. Furthermore, it will become clear, that those teachers who have availed of continuing professional development education with specific training in behavior management, restorative justice, mindfulness and/or personal development training report positive outcomes for their classroom management skills, their confidence in managing challenging situations in the classroom and their capacities to build constructive relationships with students.

#### **6.9.6.7 Narrative fragment: I needed to step back and take some time out**

**Hannah:** *'You know, people don't get it...They don't get how manic it is... which I think is why, well I don't know about other people but some people like lots of company but I would often go home and there would be no radio, no TV. (television), and I might just cook something and chop, chop, chop, (she whispers these words). It can be just really quiet because you just need no human contact and no noise, because there is so much noise.*

**Mary:** *I was very aware of the noise. I was aware of activity and then the noise level. Like twenty-five children or fifty children together out there, or in the corridor, it is really immense.*

**Hannah:** *And the energy levels are up here (signals high), do you know? And for people who think in energy levels... I think it can take, like in the Christmas holidays maybe by the second week I was back on a level playing field. Like you take a while to come down off that'.*

Later in our third session together she explores the issue of self-care further and outlines the strategies she is pursuing to nurture herself.

**Hannah:** *'I know this year is significant as well. I know we have talked before about how I am doing resource (teaching) this year. It was partly to learn about resource (teaching,) and learning support (teaching), but also maybe to take a little step back from the classroom for me, for my own personal self. So then I started taking up, I had been interested in yoga, but I started an intensive year course there in the beginning of last year...I needed to do something outside of school for me, to help me, which would then help my teaching...So it represents a time-out which I didn't have much of last year. I think I had a lot of work to do and there were examples of days when I would be frustrated or tired or...you would never actually hold it against them but, in your head, in your sub conscious, you would nearly feel...that when you are there in the class this takes over my whole life, you know, and you hold that bitterness a little bit or something. So I needed to learn to step back and take time out. So time-out for me to develop, which then improves me as a teacher, because then I am a better rounded individual, do you know'.*

#### **6.9.6.8 Tracing the narrative threads of: I needed to step back and take some time out**

Hannah is aware of the need to restore the energy she expends at school and consequently seeks quite and stillness at home as an antidote to the noise levels at

school. She whispers the ‘chop chop, chop,’ rhythmical sound of preparing food as a soothing restorative to the noise of the school day. I relate to her description of the impact of raised energy levels. I suspect only teachers understand how long it takes to ‘come down off that’ and recharge the batteries to return to normal functioning whether over the Christmas holidays, mid-term or other breaks from the relentless workload of the teaching year.

Hannah translates her understanding of the demands teaching necessarily makes on her energy by taking measures to achieve balance in her working life. She outlines a two-pronged strategy to restore balance. Firstly, she has wisely opted for resource and support teaching as an investment in her personal self and as a means of upskilling herself as a teacher. She describes this decision as allowing her ‘to take a little step back from the classroom’ for a while. Secondly, already a yoga practitioner, Hannah has begun an intensive yearlong course in yoga. Elsewhere she describes the daily practice participating in this course requires. She explains her purpose in doing so as intended ‘to help me, which would then help my teaching’. She sees reciprocal gains for teaching and for herself in the course and the anticipated outcomes.

Hannah admits to the difficulty of retaining boundaries around the demands of teaching and a private life. She echoes her frustration in using the word ‘bitterness’ to describe her feeling ‘when you are there in the class and this takes over my whole life’. However, Hannah acts on her recognition of these negative sentiments. She recognises she ‘needed to step back and take time out’. The insight she shares with us has resonance beyond her own personal experience as a woman and a teacher. She is mindful that if ‘I am a better rounded individual’ then it also ‘improves me as a teacher. She has a holistic sense of connection between building resilience as a woman and building resilience as a teacher.

Hannah’s insights closely echo those of Meg who made a very similar connection earlier when she too recognised that ‘I can’t nurture that balance in my working life if I am not taking care of that balance in my personal life’. When Meg manages that balance she speaks of being more ‘grounded’ as a teacher. This ‘grounded’ phrase of Meg’s resonates

closely with Hannah's reference to being better 'rounded' as an individual and as a teacher. These two teachers recognise the holistic connection between personal and professional life. Both employ mindfulness or yoga to learn the art of stillness, to develop balance within themselves, and to achieve better balance between their personal and teaching lives. They never suggest that balance is achieved but they do reflect that actively choosing practices supporting balance and promoting stillness provide a counterpoint to the huge demands teaching places on their physical, emotional and cognitive energy.

#### **6.9.6.9 Narrative fragment: Music and meditation**

**Jessica:** *'Anyway, I got him to sit back down and anyway I won't go on but basically he was slamming doors, kicking things...What I am trying to say is at the end of that though, I was so depleted. I was so upset...I went swimming on my own...It was just going over and over again in my head. I really try not to, I rarely do, that's the one thing, I was very low, I was shouting.*

**Mary:** *Well it's good you went for a swim. But how do you take care of yourself in that situation... have you a strategy to look after yourself?*

**Jessica:** *Yeah. I do have to play it over again and talk to about three people about it. That helps, you know getting it off your chest and actually, I meditate. As I said that's very exceptional these days (the kind of event she described). That's what I do. I get annoyed if it goes over and over in my head but I still find by the next day it's gone... But nobody sort of tells you that. They don't tell you that in college. Then you don't, yeah, that's what I would find kind of hard'.*

In a later narrative fragment, presented below, we can catch glimpses of other sources that sustain Jessica. It begins with a window into her experience of teacher education.

**Jessica:** *'I found my other love there, which was music (during my teacher education). That was my Arts subject and you see that really saved me from a lot of that stuff that goes on in [college] the pressure of people and competition and people not being that nice to each other as regards books and sharing. I think that it [music] lifted me right out of all that (her voice is animated) and it was like a safe haven for me, you know?'*

I go on to ask her about the origins of the love of music in her life.

*Jessica: 'It goes back to the fact, I suppose, that we learned the piano from a young age. I think I was five. I always, we were always exposed to music. My father loved music in the sense that he couldn't play any musical instrument but he loved listening to opera and classical, classical music in the sense of you know what you would hear on Lyric FM (Irish radio channel, broadcasting classical music). So I had a great exposure to that from a very young age. He used to take me to the opera. I did ballet so he would bring me to the ballet. We would listen to, he would put music on in the car (she laughs) all the time, tapes and everything'.*

#### **6.9.6.10 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Music and meditation'**

We pick up Jessica's first narrative fragment on the cusp of a difficult day in the classroom. The effects of the day are summed up in her phrase 'I was so depleted' Jessica, however, has the wisdom to recognise when she is depleted and reaches, in a variety of ways, for restoratives. Firstly, she chooses to go for a swim on her own. I observe this first line of response as dealing with the stress on a physical level. I hear echoes of Meg's comment 'I was reared a swimmer' and of using that gift as means to re-charge the body. The swim and the choosing to go alone suggest to me that she identified her need for time out on her own as well as physical exercise. She did not bring her daughter with her on this occasion.

I ask her about the strategies she employs on occasions when her batteries are run low by events at school. She is clear that she needs to share her story of a difficult day in order to reflect and process it. She speaks to at least three people about it. Speaking after the recording finished she shared that these people were trusted friends and most often teachers themselves who understand not only similar contexts but also the emotions that arise for teachers in the wake of such events. It seems to me that Jessica wisely recognizes that sharing her story with trusted others provides her with social and emotional support.

Jessica also meditates. It is the briefest of sentences. She doesn't elaborate. It is said shyly. The fact of it makes sense to me of the woman with whom I am sitting. Meditation promotes stillness, is intended to heighten awareness and create calm in the mind and the emotions. Jessica emits a very gentle and peaceful energy. It seems to me that Jessica, in sharing the impact of a difficult day, provides insight into strategies she has found effective to help her achieve balance and return to the classroom having processed, and possibly learned from the experience.

These strategies have potential use in exploring how teachers attend to self-care. Music permeates Jessica's life. It is her other love, besides teaching. I feel it is appropriate to place it here because, as she says about its effect on her life at college 'it was like a safe haven for me'. As we will learn later in the 'Contextual Insights' in Act Three it continues 'to lift' her. I ask her to help me understand where the spark of her love of music stems from in her life? Her father loved to listen to music especially 'opera and classical'. These are the genres she loves. Piano, ballet and listening to music are associated for her with childhood, with pleasure, and with her father. Music is a source of pleasure and relaxation for Jessica. It provides her with a creative outlet and helps replenish and sustain her. It is therefore part of her strategy for self-care and creativity.

As we get to know Jessica even better through narrative fragments yet to be presented in the 'Contextual Insights' in Act Three, we will understand that she regards the Arts as very important in her own life. However, she also sees the Arts as having huge transformative potential for the children she teaches. She echoes Meg's sentiments in the significance she attaches to the Arts in educating children, especially children in DEIS schools.

Jessica's narrative connecting her own love of music with her father has evoked my own memories of my father and my own experience of 'being steeped in music' as a child and teenager. I am very grateful to him for providing me with that gift in my life. I am realizing, just now, thanks to Jessica's reflection, that listening to music is one of my own strategies for self-care and self-expression. Jessica's insights have made me more aware that I would benefit from cultivating listening to music more often than I have recently done.



#### **6.9.6.11 Conclusion**

This sub section of the findings chapter has explored teachers' understanding of the implications of their work for their own well-being. Teachers' reflections have helped us to explore the question of how teaching fills the well of teachers' energies at times and depletes it at other times. The question of well-being necessitates an awareness of striking a balance between the energy we gain and the energy we drain. Redressing the imbalance also requires developing a strategy that works for us and cultivating the discipline and discernment to implement it. The majority of teachers in this study (five of nine), carry combined responsibilities for mothering and teaching. All of the participating women teachers, whether or not they are mothers, testify to the difficult challenge of reserving space in their lives for nurturing themselves. Most participating teachers can name simple strategies they use to alleviate stress and tiredness and to replenish themselves outside of school.

Of all the questions I put to participating teachers, in response to the issues they signified as important to them, self-care was the question, I observed, teachers found the most difficult to address. I was acutely aware of some teachers deflecting my questions about self-care. I had to come back time and time again to this question, with some teachers, in an attempt to understand where self-care fitted amongst their priorities.

However, irrespective of where self-care fits in the priorities of individual teachers, and irrespective of the supports individual teachers wisely put in place to sustain themselves, the context in DEIS schools and the demands of the curriculum pose challenges for teachers' well-being. Consequently, we will complete exploring teachers' well-being and possibilities for self-care through the 'Contextual Insights' they share in Act Three. This will provide us, the readers, with an opportunity to assess whether, and if so to what extent, teachers perceive the culture and practices within their schools on a continuum from supporting to subverting their efforts to take care of themselves.

### **6.9.7 Conclusion to Act Two: Being Teachers, Relational Insights**

Ultimately the purpose of this section has been to help us better understand the relational landscape of being teachers. I have focused the lens of inquiry, here, primarily on teachers' awareness of the factors they perceive as influencing relationships between them and their students.

In Act One, *Being Teachers: Relational Insights*, I created a narrative tapestry tracing six substantive narrative threads weaving through teachers' fragments, providing us, readers and educators with a frame of reference to explore the primary relational possibilities and challenges identified as most significant by participating teachers. These were: Negotiating relationships with students; Re-negotiating relationships with students; Teachers' aspirations for relationships with students; Learning how to better support students; Transitions in teachers' awareness; and Teacher well-being and self-care.

Teachers' stories point clearly to the quality of relationships between teachers and their students as the crucible where the possibilities and limitations for learning, and for teaching, are forged. Furthermore, by reflecting on changes in teachers' insights about themselves over time we begin to better understand the realities of being teachers and the continuum of relational factors that influence their motivation and resilience.

Some of the responsibility for developing teachers' capacities to nurture relationships with students, and to nurture teachers themselves, rests with teachers. However, some of that responsibility also rests with policy makers, education providers and school managers. Policy makers and managers of schools need to integrate teachers' relational insights in order that they understand the realities of being teachers and are therefore positioned to take responsibility for intervening in ways that effectively sustain the primary relationships affecting the teachers they employ. The focus of attention and intervention arguably needs to be invested in 'sustaining rather than retaining teachers', (Clandinin, BERA conference, September 2012).

The Contextual Insights, presented below in Act Three, provide a space in which the relational insights articulated above can be grounded in the knowledge teachers have developed over many years, about the contexts in which they teach. These contextual insights will explore, from teachers' perspectives, the efficacy of the practices and policies shaping teachers' working environments and working conditions.

## **Teachers' Storied Lives**

### **Act Three**

#### **Being Teachers**

#### **Contextual Insights**

## 6.10 Act Three: Being Teachers, Contextual Insights

Act Three, Being Teachers: Contextual Insights, provides a space within which to inquire into how teachers story their perceptions, experiences, understanding and responses to the grounded contexts within which they teach. I aim to provide opportunities for readers to thinking narratively and critically about the contexts in DEIS schools, in which part of the storied lives of participating teachers evolves. I say 'part' purposefully because these teachers are women, human beings, some are mothers, all are daughters, with storied lives evolving outside the context of their schools, as well as within it.

I present relational and the contextual dimensions of teachers' stories separately, in Acts Two and Three, respectively. This separation is a narrative device. It provides an opportunity to work the data over and back, up and down, between the relational and the contextual. These were two overarching thematic threads stitching through the body of the data. These lenses provide different perspectives with which to engage with teachers' storied lives and our own lives as educators. In fact the *relational contextuality* of teachers' storied lives is seamless. Relationality and contextuality are interwoven into their lived, told, heard and re-storied lives and into our own lives.

These lenses are also used loosely, shaped by the weight of the findings. By this I mean that the relational dimension is focused specifically on teachers relationships with students and their relationships with themselves, as presented in Act Two. Strictly speaking issues about collegiality could also be viewed through the relational lens. However I place them under the contextual lens, here in Act Three, in order to clear the relational space in the previous Act, to exclusively focus on teachers and students. My rationale for doing comes from the fact that participating teachers' story this relationship as the pivotal one for them.

Fullan and Hargreaves pose a relevant question for our purpose here, when they ask:

What kind of context is most likely to acknowledge, respect, and build upon the *purposes* of the teacher and the *person* the teacher is, while at the same time making teachers responsive to expectations and new ideas in the wider environment' (1996:36).

This question helps us to focus on the context of teachers' storied lives. My aim is to listen and learn, to hear what is told and observe what others hear and to observe silences and breaks in the telling, pointing to possible stories at the edge of told stories.

*Primary Teachers Talking* argues that 'the task of classroom teaching cannot be divorced from the context of the school' (Nias, 1989:206). In that study teachers identified that:

The ways in which schools were run, their routines, institutionalized practices, systems of decision-making and communication, customs, and accounting procedures all affected children's behavior, their interpretations of adults' aims and priorities, and the levels of constraints or supports which teachers themselves experienced (ibid:206).

My intention is to promote critical thinking about being teachers in DEIS contexts. By doing so I challenge myself, and readers, to ask better questions and to seek better solutions to supporting teachers to fulfill their roles serving the need of students experiencing multiple dimensions of disadvantage. Vindicating the rights of students to derive the best outcomes possible from their education in DEIS schools challenges us as readers to critically listen to and learn from teachers. Consequently, we can expand our present understanding of their contexts. Doing so may empower us to act more effectively in our roles as educators and take better responsibility for supporting teachers in DEIS schools to become their best possible teaching selves. Consequently, they may be better able to support the learning needs of students in their schools.

### **6.10.1 Being teachers across two sectors of education**

Teachers participating in this study are drawn from two sectors of education primary and secondary DEIS schools (see Chapter 2, The DEIS Programme and the Context of DEIS Schools).

As a consequence of the distribution of participating teachers across two education sectors, five at secondary level and four at primary level, this Contextual Insights section is presented as two sub sections. The first section focuses on what we can learn from how participating secondary teachers story their teaching contexts in DEIS schools. The second focuses on what we can learn from how participating primary teachers story their contexts. Tracing the interweaving and distinctive narrative threads within and between teachers' storied reflections on their sectors will provide us with a rich contextual

narrative tapestry. It offers possibilities to become better aware of teachers' storied lives, how we story teachers' lives and how we story our own lives as educators. By inquiring into these possibilities there is an opportunity for each of us to re-create storied lives that more fully represent how we are and wish to be as educators, teachers, women and human beings.

Tracing the narrative threads of participating teachers' stories by sector, in this section of the findings, provides a counterpoint to the way in which teachers' narratives were excavated individually in the previous Relational Insights, in Act Two. This counterpointing creates tension, cross stitching themes and constructing rigor in the fabric of the findings. It constructs a warp and a weft working the narrative threads in the data over and back, up and down. This approach is characteristic of how the methodology of narrative inquiry envisages working narrative data. This process makes visible the distinctive patterns of the narrative threads intersecting over and back, up and down, creating a tensile strength in the fabric of this Chapter and across the study.

### **6.10.2 Contextual Insights: Being teachers in a DEIS secondary school**

Five of the nine teachers participating in this research study teach at secondary within the same school in Dublin's inner city. You have already been introduced to them individually: in the Prologue, Long Ago...When We Were Girls; in Act One, Passionate Interests and Pathways to Teaching; and in Act Two, Being Teachers: Relational Insights. May I re-introduce to them as colleagues now. They are Meg, Sophie, Julia, Nicole and Victoria. My task as researcher is to utilise how they story their lives as teachers in DEIS contexts to challenge the limits of our present understanding of the challenges and opportunities teaching in a secondary DEIS school context presents for teachers.

#### ***6.10.2.1 Identifying the guiding narrative threads***

In this section our gaze will focus on secondary teachers' storied insights into their school context. Our attention will be directed at how teachers story the most significant issues affecting them in the context of their schools. Four distinctive threads weave through participating teachers' narratives, relating to school context. These threads trace: leadership; being a community of colleagues; teaching in a DEIS school; and pedagogy.

Firstly I will direct your attention to how teachers' story leadership. Secondly, I will provide a space in which to explore the significance for teachers storied lives of the community colleagues within their schools. Thirdly, I will focus on how teachers' story their perceptions of the DEIS schools context itself and the specific challenges and opportunities they perceive it as presenting. Finally, I will explore how teachers story the development of their pedagogy. I begin below with a consideration of leadership.

### ***6.10.2.2 Being Leaders: Learning from leaders and learning by leading***

Teachers story how experiences of leadership from principal teachers have shaped their perceptions of the context within which they work and the possibilities it offers them as teaching professionals. The concept of leadership in schools also stitches through the stories of some participating teachers as they reflect on and engage with the challenges of taking on responsibilities in new leadership in their schools. I begin by tracing teachers' accounts of what they have learned from the leadership of others. Sequentially it is addressed first because it provides a lens through which teachers have learned about leadership themselves. This may well influence whether and how teachers envision themselves in leadership roles and how they assert leadership roles in their schools, subsequently.

### ***6.10.2.3 Learning from leaders***

The first set of narrative fragments presented below story teachers' perspectives on what they have learned from their experiences of working under the leadership of school principals. These fragments provide perspectives on how teachers perceived the manner in which leadership was exercised and what they learned from leaders.

#### ***6.10.2.3.1 Narrative Fragment: They just got me and they just trusted me***

***Meg:*** 'Always having just one person in Senior Management believe in me has been why I have been able to do what I do. So that was crucial. So there was Tim Cavanagh, the principal in [Westland Square] and Fred Winters, the principal in [Franklin Street]. Fred ...when he saw that this Arts thing was working, and he didn't really know much about it, he allowed us, the group of us who did this work, he allowed us to experiment with the curriculum, which was huge at the time. Out of it grew this wonderful learning through Arts programme'.

Later she summarises, simply, the combined impact on her of the two principals with whom she has worked for most of her twenty-two year teaching career.

**Meg:** *'I was validated by my principal in [Westland Square], Tim Cavanagh, and I was validated by Fred Winters [First principal in Franklin Street]. They just got me and they just trusted me'.*

#### 6.10.2.3.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'They just got me and they just trusted me'

Meg's storied account of her experience of two principal teachers, with whom she has worked for most of her teaching life so far, is placed between two phrases serving as bookends reflecting the effect on her of her experiences with them. She begins with stating 'I was validated'. She ends with stating that 'they just trusted me'. I pause at my keyboard at the simplicity and deep significance of what she has declared. I ponder the implications for teachers of knowing that principals trust them and of teachers feeling validated. When I met Meg in her school, at the beginning of this narrative inquiry process I was struck by her vivacity, creativity and her confidence to innovate. I have seen more evidence of those traits as our working relationship developed over the period of the fieldwork. I detect a confluence between her possibly innate creative abilities and the wisdom of the leadership she has experienced. That leadership has cultivated the conditions where her abilities could and did flourish. It is against the storied context of having experienced a validating and trusting style of leadership for most of her teaching career, that I understand her courage and capacity to innovate. I can vouch for the level of her courage and creativity independently, because her colleagues bear consistent witness to it in their narrative accounts of her, shared with me during the fieldwork.

The earlier fragment above puts flesh on the bones of what validation and trust look like in action, from Meg's storied account. She credits her capacity to do what she does as a creative teacher with always having one person in Senior Management believe in her. Meg explains what that means. It means giving her space, time and support to innovate.



She stories how that works in action. She describes how one of her principal teachers holding a watching brief on the impact of the 'Arts thing', allows it and the team of teachers working on it to 'experiment with the curriculum'. I listen with interest to her testimony that he didn't really 'know much about it'. However, the punch line in the story is that he trusted the teachers to work out solutions for themselves.

Directing the question of leadership in schools more widely challenges us to trouble how we can develop educational leadership that has the confidence in itself and in its teachers, to avoid micro managing them. How can we inspire and cultivate school leaders invested in nurturing school cultures in which teachers as individual practitioners, and as teams, are trusted, validated and encouraged to experiment with the curriculum? This section on leadership will help us explore those questions.

#### **6.10.2.3.3 Narrative Fragment: He allowed me to grow as a person and as a teacher**

Victoria, Meg's colleague, bears similar witness to the positive impact of the same principal teacher on her as a teacher:

**Victoria:** *'This was a brand new school...there was a group of teachers and there was an amazing principal who allowed me to grow as a person and as a teacher. He allowed a group of teachers in here to develop that kind of community, that extra curricular, that learning through the Arts. He believed in us and he believed in it. He may not have fully understood it, but he supported us. That really was a breath of fresh air. That really helped in my development as a good teacher. It really, really did.'*

**Mary:** *'You are not the only one saying so, because you know I am working with a few teachers here. It's echoing through all the conversations, how that was very important, that permission.'*

**Victoria:** *'Huge, huge. I mean he was inspirational. I mean, I don't think I would be, if I had never come across Fred Winters in my teaching life, I don't think I would be as good a teacher as I am now.'*

#### 6.10.2.3.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'He allowed me to grow as a person and as a teacher'

Victoria stories the space provided by her principal, Fred Winters, as providing the conditions in which she could and did grow both as a person and as a teacher. She recognises that being the teacher she is now is partly attributed to the latitude for creativity and the support she, and a particular group of teachers, experienced from him.

She refers to being 'allowed' to develop 'that kind of community, that extra-curricular, that learning through the Arts'. Firstly the word 'allowed' is an interesting turn of phrase. Listening to her recording, the word echoes with licence to practice, being entrusted to innovate through Arts with the curriculum, being given permission to be creative. Victoria, an Art teacher herself, has assertively named being allowed to innovate and develop extra-curricular projects through the Arts with her students as the key to developing relationships with students in the relational section of the findings. That permission, and creative space in which to get to know her students and be known by them, has been the key to her progression as a teacher. Her story places considerable credit for her professional growth with Fred Winters, her principal at one time.

Reflecting on the phrase 'that kind of community', Victoria reminds us that her principal teacher nurtured a group of creative teachers, a community of innovators whose collective capacities and confidence grew together, as well as individually. I can visibly see the legacy of 'that kind of community'. The footprint of the principal teacher, now retired for several years, who cultivated Meg and Victoria's confidence and creativity is also visible to me in the storied lives of other teachers in this school whose subjects bear no relationship to the Arts. Storied accounts suggest this principal's leadership has left a positive legacy behind him for participating teachers.

I pause and listen to Victoria credit her principal teacher's influence with being 'as good a teacher as I am now' and with her development 'as a good teacher'. I think about the significance of her ownership of the phrase 'good teacher' as self-referential. She stories

confidence and satisfaction in her own developmental journey so far as a person and as a teacher. She does so acknowledging his role, and the role of the community of teachers with whom she has journeyed, in her present positive storied account of herself.

Her reference 'to being as good a teacher as I am now' is also a relative term. To me this phrase, grounded in the present, acknowledges a developmental journey already undertaken and nurtured by her experience of good leadership. It also pre-empts potential development where 'as good a teacher as I am now' points to the creative possibilities of becoming as good a teacher as I can be in the future. Victoria's fragments provide substantial evidence of her commitment to innovation and creativity and to constantly being open to how she can continually learn to be a better teacher

The next section offers narrative fragments reflecting the experiences of teachers in the same school whose subject are not Arts based. Nicole is a Domestic Science teacher. Similarly, Sophie's whose subject is Mathematics, experienced similar support. This suggests the positive impact of this principal's leadership was not confined to supporting innovative projects in the Arts but extended to other subjects across the curriculum. The narrative data provided above and below provides corroborative evidence that his leadership promoted a culture of innovation and creativity in the school. Reportedly, he cultivated teachers' self-belief by demonstrating belief in them.

#### **6.10.2.3.5 Narrative fragment: But, I slowly started to trust myself.**

**Nicole:** *'Thank the Lord that I went to the Traveller Centre first because it had a huge bearing on when I came in here. So I was used to trying different things..So I used to get loads of different mixes. I mean, you never met Fred Winters (a previous principal)...I loved him. He just said 'you just try out whatever you like.' I was like 'listen, that is not an answer' (her voice is animated), 'I need a curriculum, I need structure, I need rules'. Actually it was the best answer. He always came in. He was always hugely positive. I remember one day I had a group of ten boys in there. They threw potatoes at me hitting me in the neck. I was like going 'right, that's it, I have had enough of you boys now'. He came up. He kept them for two hours talking about different court systems and everything. He just like, he would always talk to them through stories...There was no fighting. There was no arguing. He never raised his voice. He said 'would any of you be able to come up with an answer here'? And they said 'we think we could, we think we could get the room clean, that might help the situation'...*

**Mary:** *And they thought they came to that answer themselves?*

**Nicole:** *Yes, exactly. He was just phenomenal. I am very good at people watching, and I pick up things that I really like, not directly but indirectly... he was like gentle, gentle, gentle. Later he goes 'go on, take them out on a trip'? I was going 'Oh, my God, take them out on a trip, you must be joking, I probably wouldn't come back alive and God knows where would they go'? But, I slowly started to trust myself. Yes, it's about trust but I didn't have the confidence when I came in here...It's a brilliant school if a person is open enough because in this school you will get the full range from an A on higher (level) to the D end (pass level). So it depends on what you want to do with that. I love the challenge'.*

#### **6.10.2.3.6 Tracing the narrative threads o 'But, I slowly started to trust myself'**

The positive presence of this same principal, Fred Winters, resonates through Nicole's storied telling above. She states 'he was just phenomenal'. Her choice of adjective denotes her view of his exceptional ability and positive influence on her. I can empathise with Nicole as a teacher in a school, new to her, asking for a 'curriculum, a structure, rules'. However, she recognises now the wisdom of the leadership that encouraged her to try things out, to innovate, to discover what worked for her as a teacher and what worked for the students in her class. In the wake of potatoes flying this principal does not raise his voice with the students. He tells them stories about systems of justice. He is guiding them towards a restorative solution. By proposing to clean up the mess they have created they are recognising their responsibility for their actions and their need to make redress. The moral of his storytelling has hit the mark.

Nicole, an avid learner, observes his intervention and it's pace 'gentle, gentle, gentle' as she says. His pace with her is the same, gentle. He does not capitulate by giving Nicole the answers she might prefer but trusts her to find solutions herself. However he provides authority and leadership mirroring good pedagogy himself in his intervention with the students and leading them gently, but firmly to taking responsibility for their challenging behaviour. I understand from my own experience as a young teacher having experienced upsetting incidents in class, as Nicole did, how challenging it might feel to call in the principal or a colleague to intervene. I recall feeling incompetent, unprofessional, embarrassed and inexperienced but also out of my depth and greatly relieved for their intervention. How uplifting however, for Nicole, that her principal proposes shortly afterwards that she take this same group of students on a trip outside the school. This

gesture signals his faith in her and in her potential to both educate and manage the behaviour of these particular students. Nicole is self-effacing in registering her shock at his suggestion. However his faith in her ability is rewarded as she recognises that over time 'I slowly started to trust myself'. This growing self-belief is reflected in her willingness to try different things, something cultivated earlier, in her previous work teaching travellers.

Nicole remarks that 'it's a brilliant school if a person is open enough'. She relishes the challenge of teaching students along the continuum of abilities. Her willingness to rise to the various demands of that challenge have been nurtured by her experience of good leadership including the permission to experiment inside, and outside the classroom, taking responsibility for and asserting her authority as a teacher and encouraging her students to take also responsibility for themselves.

#### **6.10.2.3.7 Narrative Fragment: He would never, ever say no, he was so supportive**

**Sophie:** *'I know when I first started I said to the principal at the time 'I want to try honours maths with those students'. He said 'are you mad'? I said 'no, no, no, just let me try it anyway sure, we will do it up to the mocks (prior to the certified examinations) and if they don't do well we will drop it'. To give credit where it is due, he would never, ever say no, he was so supportive...*

**Mary:** *I have heard about this man.*

**Sophie:** *He would let you do anything. He said 'right, let's go for it'. We did and we got success. One thing led to another. All of a sudden there were kids doing Inter Cert (Intermediate Certificate) then there were kids doing the Leaving Cert. (certificate), then he started off with LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied). Then he said let's do Leaving Cert. (Certificate), honours. It just evolved. Now it's the norm, which is fantastic'.*

#### 6.10.2.3.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'He would never, ever say no, he was so supportive'

In Sophie's story she recounts the expansion of subject choice and levels in her school, over the years. In Mathematics, her subject area, she reflects on how these expanded options evolved. Her story presents the principal teacher, Fred, once again facilitating this expansion and progression. Being a relatively new teacher in the school Sophie approaches the principal to see if he will consider her offering honours mathematics to a particular group of students. Her narrative stating 'he would never, ever say no, he was so supportive' conveys his consistently positive response. Perhaps her ability to approach him in the first place, though she was relatively new to the school, was because she perceived him to be an enabling leader. Sophie is passionate about teaching Mathematics and I hear the energy in her voice, as I listen again to the recording, as she quotes him saying 'right, let's go for it'.

Sophie's fragment prompts us to reflect on the effect leaders who provide positive support have on teachers proposing to innovate. These are teachers expressing a willingness to expand the options available to students and to increase their own workloads as a consequence. Conversely, we might consider the impact on teachers' morale of contexts where leadership is exercised narrowly and nervously. This results in micro-managing teachers. We will look out for evidence in the fragments following of contexts where teacher morale is adversely affected and possibilities for innovation and creativity are stunted.

Meg, Victoria, Nicole and Sophie have been deservedly lucky in the experiences they report of positive support and encouragement under the same principal, Fred Winters. Meg has been doubly blessed that, in a career spanning far longer than the others teachers, she has experienced the support of Senior Management throughout. Taking another perspective on leadership, we will now begin to focus on what our participating teachers have been learning as they begin to assert new positions of leadership within their school communities. Three of our five participating secondary teachers share their insights on how their roles are transforming.

#### **6.10.2.4 Becoming Leaders: Learning by leading**

The insights on leadership in this sub section will turn to how teachers are learning in asserting new leadership roles within their schools or in reflecting on their experience of exercising leadership. Fragments from Meg, Nicole and Victoria provide us with opportunities to reflect on the challenges implicit in taking on new leadership roles and the supports needed to sustain teachers in those roles.

##### **6.10.2.4.1 Narrative Fragment: Being the leader, the groundbreaker, but also respecting**

**Meg:** *'It took a number of people saying to me 'you know you were the reason I stayed in this school, you were the only one who listened to me' and I realised...that I was actually empowering other people on the staff. So, then when I took time off, I thought well actually this is actually a strength that I need to nurture and I can't trust these people if I can't trust myself. So I did a lot of work on myself...as a consequence when I went back, it was easier to nurture that in myself this stillness and the capacity to listen. I think that is what I lacked in my early years in teaching, a capacity to listen to my colleagues. I think I judged very quickly. I saw, in the northside school, where I was for ten years, I saw a disgruntled, unhappy, unkind bunch of people, in the staff. I decided therefore I had to do a solo run. I was allowed to. In [this school] I started that way but over the years I have come to realise no, it doesn't have to be that way. So, it's that balance between being the leader, being the groundbreaker but also respectin'.*

Elsewhere she picks up this thread of her evolving respect for her colleagues:

**Meg:** *'And what I discovered was an awful lot of teachers didn't get how important it is that the child is as central a player as the adult...But meanwhile those teachers, some of whom I struggled to work with, when they challenged me on the Arts programme, some of them have become the most wonderful teachers and teachers as Artists. They really get education and really give the kids a voice, once they were able to work out their own way of doing it. So, again, another key moment for me in my education was learning to really respect teachers and listen to them and accept that quite a significant number are not used to a child having a voice, a strong voice and that sometimes it just takes time for that to change. And I have come to know now, and I am twenty three years at it, that the key to education working is when the teacher feels validated, valued, challenged. Challenged in terms of finding a determination about how to get it right, and also challenged when they do things wrong to be gently guided towards an awareness of what they have done wrong. That's one of the biggest challenges I think we now have in education.*

*Teachers, leaders in education, are afraid to challenge people who are getting it wrong and being unprofessional. Self-reflection and discernment is something that not all teachers have, not all humans have. Working as we do in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage it's crucial that we have discernment and self-reflection and that we look at how we speak and act with the kids. And some don't, so that's really tough. But, it is really heartening to see how many just love their job and feel validated and that's an awful lot to do with who is in charge. So when I did come back...I took a year off, a career break and I did some training in Steiner. When I came back I was a better leader. I trust teachers now and when I see a teacher behaving really badly I am aware more than ever of what is and isn't my job. So, I pass it on very quickly to the principal but I try to respectfully honour the person who even is making big mistakes'.*

#### **6.10.2.4.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Being the leader, the ground breaker, but also respecting'**

Meg's reflections on leadership, in the fragments above, chart her recognition and development of her own leadership skills. Recognising her own leadership potential came through hearing feedback from her colleagues reflecting back the positive impact of her leadership on them. Meg understood and continues to understand the intrinsic relationship between building her capacity to trust her colleagues and building her capacity to trust in herself. She contrasts her tendency early in her career to judge her colleagues very quickly with her growing commitment to developing her capacity to listen to them. She has transitioned from being what she describes a 'solo' runner to being a team player.

As she says 'I did a lot of work on myself'. As I absorb the implications of this phrase I realise her discernment in recognising and prioritising 'work' on herself as not only an investment in self development, but has also in nurturing her leadership capacity as an educator. She captures the challenge of leadership as striking a delicate balance between being the 'ground breaker' and 'respecting her colleagues'.

Meg admits that the journey to developing her own leadership has not been smooth, there have been bumps along the way. She points to the tension between her own clear vision and mission seeing the child as the central layer in education and her struggle with



those colleagues who 'didn't get' that. She admits she struggled with the challenges some teachers put to her on the Arts programme. Her understanding now is that teachers have to have the freedom to work out their own determination about 'their way of doing it' in order that it works for them. She is open-hearted and open-minded in her acknowledgement that 'some of them have become the most wonderful teachers and teachers as Artists'.

Meg's condenses her thoughts about what makes education work for teachers down to creating conditions in schools where teachers feel 'validated, valued and challenged'. There is an interesting symmetry between being valued on the one hand and being challenged on the other. She sees clearly that the experience of being valued or challenged has 'an awful lot to do with who is in charge'. I intuit from her testimony about her own positive experiences of 'one person in Senior Management who believed in her' and nurturing her development as a teacher, that she sees the role of validating and valuing as pivotal to good leadership and colleagues experiencing support in their teaching context.

However, as a counterpoint Meg recognises that leadership requires challenging teachers to take responsibility for improving their capacity and performance, to becoming more professional in how they do their work. I interpret this as teachers being supported to develop their best 'professional' selves. Meg is clear in her conviction that not only do teachers need to be challenged but how they need to be challenged. She names the means to challenge effectively as 'gently guiding them towards and awareness of what they have done wrong' and helping them 'find a determination about how to get it right'. I note her observation from experience that 'leaders in education are afraid to challenge people who are getting it wrong and being unprofessional'. Meg clearly sees that educational leaders need to develop courage and exercise authority taking on this challenge not just for the sake of developing teachers but in order to ensure the conditions that best serve the needs of students, particularly students in DEIS schools.

Working as she does in a DEIS school, with twenty three years experience of teaching in the inner city, Meg understands how critical it is that teachers ‘working in areas of socio-economic disadvantage’ develop ‘self-reflection and discernment’. Developing and engaging these tools, according as Meg, helps to make us aware of our responsibilities as teachers. In DEIS schools she urges us as teachers to be mindful that ‘we look at how we speak and act with kids’. Consequently, she sees the development of self-reflection and discernment as critical in order that teachers take responsibility for monitoring their own behaviour and evaluating whether they are speaking and engaging with their students in a manner that is respectful of them and responsive to their needs.

Meg finishes with reflections grounded in her own experiences of intervening as a member of Senior Management in her school when she sees ‘a teacher behaving really badly’. Her own discernment has helped her clarify her responsibility in these situations and to act upon it. She has also learned to discern what is outside the boundaries of her own responsibility and to pass appropriate issues on to her principal teacher quickly. Her self-reflectiveness is evident in her aspiration ‘to respectfully honour the person who even is making big mistakes’.

It seems to me that Meg has taken a personal and professional journey from a starting position as a ‘solo’ runner who ‘judged her colleagues too quickly’ in her own words and slowly evolved into a more discerning team player. Her self-reflection allows her to be mindful of her own mistakes. There is ample evidence of her reflection in her fragments presented throughout the findings. This self-reflection also enables her to take authority as a leader by supporting teachers to take responsibility for their own mistakes. She seeks to respectfully intervene to both challenge and support them to find solutions that deliver the best outcome possible. Working together with colleagues to help develop relevant solutions better serves the needs of students and improves teachers’ capacities to become more responsible, effective and fulfilled professionals.

Below are some narrative fragments providing glimpses of how Nicole’s awareness is developing through taking on a new leadership role in her school. Both she and her

colleague Victoria have recently chosen to take on new responsibilities. We will begin by reflecting on what Nicole is learning by way of opportunities and challenges through this experience.

#### 6.10.2.4.3 Narrative fragment: We both need to drive ourselves, we are very hands on

**Nicole:** *'I mean we had an LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied) inspection and Victoria, as it happened, just recently took over as LCA coordinator. I took over as year head. We were both going 'we have no posts'. We have just taken it over. Part of us are going 'were we blooming stupid to have done that, right', even though both of us are very similar. We are both practical teachers and we both need to drive ourselves and we are very hands on. We are very much like 'let's push those kids'. We know them. Let's push. And we have to fight with them because we know it will help them.*

**Mary:** *It will bring them on the extra few yards?*

**Nicole:** *Exactly. Following it, and I don't know have you taught an LCA or if you know LCA, but you know it's a different way of teaching. Basically all students' work has to be recorded by each teacher. Preparing for the inspector to come in, we were looking at it and saying we could improve this and this. We could see good practices and bad practices. Not that we are better at it than anybody else but we were saying let's put that down, instead of getting annoyed let's put it down on a sheet of paper. Let's go to management, let's talk about it and we have practical solutions for how we can bring it together. I can't see that happening. I did go. I did explain. Nothing has happened. I am kind of going, oh my God, the whole thing is continuous assessment. So in order for the child, like in my view it should be totally student centred. Basically they have to have pieces of work that they hand up every few weeks. So if you know at the end of a month, I said let's meet every month but instead of teachers coming with nothing prepared, you send down a check list of what you want the teachers to have prepared so that when they come then we can identify the children who are at risk. Give them a week to catch up on anything that they can. Put in supports for that week and then less children are failing, you know. But, that doesn't seem to be the drive and you are just kind of going, oh, (she pauses). I get really disillusioned because I then kind of go, well then what is it about'?*

#### 6.10.2.4.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'We both need to drive ourselves, we are very hands on'

Nicole reflects on how she and her colleague Victoria have reached for new leadership roles within their school. Nicole herself has taken responsibility for being a year head. Victoria has taken on the role of LCA co-ordinator. In the opening fragment Nicole articulates a shared perception of Victoria and herself as sharing the need to 'drive themselves' characterising both of them as 'practical teachers' with a willingness and commitment to 'push those kids'. However already there is apparent tension between their willingness to take on new responsibilities, adding to their respective workloads, and the fact that doing so does not offer either of them posts of responsibility. These posts traditionally provided some additional financial reward to teachers and some level of recognition valuing those teachers willing to take on increasing workloads and responsibilities. The impact of cutbacks in funding to schools in recent years, as Ireland experienced financial crisis, means that where existing teachers holding posts of responsibility retired, schools lost the posts of responsibility with the retiring teachers. This means that teachers taking on these new roles do so out of commitment to their students and their own drive to learn and take on leadership roles.

In preparing for the LCA inspection Nicole and Victoria clearly worked together to look at how practices could be improved to yield better outcomes for students in the project work mandated for the LCA. The LCA provides an applied route to Leaving Certificate for the least academic students in the Senior Cycle of secondary school. Therefore, Nicole and Victoria have aligned themselves to better supporting the weakest students at Leaving Certificate level. Again the phrase 'we are both practical teachers' resonates with me as they put their heads together and outline practical changes that might better support students' capacities to satisfy the coursework demands. Nicole and Victoria prepare a blueprint, a draft proposal outlining a strategy to better support at risk students, for the consideration of management.

As we move into the final fragment presented above I note the shift from 'we' to 'I' in Nicole's narrative. Nicole articulates a clearly developed strategy for teachers to identify

and support 'children who are at risk'. Elsewhere in the relational section of the findings the data testifies to the depth of her commitment and her demonstration of her practical capacity to support students who need extra support. I cannot mistake Nicole's passion for keeping the needs of students at the centre of the learning process. Like Meg, Nicole's guiding principal is to tend to the needs of students, especially reluctant students, and keep them at the centre of the agenda. Therefore, her motivation is to push for better supports for students who are most at risk.

In Nicole's final comments we learn about the fate of the proposals, so far, in terms of the absence of a response from Management to them. Nicole is pessimistic about the chances of Management supporting the proposals as expressed in her view that 'I can't see that happening'. I hear in the tone of Nicole's voice, as she says this, a deep sigh. It sounds as if the air has been let out of a balloon. Her comment suggesting that 'doesn't seem to be the drive' demonstrates her perception that their support will not be forthcoming. I empathise with her situation and the deflation and frustration I intuit from her body language, her tone and her words. She finishes with an honest admission about how she feels in the wake of her efforts to convince Management to support what she sees as positive changes to support vulnerable learners. I empathise with her when she admits 'I get really disillusioned' as she asks herself 'well then what is it about'.

For Nicole the student is at the centre of the process. In her new role Nicole demonstrates her willingness and commitment to advocating on behalf of vulnerable students. Victoria and Nicole appear to share a vision to improve supports for these students. However, rolling out that vision has implications for individual teachers and for Management. Nicole's new role is bringing her into negotiation with Management in her school and with the politics of how decisions are made or not made, implemented or not implemented.

If we draw on Meg's insights, based on her challenging experiences of working to innovate with colleagues in the past, we begin to understand that teachers need to be supported to find solutions that work for them in their classrooms. One size does not fit all teachers. When the development of solutions includes the participants expected to implement the

changes, it is more likely that proposals might garner support. Meg's words resonate with me about seeking and finding the balance between 'ground breaking' and 'respecting colleagues' as part of the challenge of exercising effective leadership in education. A delicate balance is needed indeed, one requiring a great deal of reflective practice and capacity building. However, when teachers assert their leadership they also need what Meg has largely had, someone in Senior Management who believes in them and supports what they are trying to achieve.

#### **6.10.2.5 Being a Community of teachers within a DEIS school**

Reflections on teachers as a community of colleagues weave through the narratives of all the participating secondary teachers. The narrative data reflects the tensions between the opportunities collegiality offers to teachers on the one hand, and the challenges it poses for teachers on the other hand. The fragments in this section provide glimpses of these tensions at play. They illustrate the significance of the support of colleagues for teacher well-being, morale and mutual learning. They also reflect the deep challenges involved in working with colleagues whose levels of awareness, derived from their lives inside and outside of school, and whose capacities, may be at different stages of development. In this section teachers also reflect on the challenges of working in a school located in the heart of an inner city community in Dublin. Teachers' insights help us to consider the implications, for both the school and the community, of taking, or not taking, responsibility for their interdependence.

##### **6.10.2.5.1 Narrative Thread: That's huge, being there for each other**

**Victoria:** *'Part of the job is looking after students but part of the job is looking after each other as a staff too. That's huge, being there for each other, and even if it is just a chat or a hug, some thing. You know, we are really a good staff in here. We are over worked. I would like to say what school isn't. It's just the way the job is going at the minute. You just keep going but I think it is important to have some time for staff to have together and it's not very often that happens.'*

She continues a little later by saying:

**Victoria:** *'We can focus so much on the paper work and the students and we can forget about each other and I think that sometimes we need a breather'.*

Later still she reflects that:

**Victoria:** *'Even just to sit and have a five minute chat with a colleague to say 'God, I am feeling so tired' and maybe they are feeling exactly the same, even that helps. You feel, well, I am not the only one.*

**Mary:** *And you have laid it down in a way.*

**Victoria:** *Yes. And it's just to say it. Ok, it's gone now, ok, back to work. Just to know that others are going through that with you, it can help too, you know.*

**Mary:** *And there is a lovely atmosphere in the staffroom. As an outsider coming in, I can detect it. Especially the last day I was here there were some issues going on. I could detect the support that was attaching to the person who was having a difficult day. There was a marvellous solidarity that I observed, just as an outsider and not overhearing anything that was said. I was at the other end of the staffroom but I was observing and I could feel that. On a bad day that must be great to know that there are colleagues who, when you go in there, gather around to support you.*

**Victoria:** *And there will be bad days, in any job that you hold, there will definitely be bad days. We can all get things on top of us, I mean, because we are not just teachers we are people. We go home. We have our own kids and we have our own life. We try to fit it all in. It can get on top of anybody, anybody, you know'.*

#### 6.10.2.5.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'That's huge being there for each other'

Victoria reminds us in this fragment that the grounded context in which she teaches is one characterised by heavy workloads and many stresses. In that context she tells us that teachers are human beings therefore 'being there for each other' helps teachers survive the stresses. A 'chat', a 'hug', an empathetic response from a colleague leaving a teacher feeling 'I am not the only one' helps Victoria cope. She is affirmed by the recognition in

others that sometimes it's hard or exhausting, and, yes others colleagues feel overworked too.

Victoria emphatically states 'yes, we are really a good staff in here'. She is confident in her assertion of this fact because she has experienced the support of staff herself. I am also aware of her perception that there are few opportunities for staff to have time together. This time poverty for staff resonates through many other fragments presented in this study. This narrative thread reveals the acute need identified by teachers for time to talk about their work, time to share strategies to cope with the daily challenges it presents and time to support and challenge each other. As Victoria says 'we can forget about each other'. She is reminding us, readers, that teachers are fallible human beings who can have 'bad days' inside school and like the rest of us also have lives to manage outside of school. Her final phrase alludes to the challenges as women and as teachers to fit it all in. Victoria speaks about the challenge of balancing the demands of school, home, and life and yet 'being there for each other' as colleagues. The fragment below picks up a similar narrative thread.

#### **6.10.2.5.3 Narrative thread: No one has the time or knowledge to share with newer, younger staff**

**Julia:** *'There is one teacher on the staff and she is actually retiring at Christmas time. She is a wonderful support actually in that she has been around so long. She knows all the parents and all the brothers and sisters and grandparents even at some stage. I have had great conversations with her because she will give me the little bit of background, where I wouldn't have got that from the principal or vice-principal or year head because it would have been considered sensitive. Maybe this other teacher shouldn't have said anything but actually it was very valuable and changed my relationship with the student and I think the student's experience of being at school. So it's amazing to have people like that on the staff'.*

She reflects again on the significance for teachers of knowing when students are experiencing difficult challenges in their lives.

**Julia:** *'I was just thinking even, you know, on a smaller scale, the way the staff talk about students, in the staffroom, to support the student and the staff, that so and so is going through a tough time at the moment and maybe going through a difficult situation. It is really important for people to know that.*



*You can often, you know where a new teacher comes in, maybe hear them say they are struggling with a student or with a student behaving bizarrely and to be able to help them to try and make sense of that’.*

Later she says:

**Julia:** *‘I was very lucky here in that there were a number of teachers that would have been very supportive and again would have had the backstory to different students. It just made you feel you could just go and vent and say ‘I had this terrible class, how do I manage or why did that happen’? I have seen how it has changed over the last few years. Those older members of staff have retired. We have newer, younger staff coming in, and no one has the time or the knowledge to share with them. It changes the whole atmosphere of the school.*

**Mary:** *Do you think that is a loss?*

**Julia:** *Completely. I think it is devastating to the children because they don’t have as many people now who are able to support them. I think it would be fair to say that most teachers, the majority of teachers would be willing, if they had that information, to give a little more or to approach things differently. But, they don’t have it and they are frustrated then because of the difficulties they have’.*

#### **6.10.2.5.4 Tracing the narrative threads of: No one has the time or knowledge to share with newer, younger staff**

The first of the fragments in the sequence reflects on the significance for Julia, of being able to draw on the support and deep knowledge of a mentor teacher, soon to retire. How did access to this reservoir of knowledge influence Julia? It influenced her significantly to the extent that ‘it changed her relationship with a student’ and in her view ‘changed the student’s experience of being at school’. Julia is well aware of the delicate balance between protecting the privacy of students and as a teacher knowing enough of their story to make sense of their behaviour and responses in school. Julia’s experience and her observation of colleagues is that when teachers understand that students are going through a particularly difficult time they are willing ‘to give a little more’ and ‘it helps them to make sense of ‘what is happening in their classroom.

Julia reflects on the impact of the recent retirements of teachers in her school as having changed the atmosphere in the whole school. This closely echoes Nicole's similar observation of seeing the loss in the staffroom. Julia observes the devastating effect of the loss of this support for students. She also evaluates the loss for younger teachers on the staff. I am struck by the implications of her statement that 'no one has the time or the knowledge to share with them'. Once again the erosion of time to learn from experienced colleagues, already signalled by Victoria and Nicole, is seen by Julia as a significant loss to teachers, especially to newer, younger teachers. It seems both the retirement of experienced colleagues and the pace of the current workload are shrinking the space in which newer and experienced teachers can say to each other 'I had a terrible class, how could I manage that differently' or 'why do you think that happened'? Julia empathises with the frustrations of younger teachers lacking the level of guidance, support and encouragement she has experienced from her mentors.

#### **6.10.2.5.5 Narrative fragment: I think we are a great team but...**

***Meg:** 'I have a feeling that we are failing young people in education now because young people can find out information very easily but it's how they use that information is important and how they learn to be discerning about the information. So what a teacher is, is changing. I think at the moment there is a huge amount of paper work. I think teachers are erring on the side of litigation and doing the paperwork to the detriment of following through the vision. I see, I see really strong creative people just closing up. We have a new vibrant young staff, about ten new people. I just see them being chipped at and I think they are not even aware of it. I see the older people and I think our school is exceptional, I think we are a great team but the paperwork is huge. I see the older people kind of just clocking in sometimes. I say the older people, I mean the people who have been here longer'.*

#### **6.10.2.5.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I think we are a great team but...'**

The title of this fragment captures the tone of the content reflecting on a great team of colleagues in her school and adding the caveat 'but'. This 'but' brings us face to face with the grounded realities of teaching in a DEIS school. It highlights the tensions that the workload and demands on teachers brings including fears of litigation and the 'huge amount of paperwork' and the time and energy needed to nurture the vision and

creativity of teachers. Meg's storied account perceives the emphasis to be on the paperwork and risk, at the loss of creativity and vision. She argues, the nature of teaching should be changing in the direction of helping students develop discernment. We may well ask how can teachers develop discernment as individuals or as a group of colleagues, in a culture arguably preoccupied by litigation and administrative demands at the expense of vision and creativity?

As a member of Senior Management in her school Meg observes the fallout from this imbalance throughout the life cycle of teachers she is observing and seeking to support. She sees 'a new vibrant young staff' being 'chipped at'. She testifies to 'strong creative people just closing up'. She witnesses 'the older people, kind of, just clocking in sometimes'. The outcome for students is condensed in her first phrase 'I think we are failing young people in education now'. However, it is clear from Meg's insights that where the culture of schools promotes paperwork and fears of litigation over the vision and creativity of teachers, it not only fails young people, it fails teachers too. The consequences are inevitably that teachers cannot then provide students with the quality of education they both deserve and need to develop their full potential. Meg understands that the creativity of new teachers, mid career teachers and older teachers has to be nurtured in order to deliver equality of opportunity and outcome for students. She observes the impact of the priorities being imposed on schools as undermining this potential with devastating effects for students and for staff.

#### **6.10.2.5.7 Narrative fragment: It's important the school isn't seen as separate in the community**

Julia reflects on the significance of a theatrical event, hosted in the school, for the school, itself and the community in which it resides. This event involved students, teachers, parents and local people.

**Julia:** *'I thought the way it worked collaboratively here, that they had been working for weeks to come up with a song that they could perform together.'*

*There were so many different elements and it was just a very special experience...I suppose it's important the school isn't seen as separate in the community, you know? Everyone has a responsibility to interact and to add to the school whether they are parents or just people in the locality. Everyone is involved in it.*

**Mary:** *Exactly. One of the teachers was telling me about putting up the Christmas tree, at Christmas time, you know, of inviting some of the very close neighbours in. I thought was a lovely gesture of inclusion, of the space as a community space as much as being owned by the school in a way.*

**Julia:** *Absolutely, because I suppose the consequences are huge really, you know, if you do separate yourself off, then it becomes almost frightening for both parties because you don't want to be a school just on our own. We need the outside parties and equally the thought of the students going out and having no sense of being in a community and that they can do what they like. They need to have a sense of responsibility for their area'.*

#### **6.10.2.5.8 Tracing the narrative threads 'It's important the school isn't seen as separate in the community'**

Julia draws our attention to the mutual gain for both the community and the school of collaborating in shared events. The event prompting her reflection invited the community within the school, and the community supporting the school, to work together on a shared production. Participants included students, teachers, parents and people from the local community. Julia is deeply insightful seeing the benefits of this collaboration as going far beyond the cooperation and relationships built up over weeks of preparation and practice for the event. She reflects on the potential of collaborative events such as this to illustrate that the school is not separate from the community nor should it be seen as separate from the community. Julia reminds us that everybody has a responsibility to contribute and take responsibility for engaging with the school. She also sees the school as having a responsibility to engage with its community.

Julia's reflection triggered the memory of another teacher sharing with me her observations about the positive effect on relationships between the school and the

community of a very simple gesture coming from the school. The community in the school invited neighbours in the vicinity of the school to come in to celebrate switching on the lights on the school Christmas tree. It seemed to me the teacher that this simple gesture towards the community generated good will and reflected the schools' recognition of its interdependency with the community it is responsible for serving.

Julia's reflections direct us to consider the losses for both community and school where this interdependency is not nurtured. Julia recognises that the school cannot survive as a separate entity without the support of the local community. She points to the risk for the school of getting cut off from its community base. However, she also reflects on the necessity for students to realise they need to develop 'a sense of responsibility for their area'. Julia's insights remind us that DEIS schools are an integral part of local communities with mutual rights and responsibilities between school and community.

#### **6.10.2.6 DEIS school contexts**

This study is focused on teachers working in DEIS schools. Arguably all the insights emerging from the narrative data provide reflections by teachers about working in a DEIS context. However, there are places in the narrative data where teachers focus specifically on issues or experiences they identify as particularly challenging or creative about their experiences in a DEIS context. That is the rationale for presenting a discrete section on the DEIS context from the perspective of teachers' stories. The narrative threads tracing through the fragments below relate to: resources; supporting vulnerable students; managing difficult students; students having a voice and teachers being challenged.

##### **6.10.2.6.1 Narrative fragment: We aren't given proper resources, it's an absolute disgrace**

**Meg:** *'Now in DEIS schools I think it is hard to stay focused on that [being an educator], I think, because we aren't given proper resources. I mean it's a disgrace. It's an absolute disgrace. In two years going from class sizes of seventeen to thirty and we are a DEIS school. I mean, Ruari Quinn (Minister for Education and Skills at the time) I have all the time in the world for him. I think he has great ideas around the new Junior Cycle (3 years of preparation for the Junior Certificate Examination) but I mean why, (she sounds perplexed), why have thirty kids in a class?...*

*We have kids and the facts are some of their parents don't know how to care about their education and we still have them in class sizes of thirty. It's so wrong, it's so, so, wrong. Maybe that's where I go next in my life, maybe I will fight that cause...It's very wrong'.*

#### **6.10.2.6.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'We aren't given proper resources, it's an absolute disgrace'**

Meg critiques the erosion of resources in DEIS schools since the demise of the so called *Celtic Tiger* Irish economy and with it a range of supports to DEIS schools. Her first fragment testifies to the reality that cutbacks in education in the last number of years have increased the pupil teacher ratio in her school from 1:17 to 1:30. This has almost doubled the workload for teachers and almost halved the attention to individual students. She stresses the loss involved here against the backdrop that 'some of the parents don't know how to care about their kids' education'. I note her reference to the inability of this particular group of parents experiencing disadvantage to care as distinct from any lack of desire on their part towards their children's education. For these children in particular, the increased class size makes it difficult for teachers to tend to their needs. Meg clearly articulates the view that this deterioration in resources and supports is 'an absolute disgrace' and the responsibility of the Minister for Education and his department. As I listen to her recording I hear in her voice the frustration she feels in relation to the lack of resources available to support students in her school, compared to the situation some years ago. She is committed to championing the cause of these students. She understands that the commitment of resources to support projects targeting 'reluctant students' is vital to providing them with positive experiences in her school. She places responsibility for addressing these resource gaps in the political arena.

#### **6.10.2.6.3 Narrative fragment: You can see a lot of the work you have done, it has just been lost.**

**Mary:** *'Talking about the special learning needs group, tell me a little bit about that because I don't have a great deal of understanding about how that happens or how you are as a teacher in that space.'*

**Julia:** *Well we have a lovely small group. At the moment there are ten students in the group and the children are very, very needy. They have huge difficulty organising themselves. They will generally bring a lot of stress into the classroom because they have no idea are they prepared for the day, do they have the right equipment? So often we will spend the first fifteen minutes just looking in our bags, thinking about what we can expect from the day and, is there any opportunities to avoid getting into trouble? So the start of the class is very different from the end because there will be anxious tummies and people wanting to put their head down on the desk until they realise that 'actually I am ok'. Then in terms of the work, again, in a sense it's a bit repetitive for me because we do move at such a slow pace but you see the progress even if it's just that they are getting their spellings right or slowly but surely they are making sentences that are more complete'.*

A little later she explains the impact of the cutbacks in DEIS schools on this support work to students with special needs at Junior Cycle:

**Julia:** *'Well, with cutbacks now, but in first year they always get four hours of English and one of those hours is spent in the library. Previously the special needs classes would have got four classes, four hours, in second and in third year as well. But, we have had cutbacks so it's just three hours a week now. You can see the difference there. I mean you can see a lot of the work you have done, it has just been lost, again just in terms of organising themselves and getting into trouble and feeling bad about being in school'*

#### **6.10.2.6.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'You can see a lot of the work you have done, it has just been lost'**

Julia teaches English to both high achievers and children with special educational needs. She works with students undertaking higher level Leaving Certificate English and with students coping with special learning needs at Junior Cycle. She helps me understand the purpose, the approach and the progress of the work at Junior Cycle. She begins by sharing her conviction that though there are only ten students in this group 'they are very, very needy'. Julia explains that because their organisational skills are so weak they have no idea whether they are prepared for the school day or not. Consequently, they bring a great deal of stress into the classroom and easily find themselves in trouble with teachers. Julia's task is to help them organise themselves, reassure them and help them negotiate safe passage through the school day, if possible, by avoiding trouble with teachers. In

English class the pace of the work with these students is slow but the progress is evident to Julia in improvements in spelling and sentence construction.

Cutbacks in Education however in recent years, including cutbacks to supports in DEIS schools, have according to Julia eroded the gains made when there more contact hours available to support these students. The loss of an hour a week through second and third year radically undermines the supports available to these very, very needy students. Julia sees that the gains made by the work she had done, have now been lost. This is disheartening for teachers. However, the outcome is a travesty where students are again 'getting into trouble and feeling bad about being in school'. How can these very, very needy students experience equality of opportunity and outcome in a system that cannot support their basic needs? In this case the system is failing them by failing to provide DEIS schools and teachers with the necessary resources to help them participate fully and benefit from being at school.

#### 6.10.2.6.5 Narrative fragment: We have some extremely difficult students

**Sophie:** *'You know, I used to think once upon a time, I used to say 'what have I put myself through this for' because...we have some extremely difficult students. The students you know, there are times when I just want to go home and cry and I say 'what am I doing'? Just give me a nice little Loreto school (private) where the students want to learn and I will go in and they will all do their essays and I won't have all this chasing around. I won't have to be ringing parents up and parents saying 'Well he won't get out of bed for me. What do you expect me to do? You are his fucking teacher, you get him up and you sort him out'. And I say 'hang on, how far does my job go? It is not a case of we can just come in and just do a job. Do you know what I mean, we are teacher, we are doctor, nurse, teacher, psychiatrist, mammy, daddy'.*

Later she gives her perspective on the challenges of teaching in DEIS schools.

**Sophie:** *'Like I also think that sometimes teachers in inner city schools...I mean I have seen dangerous situations here in the classroom. I honestly think that we work, and I mean I suppose I am being biased, we work ten times harder than teachers in the likes of schools like the Loreto (a private school). We don't get a bit of credit for it and sometimes we can put ourselves in danger over a situation...*



*I really feel teachers working in the inner city either deserve extra resources or extra pay or extra something. What we have to put up with in here. Don't get me wrong, I love the kids.*

**Mary:** *I know that.*

**Sophie:** *I love the school but there are times when we have to put up with dreadful things, you know what I mean'.*

#### **6.10.2.6.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'We have some extremely difficult students'**

Sophie reflects on some 'dreadful things' she has witnessed in her time as a teacher in her school, in Dublin's inner city. She is referring to her experiences with 'some extremely difficult students'. These experiences have affected her such that at times she feels 'I want to go home and cry'. As teachers and as human beings witnessing 'dreadful things' tugs on our emotions. Sophie imagines the context of another school, a private school, 'where students want to learn'. I empathise with her fantasy but I understand why she reaches for it as a palliative to some of the challenges she perceives teaching in her context as posing for her.

Sophie asks us to contemplate what it is like for a teacher trying to ensure students are present in class to undertake a mandated and accredited assignment, which counts towards their final examination, when the response they get from some parents is negative. I hear Sophie repeat the parents' words 'what do you expect me to do' and 'you are his fucking teacher?'. At the very least these words convey the inability of that parent to intervene positively and makes clear their sense that responsibility for getting the student to school is with the teacher. Sophie validly asks 'how far does my job go'? I can hear the frustration in her voice, as I listen to her recording. She sees the chances, for some of her students to produce the necessary work and be present for the mandated number of hours to earn their credentials, being lost and also being outside of her control. Sophie also refers to witnessing dangerous situations in her classroom at times. She assesses the demands of working in a DEIS school in the inner city as much more onerous than the demands she perceives being placed on teachers in private schools. Consequently, she argues that 'extra resources, extra pay or extra something' should be

provided to schools and or teachers in contexts such as hers. Like Meg she sees that extra resources are vital to supporting teachers to teach and to reach 'difficult students'.

Sophie's fragment expresses with honesty and clarity the struggle she faces getting some students into school in the first place. As I hear the exhaustion in her voice I empathise with her struggles. I wonder how she, and other teachers like her, can be supported in tackling these challenges? I can only imagine that repeated exposure to hostile encounters, without receiving adequate support or resources to help teachers tackle them, erodes teacher motivation and morale. Sophie reminds me not to misinterpret what she is saying about the students she teaches. She reminds me that she 'loves the kids' and 'loves the school'. However she also speaks honestly about having to deal with 'dreadful things' and 'some difficult students'. As a human being, a woman, and a teacher, when she finds herself in these situations she wants 'to go home and cry' and she does go home and cry sometimes.

I am now at a distance from the intensity of these highly charged moments, as I sit at my desk in my role as researcher and writer, it is possible for me to distinguish the difference in perception between seeing some students as 'very difficult' and seeing their behaviour as 'very difficult', and aspects of their lives outside of school as possibly 'very difficult'. Placed in the eye of the storm, as Sophie has been, as all teachers have been at some point, as I have been in the primary school classroom, holding the distinction between the behaviour of students and students themselves is infinitely harder. However, the degree to which we are aware of these distinctions and capable of empathising with the context of students' lives may shape how we see our challenges as teachers in the situation and whether we can see ourselves as part of the solution. This awareness or discernment has to be cultivated within schools in order to support teachers to build resilience to deal especially with 'dreadful things' and the difficult behaviour of some students while retaining empathy for the same students. Increased awareness needs to be translated into effective management strategies supporting teachers in challenging situations and providing them with guidance.

#### 6.10.2.6.7 Narrative fragment: If a kid feels they are not learning, they say it.

**Meg:** *'Well, I tell you, I think in DEIS schools we are actually blessed in one sense in that kids vote with their feet. Now maybe I am wrong, because I am going on well, I have been in two DEIS schools and one private school. Then I went to middle class schools when I was growing up. In the middle class schools and the private schools, when I was growing up, boy you didn't challenge. You didn't say anything about the learning. In this school if a kid feels they are not learning, they say it.'*

**Mary:** *Ok, that's interesting.*

**Meg:** *That creates a rigour around pedagogy. That gets back to a teacher. Now the challenging thing is there are teachers here who naturally self-reflect but there are teachers here who are deluded, who are too scared to take on board what is coming at them. So what I like about where I am working here is sometimes those teachers become so exposed that they have to deal with it. Some leave. Some deal with it and break through'.*

#### 6.10.2.6.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'If a kid feels they are not learning, they say it'

Meg's experiences of being a student were formed in middle class schools growing up. Her experiences there and later teaching in a private school at the beginning of her teaching career, conveyed to her the strong message that as a student 'you didn't challenge'. She contrasts that with her experiences of the permission and right she observes students exercising in DEIS schools, in which she has spent most of her teaching life, to comment on the learning. She states with conviction that 'in this school if a kid feels they are not learning they say it'. Meg counts this as a blessing in DEIS schools, noting that students vote with their feet, they call it as it is. In the light of Meg's commitment to students having a voice, articulated in the relational section of the findings, we can interpret a fit between her vision and the context in which she works, a DEIS school.

Meg's reflects on the implications of the honest feedback of students on the quality of the teaching they are experiencing. In her view students telling like it is 'creates a rigour around pedagogy'. The feedback reaches teachers. Meg recognises that some teachers, those are self-reflective, are capable of responding and learning from challenges students

put to them. However, she also recognises that some teachers are 'deluded' and 'too scared' to take those legitimate challenges to their teaching on board. Meg is glad that the truth telling of students forces some teachers to deal with issues and she sees that some teachers 'breakthrough'. She observes that others leave rather than face the challenges. As I reflect on what I am learning from Meg in this fragment I ponder the possible third category of teachers, those who stay, who continue to be deluded, those who do not breakthrough because they don't recognise the need for change in themselves or their teaching. For me it raises broader questions as to how the culture and management of schools can both challenge and support teachers to respond positively to the challenges of fulfilling the unmet learning needs their students are expressing and experiencing.

#### **6.10.2.6.9 Narrative fragment: I can follow the curriculum and I can also allow that discussion**

**Victoria:** *'We are in so much of a rush to get to grades as well, in my subject. I feel very, very frustrated that the kids don't seem get to relax and enjoy it and be more creative within Art.'*

She explains the tensions between the responsibility to deliver the curricular content and the responsibility to nurture critical thinking and creativity.

**Victoria:** *'Same Leaving Cert. (Leaving Certificate). I am forty-two years old now and I am teaching the same stuff I learned.'*

**Mary:** *The same programme?*

**Victoria:** *It's disgraceful. It allows for no change and teachers are being told more critical thinking, you know, like the students should have more opinions. You can't allow that because you have to get through the curriculum because there is so much going on. We are looking at the grades for college points to get them in but when they get to college, then they need the critical thinking and then the students are stranded.'*

**Mary:** *So there is a weakness in that foundation?*

**Victoria:** *Big gap. So as a teacher, I have learned, I have to allow that time. So what I have ended up doing is I come in over Easter and I give extra classes after school. That way I can follow the curriculum and within class I can also allow that discussion and let them be, be a little bit more open to their ideas and how they feel.'*

#### **6.10.2.6.10 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I can follow the curriculum and I can allow that discussion'**

Victoria is also grappling with the same balancing act as Meg between the demands of delivering a very broad curriculum in Art and the creativity and critical thinking she wishes to nurture in her students. She begins by reflecting on the frustration she feels as an Art teacher where she sees the push for grades in Art overwhelms the creative experience of making Art. Victoria knows that the development of critical thinking and providing sufficient time to relax and explore the Art processes yield results that carry students forward to both enjoy art and study Art. However, she also knows well the reality that the grades achieved at Leaving Certificate determine whether or not students gain entry to Art college in the first place. Victoria attempts to resolve the tensions between these two poles, creativity/critical thinking at one end and curricular content at the other end, by providing extra teaching time. She moderates her pace of teaching in class in order to allow for discussion and critical thinking. She compensates for the slower pace in covering the curriculum by providing extra classes during the Easter school holidays and by providing extra classes after school to ensure she covers the curriculum.

As I consider the implications of what Victoria has shared I realise that the aspiration of critical thinking as a desirable learning outcome in Art is unlikely to be achieved while working with an unreconstructed Art curriculum, in place for decades, in which critical thinking was not the impetus for its design. I marvel at the commitment of this teacher to the quality of the learning experience for her students. Rather than compromise on either curricular content or on opportunities for creativity and critical thinking she provides extra time, extra classes. She is committed to doing things in a particular way. Many of the other teachers acknowledge that this takes more 'time' and a particular quality of attention. They are willing to give it. They love what they do. They are passionate about meeting students' learning needs and about communicating their subjects to the best of their abilities.

### 6.10.2.7 Pedagogy in DEIS Contexts

The final sub section on the context of teaching in a secondary level DEIS school, relates to pedagogy. The focus here is on how we teach. Pedagogy relates to the methods, practices and strategies teachers develop in an attempt to successfully teach their subjects, manage their classrooms and reach their students. The narrative fragments presented below contain reflections on the challenges of: classroom management; teamwork; balancing the demands of the curriculum and nurturing students; keeping pupils at the centre of the process; paying attention to the day to day interactions; helping students identify with stories and find self-expression; and providing a reflective space for teachers to explore and develop pedagogical solutions together.

#### 6.10.2.7.1 Narrative fragment: You just have to be very mindful of the balance

**Meg:** *'An interesting thing for me Mary, this year, is I have taught CSPE, Civic, Social and Political Education. I opted to do a mindfulness course with one class group who were very on the edge of learning and staying in school. It was a decision I made with the previous principal without consulting parents. I simply told the parents we were doing this. Some of the kids objected. We were half way through the mindfulness programme when the new principal, who we have now, became aware of it and said 'you can't do that, you can't just pull a subject off a child for Department reasons, for educational reasons'. So I realised that I hadn't gone about it the right way...So I went back to teaching the children CSPE and I had to drop the mindfulness programme. I only have them once a week and we didn't get the course covered'.*

*'That child I just met down there, his mother said 'he came home yesterday and he said stuff came up in his exam that he didn't know and he is going to fail because he didn't know it'. I said to the mother 'that's my fault'. I explained to her why it had happened. She said 'well, that's not fair on my son'. She said 'he sits his exam, his first exam in the mocks and he comes out and says he has failed because there was stuff on it that he didn't know'. It made me think that while I can have all this wonderful time with the kids a teacher also has a very strong remit, which is to deliver the curriculum. There is that real balance in education, do your job, deliver the curriculum as well as nurture the young people and be creative. And, sometimes, as in the example of what I did, sometimes I get it wrong. I spend more time than I should on the supportive aspects of the work and something like that happened. So I think to be a good teacher in this day and age you just have to be very mindful of the balance between getting the curriculum, getting the tricks of*

*the exam system done well and I will for the main exam and I always do pull it out of the bag'.*

#### **6.10.2.7.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'You just have to be very mindful of the balance'**

Meg's fragment testifies to her personal experience of the need to be very mindful, as a teacher, of the delicate balance between teaching the curriculum and nurturing students. She draws on an example of an occasion where she got the balance wrong and had to readjust it. Meg recounts a number of errors in her approach to teaching mindfulness to a particular group of students. She stresses that though the decision to run the course was agreed with her 'then' principal (since retired) she did not consult with parents. She recognises that she should have consulted with parents. The new principal challenged her about the negative impact on students' subject time of teaching the course in class for a number of weeks. Meg accepted that she had made an error. She is absolutely honest in admitting that as a consequence of her actions 'we didn't get the course covered'. When confronted by a mother whose son reported that he could not tackle certain questions in his pre-examinations because certain aspects of the course were not covered, Meg put her hand up and says to the mother 'that's my fault'. Meg accepts what the mother says, that the situation 'is not fair to [her] son'. Meg reflects on how 'she sometimes gets it wrong' and she sees and promises to get the balance right in time to prepare the student thoroughly for the final examination.

I am struck by her honesty in choosing to share this particular narrative fragment with me. She could easily have chosen to air brush this narrative out of our dialogues. I am aware that the content of this fragment reflects the opportunity for increasing self-awareness that becomes available when teachers are open to being challenged about how they are doing their work. Secondly, this fragment reflects the shift from an uncomfortable new awareness that 'I sometimes get it wrong' to taking responsibility and action to get it right. Meg has already spoken of the need for leaders in schools to have courage to challenge teachers when they get it wrong. Here the shoe is on the other foot, she is in the role of the experienced teacher receiving the challenge that she has got it wrong and she is learning from the experience. Her insights remind us to be aware of the extremely

delicate balance between our responsibilities to teach the curriculum and our responsibilities to nurture our students. In the fragment following Victoria grapples with striking a similar balance.

#### 6.10.2.7.3 Narrative fragment: I think you have to believe in your students

**Nicole:** *'So it just means that every group, they are realising that we are a team. I think children are really positive if you can give them good reasons for your argument. I mean I have two or three kids and it's not that you can solve their problems and it's not that I get it right, there could be days when I don't. Unfortunately some of the people I work with, I often think they would get a completely different response but because of the restrictions they impose it's a little bit chicken and egg. Often as well, I think what teachers would say is 'look, you know, they are not working' but I believe in my heart often teachers are labelling them. They are closing off the avenue to actually getting to them. Often teachers come in and say 'look we are all doing this' (she emphasises all) and a child who says 'why' is seen nearly as the baddie.*

Nicole goes on to describe the small important everyday things:

**Nicole:** *'Whereas honestly my point is if you take care of the day-to-day and keep bringing it back to the pupils. That's why we are here. If you try your best and I know there are political things where you have to do things for the sake of it but if that is your main goal I honestly don't think you can go far wrong'.*

Her fragment below captures the heart of her pedagogy:

**Nicole:** *'It's just you know I think you have to believe and I am not just saying this in a patronising way, I think you really do have to believe in your students because very often I find with some of these kids they don't believe in themselves'*

#### 6.10.2.7.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I think you have to believe in your students'

Nicole, like Victoria, nurtures the development of each group of students she teaches as a team. As I listen to Nicole's voice in the recordings I am struck by her positivity towards



her students. There is no mistaking it. It is not just evident in the words she utters but in the tone of her voice. She believes that children will be really positive if they are treated with positivity and given sound reasons by their teachers for why and how things should be done in a certain way. Nicole reflects on the approach of some of her colleagues who apply a one size fits all to their students and who label students as 'not working'. In her view it is the approach that is failing, not the students. Nicole keenly observes that those teachers are 'closing off the actual avenue of getting to them'.

From my perspective as researcher Nicole's avenue is a wide open vista and her students are occupying the focal positions on it. Her philosophy, guiding her pedagogy, is to keep bringing it back to the pupils. She knows the pupils are the *raison d'être* for her. She reminds us teachers 'that's why we are here'. We are here to fulfil their learning needs, to develop their best selves. Nicole helps us see that the task is quite simple, if we are open to it. It means 'taking care of the day to day' details and 'keep bringing it back to the students'. So the devil is in the detail, taking care of the small daily interactions and the steps in the tasks. Nicole draws our attention back to the purpose of teaching, engaging with our students and to 'taking care of the day-to-day' things well. Her insights resonate with Meg's commitment to 'doing things in a particular way', always trying to ensure that 'these kids have a voice'. Julia provides us with an insight about how she uses story as a central part of her pedagogy. Her fragment reveals how story can be a means to reach reluctant students and give them a voice, an avenue of self-expression.

#### 6.10.2.7.5 Narrative fragment: That is just like me

**Mary:** *'Obviously, you have developed the hook. How did you come upon that hook of the prison story? How did you discover that?'*

**Julia:** *'We would have a period in the library every week and of course they didn't want to read. They'd been through all the football books and weren't even very interested in those...The librarian had a number of books by Paul Williams (Irish Crime Correspondent, Journalist and Author). So they became very attractive...it did get them interested in reading books and finding the different ways, you know, of listening to a story. Rather than just getting the headline and the exciting bit, you know, that there were people's lives who were affected by the actions of these people, their families. Of course some of them would have had parents that were in prison as well, so they had ideas and opinions about all of this as well.'*

She explains the opportunity for connecting with the students through the prison stories.

**Julia:** *'With that particular group, it would have been silent reading. There would have been myself, the librarian and often there would have been a librarian's assistant as well. We would have gone round and spent maybe five or ten minutes with each child. So they would have read to us. That's where the most interesting conversations would have happened, where they would have asked 'why did this happen' or even told you 'something like that happened to me' or 'that sounds like me in the story'.*

**Mary:** *So they could identify?*

**Julia:** *'Very much. I think it was lovely for them to be able to say that. There was one particular story, a boy, actually it was in a completely different class but it was the same type of book. It was a story about a boy whose dad had gone to prison. He was failing in life, failing in school, his friends were falling away from him. He was desperately lonely after his father. At the end of the book he said 'that is just like me' (her voice fills with emotion.)*

**Mary:** God!

**Julia:** *And you know it gives you the opportunity to say 'you know what, you are not failing and we are going to work really hard to get you a good education'.*

#### 6.10.2.7.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'That is just like me'

In the prologue and in the relationship section of the findings we have already learned that stories have been a source of inspiration for Julia as a woman and as a teacher. As a teacher she has expressed her passion to share the joy of stories with her students, as an English teacher. In this fragment the tremendous power of narrative to connect us to our own internal landscapes and to help us communicate our emotions to each other is palpable. For Julia the library in the school has been a blessing for her work as a teacher. Julia discovers over time in the library, searching for texts that would inspire the children, that prison stories are a hook for her reluctant readers. As she describes the potential of these stories to be used as a means to connect to her students we begin to understand her pedagogy in action.

Julia is using the prison stories as leverage to examine the implications of peoples' behaviour on others. She is also aware that some of her students have family members in prison and these stories provide them with an opportunity to express their views and opinions and to work through their thoughts on that reality. However, we really begin to glimpse the potential in the shared reading when we envisage the students in the library, reading their prison stories. I have been there, it is a big space with cosy corners filled with couches and scatter cushions. So here we have Julia, the librarian and maybe another adult floating from student to student, listening to them read an extract from their prison storybook. For Julia the value of the learning experience is where students are able to identify with characters or situations that resonate with their own lives and they are in turn able to connect with and communicate their own feelings and thoughts. I reflect back now, as I listen to the emotion in Julia's voice on the recording, in that moment when she describes the boy identifying 'that is just like me' in response to the boy in the story who was 'failing in life, failing in school and desperately lonely after his father' who is in prison. However, I look to Julia's response, which is to say 'we are going to work really hard to get you a good education'. This is a moment of solidarity between this teacher and this student. She is reminding him that he doesn't walk this path alone, it is 'we' not he alone that will work hard, it is a team effort between teacher and student that will secure a good education. I wonder how significant might it be in the life of a student who is struggling in school and in his life to hear someone say 'you are not failing' and I will support you to succeed.

#### 6.10.2.7.7 Narrative fragment: Wow, Miss, I am eating me Maths now

**Sophie:** *'I think I said this to you before, one of the things I have tried to do is to try put Maths into reality. Try and let the kids see this is about normal everyday things. It's no big deal, it's just another subject. Right, there's your glasses case (she picks up my case), get the area? Right ok, it's a glasses case. So why would you have to get the area? Well, maybe to see if the glasses will fit into the glasses case. So the kids say, oh yeah! So you build this up... Like going to the Cathedral, that was amazing. I brought the kids out. It was really good...or in the multi storey car park... Finding how many red cars and blue cars come out in a given time period, things like that. Doing everyday simple basics. One of the first things I did (she laughs), we had gone from ounces to grams and grams to kilograms and oh, for God's sake. So the measurements when you are making a cake had all changed. Of course I didn't have a new weighing scales, mine was all in ounces and pounds...I wanted to learn this myself.'*

*So we were doing the measurements and the weights and all that type of thing... We had ingredients in ounces and pounds... Then we were translating them into grams and whatever... After that project was done, we went and we made a cake. Simple thing. The kids brought home a cake. It was 'wow Miss, I am eating me Maths now'. Do you see, that's what I love, (animated voice). That's what I love, that's what I love about the inner city kids, they say it as it is'.*

#### **6.10.2.7.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Wow, Miss I am eating my Maths now'**

Sophie is a Mathematics teacher. She understands the logic and the applicability of Mathematics solutions to real life. In telling this storied fragment we hear the joy she experiences in putting 'Maths into reality' for the students. The told story refers to her work with students studying Foundation Level Maths in the Junior Cycle, of Secondary school (first three years). She smiles with delight remembering 'I brought the kids out' to car parks and Cathedrals. I hear the 'bringing out' also as liberating Maths from the constraints of the classroom for Sophie, as well as for her students. Outside and inside the classroom she thrives on connecting Maths to life. She takes pleasure in helping weaker students understand that Maths is real and can help us solve problems. Obviously the challenge of translating ounces and pounds to grams and kilograms was challenging for Sophie, because she had learned through ounces and pounds, and for the children for whom grams and kilograms were a new concept. Making a cake marked the culmination of their efforts to understand weights and measures.

My recollection of Sophie quoting the student who said 'wow, Miss, I am eating my Maths now' was hearty laughter on her part and a big smile on her face. In the telling I could see those precious moments of delight, for teachers reflected in Sophie's experience, when students discover and enjoy what teachers value and love about their subject. In this case the student is seeing that Maths is part of reality, it can be fun and 'I am eating my Maths'. In the telling Sophie expresses three times in a row, 'that's what I love' meaning the fact that the inner city kids she teaches 'say it as it is'. These words resonate closely with Meg's words in a previous fragment when she reflects that students, in the inner city, tell it as it is. This telling is what Meg advocates. Of course when students' telling is favourable the hearing is pleasant for teachers. When students report to teachers that they are not

learning, hearing the truth of that may be more problematic and responding honestly may well force teachers to dig deep or deny.

#### 6.10.2.7.9 Narrative fragment: If we allow for a reflective space for teachers

**Meg:** *'I think the difference Ireland will make is if we allow for a reflective space for teachers to look at how they are being transformed by their experiences. I think if the Irish Government, the Department of Education, allowed that to happen within the working week because at the moment it is not perceived as a part of your job to sit with a bunch of people and talk about what you have been doing. We have meetings, Croke Park hours which are imposed on us, Haddington Road hours, but even at those we don't have discussions. We are still being told, being given more information about more policies, about more things to do. There is no space, there is no space in a given week for a teacher to reflect with a colleague and sure that is daft. I mean in business if you didn't reflect on how well or badly you did, you would never grow'.*

#### 6.10.2.7.10 Tracing the narrative threads of 'If we allow a reflective space for teachers'

In our dialogue preceding this fragment Meg has been reflecting on the proposed changes to the Irish Junior Cycle programme, in secondary education. She has also been discussing what has been learned from evaluating the outcomes of changes made some years ago to the English education system at Junior cycle. She follows these observations with reflections on the future of secondary education in Ireland. She identifies the way forward. Whatever changes are implemented she sees the key to the development of secondary education as being the provision of a reflective space in which teachers can look at how they are being transformed by their experiences in school. Meg sees it as the responsibility of the Government and the Department of Education to provide this space, during working hours so that teachers can sit down together and share the learning from what they are experiencing. The increased working hours mandated by the various labour agreements are not used to provide such a reflective space. Instead, from Meg's perspective these hours are used to pile in more information, more policy directives increasing teachers' workloads. She calls it 'daft' that there is no dedicated space 'in a given week for a teacher to reflect with a colleague'. She suggests the development and growth of teachers necessitates providing this space. I recognised the absence of such a space and the need for such a space in my own teaching life, at first level and

subsequently at third level. That recognition led me to constructing this particular research study as an attempt to provide such a reflective space.

#### ***6.10.2.8 Section Conclusion: Being secondary teachers in a DEIS school context***

The section above provides an overview of secondary teachers' storied accounts of the DEIS context in which all five of them teach in Dublin's inner city. Five lenses were used to inquire into their storied fragments. These were: leadership in context; Being a community within a DEIS school; DEIS school contexts; and pedagogy within a DEIS school context.

### **6.10.3 Contextual Insights: Being Primary Teachers in DEIS School Contexts**

This sub section on contextual insights will direct our attention to what matters to teachers in DEIS primary schools. My intention is to provide you, the reader, with glimpses of what teachers are learning as a result of working in these specific school contexts. The glimpses will be provided through the narrative fragments, taken from teachers' stories.

#### ***6.10.3.1 Re-introducing the guiding narrative threads***

In this section we will once again pick up the narratives threads that guided our journey through the secondary teachers' narrative fragments. Four distinct but interwoven contextual threads emerged: Leadership in context; Community and culture within DEIS schools; Schools within communities experiencing multiple disadvantages; and teaching in DEIS school contexts. These four threads reveal patterns. Tracing these patterns helps to become more aware of teachers' insights and what we can potentially learn from them. However, though presented as distinct, these four threads are in fact organically interwoven through the fragments presented as teachers' narratives not only in this contextual section but also within the 'Relational Insights' in Act two of this Chapter. They are a methodological device. The threads work the narrative data over and back in order to reveal the patterns stitched through the stories. These interwoven narrative threads

have provided the means by which I have been stitching teacher's fragments to create a narrative research tapestry. This tapestry will represent the co-constructed knowledge we crafted together during the narrative inquiry process.

### ***6.10.3.2 Leadership in context***

Teachers' narrative fragments provide us with glimpses of what they have been learning from leaders in their school contexts. They also provide us with glimpses of teachers' insights into exercising leadership roles. All teachers have at least ten years experience in teaching. Many have between thirteen and fifteen years experience. One teacher has twenty-two years teaching experience. Between them these teachers are reflecting on a large reservoir of teaching experiences. Consequently they reflect on both being mentored and on mentoring. The sub sections below focus on both ends of that continuum, learning from leaders and learning by leading.

### ***6.10.3.3 Learning from Leaders***

A vibrant thread, reflecting on leadership, stitches through primary teachers' narrative fragments. This thread creates patterns representing ways in which teachers have been learning from leaders in their schools. These patterns put a shape on the characteristics of leadership teachers have found to be enabling for them. Consequently, learning from leaders in schools is the classroom in which teachers learn lessons about becoming leaders themselves. Two fragments, presented below, capture the patterns of leadership that have influenced particular teachers. However, they also resonate with the reflections in many other fragments in the body of the narrative data, representing teachers' reflections on leadership in this study.

#### **6.10.3.3.1 Narrative Fragment: She spots a spark in you and lets you run with that**

**Hannah:** *'I have introduced Mindfulness into the school and all the kids do Mindfulness. My class would have been piloting that before.*

**Mary:** *I saw something on the walls about it on the first day and I thought I will have to ask where the source of that comes from?*

**Hannah:** *A lot of it has to do with Catherine. Like when the principal spots things, you know, randomly sends somebody somewhere. She spots a spark in you and lets you run with that, you know. Since that Amnesty thing, I have never really stopped. I have set up the Student Council. I have just done lots of things. But, she has never gone ‘what are doing there now’? She just lets me off.*

**Mary:** *Very wise.*

**Hannah:** *Yes. It’s good, because you don’t want to stop people in their tracks. It stops the momentum.*

**Mary:** *Well, if you can find peoples’ passion then they are going to do great work.*

**Hannah:** *That’s what she is good at. People get involved in lots of things and somewhere in it they find their passion’.*

#### 6.10.3.3.2 Tracing the Narrative threads of ‘She spots a spark in you and lets you run with that’

Hannah’s narrative fragment provides us with glimpses of what matters to her. We learn that training with Amnesty on human rights and mindfulness training have ignited her passion as a teacher, a woman, a human being. She has embedded these values and practices into her teaching life and her school culture. However, her fragment also provides glimpses of Catherine’s leadership guiding her path. The phrase ‘she spots a spark in you’ has echoes of the humble beginning of a fire with potential to ignite once the flame is lit and the oxygen is provided. Catherine provides Hannah with opportunities to light the spark by encouraging her towards training that nurtures her gifts. The oxygen is provided by the fact that Catherine, once she opens up the opportunities, as Hannah says ‘she just lets me off’. Hannah is entrusted with both the responsibility and the freedom to explore the possibilities of mindfulness and human rights training and has the support and authority of her principal to embed the practices in the school community. As I listen to Hannah describe how Catherine ‘randomly sends somebody somewhere’ I suspect that selecting the teacher for the destination is in fact a discerning rather than a random act on the part of the principal.

Hannah’s experience of this entrusting model of leadership resonates with Meg’s Victoria’s and Nicole’s reflections on their principal teacher’s approach which was to fully support them without knowing what the outcome might be. Elsewhere, Meg shares a



metaphor, her principal offered, to describe the spirit of the experience. Meg quotes him as describing the work they did through the Arts programme 'as being like a jazz orchestra in that nobody quite knew who was in charge but there was always this wonderful melody coming up from the different instruments'.

The exercise of leadership in schools, in these examples, exhibits confidence in itself, and the wisdom to avoid micro-managing innovative initiatives. Meg's principal, like Hannah's principal, appears to have valued the 'wonderful melody' emerging more than the role of conducting the orchestra from the front of the podium. Hannah's reflections and those of the secondary teachers cited above, across the two DEIS sectors, provide testimony to the fact that principal teachers who seek to kindle the spark in teachers, provide avenues for creative expression and the freedom to harness it in their schools create a win-win situation. Teachers' narrative accounts suggest they blossom in these circumstances and the school community benefits. This model of leadership is distributive, based on principals exercising authority rather than holding power. The exercise of leadership in this way is invested in not only building teachers' potential but also creating school communities actively supporting creativity, innovation and a culture of learning among teachers. Teachers are also learning about good leadership by experiencing the benefits of working with people who exemplify it.

#### **6.10.3.3 Narrative fragment: If you value this course you should be doing it yourself**

**Rachel:** *I suppose for me like, I think, the relationship with the principal is really important. I think a principal being visible, and if the principal wants something done they are willing to do it themselves...When we were doing the Incredible Years training, Catherine was doing the training as well.*

**Mary:** Ok, as a participant?

**Rachel:** *As a participant, yeah. I think that was really important for staff to see that if you value this course then you should be really doing it as well. So if she is doing that she can come down and say this is important because of x, y and z, and this is part of our whole school policy. So, I think it is really important for a principal to kind of know that it is important to do that. I think she is very good at that'.*

#### **6.10.3.3.4 Tracing the narrative threads of ‘If you value this course you should be doing it yourself’**

Rachel is decisive about the significance for her of the relationship between a principal teacher and their staff. In her view a principal needs to be ‘visible’. I interpret this reference to ‘visibility’ as the necessity for principals to be seen and not just heard on issues. Rachel speaks from a position of considerable responsibility herself as a young deputy principal in a large primary school. Referencing the *Incredible Years*<sup>8</sup> training programme we become aware that Catherine participated alongside Rachel on this training. Rachel points out to us the significance of the principal as participant in these contexts. Consequently, the principal understands the potential of the programmes for use in the school community and can lend her authority to embedding the approach on a whole school basis. Because the principal understands this she can therefore allow her teachers to do what they do best. I note with interest Rachel’s final words, mirroring closely Hannah’s final words in the previous fragment, that their principal ‘is very good at that’. The simplicity of the words rings true. The statements are definitive. Rachel and Hannah are experiencing effective leadership and are simultaneously learning how to lead.

#### ***6.10.3.4 Learning by Leading***

This section of the findings, focused on leadership in participating primary school contexts, began by exploring teachers’ reflections on what they have learned from leaders in their schools. This sub section shifts the focus on leadership to learning by leading. Two fragments will represent what teachers have been learning from exercising leadership themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> The Incredible Years Programme, designed by Carolyn Webster-Strattan is a family orientated programme to promote pro social behaviour.

#### 6.10.3.4.1 Narrative fragment: I think that could work in our school

**Mary:** *'And where did the motivation for it, in the beginning, come from, seeking a strategy (for positive behaviour)?*

**Jessica:** *I think it began when I was doing...[post graduate studies]. What happened was there was a teacher, a lecturer there, and she had done a lot on whole school approaches to discipline. She had done, actually her masters was based on a piece of work she did at whole school level on a positive approach or on an approach to positive behaviour. So I just thought when she was telling us about that, it really ignited my senses and got me interested. I said I think that could work in our school'.*

Later she reflects on how she harvested this knowledge and put it to use.

**Jessica:** *'I suppose that would have been, all of that time would have been a bit of a turning point for me, between getting that information from College, then I suppose because there was a new principal and that also meant I became deputy and you know that meant stepping up to that role. I felt that was my responsibility to do something, you know, about this. So, and then because I knew I was facing that fifth and sixth class, well whatever about the fifth, the sixth did have a lot of need.*

**Mary:** *So September you were facing into that?*

**Jessica:** *Yes, September 2012. So during the summer, before September 2012, I sat down, I took time to go to the library, to read that lecturer's thesis and she said she would help me out in whatever way she could. Between that and the Jenny Mosley Circle Time strategies, I kind of combined the two, to come up with this system which is still in place today and is still effective and fresh because I think we, once you keep it fresh and keep changing the little goals, you know, it keeps it alive. That's important too because otherwise it can fade out, you know, and get stale'.*

#### 6.10.3.4.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I think that could work in our school'

There is a confluence between a number of significant events shaping Jessica's commitment to developing a positive behaviour strategy for her school. Firstly, there is the significance of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for her. Jessica pursues

graduate studies. The inspiration provided by hearing her lecturer teach about the possible gains of implementing positive behaviour strategies at a whole school level strikes a chord with her. It 'ignited my senses' she says. A similar spark ignited for Hannah in relation to the Amnesty training. CPD and training offered these teachers inspiration and the necessary skills for applying new strategies in the grounded context of their schools.

Secondly, Jessica speaks about the timing of these events as a turning point for her in a number of ways. A new principal had been appointed to her school and she had become deputy principal. Her words convey her assumption that this turning point in her new role in the school required a 'stepping up to the role' on her part. There is willingness and readiness conveyed in her narrative which enabled her to assume responsibility for finding a 'positive' whole school strategy for managing behaviour.

Thirdly, Jessica was facing a practical pedagogical challenge. She was fully aware that in the forthcoming September she would be taking the fifth and sixth class, where the sixth class children 'did have a lot of need'. Anticipating this need, Jessica was highly motivated to bring together strategies that would support the children but also support her as a teacher to respond positively to their behavioural needs.

Fourthly, Jessica did her own homework. She undertook her own research during the summer, reading her lecturer's thesis on a whole school approach to positive behaviour and combining what she learned with strategies from *Jenny Mosley Quality Circle Time* (1996). She created an efficient and effective system for developing and rewarding positive behaviour upon which the whole school still relies.

Jessica is well aware that this system needs to be refreshed and adjusted continually in order that it continues to serve the active purpose for which it was intended. This fragment reveals the transition of a class teacher to the role of deputy principal. Jessica 'steps up' to her new responsibilities inspired by her CPD, and the support of her lecturer,

to find solutions that work in her school. There is an intricate balance between the new opportunity to lead and developing the capacity to lead. Jessica's example illustrates the happy synergy between need, finding the right resources and supports, self-motivation and creating and implementing an appropriate and effective solution.

#### 6.10.3.4.3 Narrative fragment: Tell them what is going well and ask what they need

**Rachel:** *'On the Incredible Years, when you do the training there is a section about negative self-talk. I think that happens a lot with younger teachers as well, that they kind of go 'I am just crap at this, and if I can't solve this I am obviously stupid, there is obviously a problem with me'. Like 'the teacher last year didn't have this problem with x or y'.*

A little later she reflects on her role as mentor to younger staff members and on her support role to staff on behavior management.

**Rachel:** *'I think, the mentoring as well, being able to, cos they know, like it has always happened in this school where I would either go into the classroom, or Catherine (Principal teacher) would go in and do an observation and tell them what is going well and ask what do they need. I think, when they hear we are coming in there is not this 'aah, they are coming in'. One teacher that I am working with, as soon as I said it to her, she said 'yeah, I would love that, I would love somebody else to come in and see it'. So I think because we have always done it and there is that kind of atmosphere of openness. Myself and Ide (colleague teaching infants) would do a lot of team teaching and there are connecting doors. So there are a lot of people working together and people are in and out of your classroom. So I think people feel comfortable then coming to say 'well, so-and-so did this and I have tried to sort it out but I can't'. So they know if there is something serious in behavior it comes to me, if they can't sort it out'*

#### 6.10.3.4.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Tell them what is going well and ask what they need'

Learning from the *Incredible Years* programme (Webster-Stratton, 2016) provides a reservoir of knowledge on which Rachel draws in her mentoring role with young teachers in her school. In taking responsibility for that role Rachel empathises with the destructive

effects negative self-talk can exert on young teachers. She is keenly aware that the assumption that 'there is obviously something wrong with me' undermines the confidence of young teachers and makes it less likely that they will ask for the help they need. By providing us with glimpses of the context of cooperative working in her school we begin to sense an environment conducive to teachers learning from each other. Mentoring is not a random act of personal kindness by a more experienced teacher to a less experienced teacher. Mentoring is a role for which Rachel is given and takes specific responsibility. Her principal also operates as a mentor. There is an open door policy in classrooms. This means team teaching operates at each class level. Connecting doors between classrooms are swinging open. Equally Rachel (deputy principal) and Catherine (principal) come into classrooms to observe probationary teachers supporting and encouraging what is working well and providing support where need is expressed or observed. The fact that these observations are habitual rather than occasional is intended to lessen the stress for young teachers as well as remind them that senior staff can be approached to specifically support behaviour management. Rachel is confident that teachers do feel comfortable to come and say 'so-and-so did this and I have tried to sort it out but I can't'.

In the expanded narrative data Rachel reflects on her own early days and the reluctance she felt to say 'I need help here'. She is empathetic towards young teachers connecting her own experiences to theirs. Her capacity for exercising leadership has been enhanced by numerous opportunities, offered to her by her principal for external training in behaviour management, including the *Incredible Years* training and training for trainers in restorative practice. In my stepped back role as researcher the signs indicate to me that the principal has been nurturing Rachel's clear leadership skills and building her capacity to exercise her role as mentor and lead teacher on behaviour management.

Many teachers participating in this study point to behaviour management as a significant challenge for them. It strikes me that in Rachel's school the principal has recognised the significance of both behaviour management and mentoring to support the development of the teachers and to benefit the children. By designating a specific teacher, Rachel, to adopt this role the principal has identified the importance of this support in the community of the school. Rachel has transitioned into this role comfortably both because

she is passionate about her work and has leadership abilities but also because her capacity to support teachers has been highly developed by training specifically focused on behaviour management and mentoring. She has grown into the leadership role but she has also been nurtured for the leadership role. The hallmarks of the intention and attention of her principal teacher towards Rachel's professional development and the development of support structures for teachers in their school are clearly visible. The prioritisation of whole school approaches to behaviour management and to building relational skills here resonates with the role Jessica has adopted in her school in terms of creating a positive behaviour strategy for the whole school. It is interesting to note both Jessica and Rachel are deputy principal's in their respective schools and both demonstrate high levels of commitment and skill in fulfilling their support roles in developing positive behaviour and in managing behaviour programmes. CPD has been pivotal in building their capacities to do so.

#### **6.10.3.5 Community and culture within DEIS schools**

The second narrative thread traces stories of the culture and community of the teaching contexts of primary teachers in this study. The community of the school occupies a specific location, shares resources, shares a school culture and communicates values about how relationships are mediated in that particular community. The community is comprised of individuals with different roles and responsibilities. Those who are in school on a full time basis are teachers, students and other staff members. Others come in and go from the school intermittently such as parents, visiting staff and other professionals or members of the local community. The narrative fragments presented below are focused inwardly on the school as an environment. In itself it constitutes a community of people with a shared culture and a shared function to educate and be educated.

##### **6.10.3.5.1 Narrative fragment: Being able to use our first names**

**Rachel:** *'Exactly, and they do, even when they come in to the parent teacher meetings even, you can see them, like they are going like 'oh, that was fine'. We are saying 'what were you worried about'? Parents have said to me, when I was home/school (Home School Community Liasion, HSCL co-ordinator) they found even being able to use our first names. They find that breaks down a huge barrier.*

*Some of the parents could be older than me, and if they still have to call me by my surname, whereas if they are able to call me by my first name they don't have a problem. It breaks down that, I am better than you, you are only allowed use my surname. But they said they really liked that, that we were able to do that'.*

#### **6.10.3.5.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Being able to use our first names'**

The focus in this fragment is on building relationships between parents and teachers. Parents and teachers are important players in the community of the school. It is obvious to us that Rachel is sensitive to the anxiety parents might feel facing into parent teacher meetings. Rachel presents parents' comments stating 'that was fine' as a pleasant surprise to them, certainly not what they had been expecting. In her previous role as Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator Rachel has learned about the challenges parents feel in relating to the school and to teachers. They have pointed out to her the value of being invited to call teachers by their first names. Rachel reminds me that some of the parents of children in her infant classroom are older than she is. She recognises that parents interpret being obliged to use teacher's surnames as a suggestion by teachers and schools that 'I (the teacher) am better than you (the parent)'. Of the four schools participating in this research study only one has a policy where parents relate to teachers on a first name basis. That is the primary school where both Rachel and Hannah are teachers. It seems to me that the decision for both the children in the school, and the parents, to call teachers by their first names provides a strong signal about how this school respects its students and parents. This is a gesture towards community building. It invites the parents to feel comfortable participating in activities within the school. The naming ritual reflects the schools' equality of respect for pupils, parents and teachers alike.

#### **6.10.3.5.3 Narrative fragment: If we can feel good about each other and feel good about ourselves**

**Hannah:** *'Myself and Rachel and Catherine (principal teacher) did the Restorative Practice course during the year and it was for training the trainers, so we could train other people'.*



She reflects on the effect of this training on herself and on other teachers in her school.

**Hannah:** *'But it was one of those courses when, I remember ringing my mam after day one and talking about my sister or somebody else in the family and saying 'I understand this now because', using it like to help understand. I know that it has changed how I deal with my relationships. I have no doubt that if everybody, if it had the same effect on everybody, even a little tiny bit, and all the staff are getting trained in it, it must effect our interconnectedness, do you know, it must do'.*

She expands a little further explaining what she sees as the knock on effects of *Restorative Practice*<sup>9</sup> for teachers.

**Hannah:** *'That has a huge knock-on effect on the kids because if we can discuss, and not even discuss kids. It's not even that. If we can feel good about each other and feel good about ourselves and you have good relationships, you feel better, that well is fuller and you can teach better'.*

#### 6.10.3.5.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'If we can feel good about each other and feel good about ourselves'

This fragment reflects on the effects of *Restorative Practice* (R.P.) on a community of teachers. Hannah recognises that using the skills of R.P. as she says 'has changed the way I deal with relationships'. Simply put, when relationships breakdown for some reason R.P. provides a five step practice for restoring relationships. It does not invest in posing or answering the futile question, why did you do that? Beginning with the place of transformation of her own understanding because of her knowledge of R.P. she intuits that in terms of the community of colleagues in her school 'it must effect our interconnectedness'. She recognises the potential gains for the community of the school if teachers are 'feeling good about each other' and if we are 'feeling good about ourselves'. She sees the benefit for individual teachers, for the collective body of teachers and for the

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<sup>9</sup> Restorative Practice (RP) is 'the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision-making' (Wachtel, 2005, p. 86)

children in restoring practice in a respectful way that honours each person's story and creates an environment in the school where students and teachers take responsibility for actions that have ruptured relationships. Hannah's final phrase captures the transformative potential of practices that enhance the interconnectedness of teaching colleagues and the interconnectedness between teachers and students. Hannah sees that the result, when this potential is realised, is 'you feel better, that well is fuller and you can teach better'.

I am drawn to the heart of her sentence and to the metaphor of the 'well' being 'fuller'. It resonates with the spark that set me forth on charting a course to undertake this study. The question in my head and in my heart then, and now, is 'how do we fill the well from which we draw as teachers, women and human beings'? Hannah is providing us with insights about what works for her and what she perceives as working for her colleagues in her school context.

Elsewhere in her narrative data and in Rachel's narrative data I am aware of how R. P. has been used to restore relationships within the school community between parents and teachers, between teaching colleagues and between students. I was humbled and deeply honoured to be invited by Rachel and Hannah to observe and participate in the training they were providing to fourth and fifth class students to become peer mediators within the school, equipping them with the skills to help students resolve disputes and restore positive relationships. As I drove back from Dublin to Limerick after that experience I was deeply excited by what I had seen in action. I remembered what I loved and still miss about teaching children. I felt very emotional about being invited by these two teachers not only to observe but to facilitate a small group of children during the training. It felt as though I, an 'outsider' in the community of the school, was invited to be an 'insider' during that encounter. It seemed as though my sense of identity as 'teacher' was affirmed by the experience. I was grateful to be recognised as 'teacher' rather than 'researcher' by Rachel and Hannah, in that instance.

As my journey home progressed I became aware of my identity as ‘researcher’ becoming the dominant voice in my head. I began to take full stock of the significance of the commitment I observed the whole community in the school making to provide everybody with the skills to nurture relationships in their context. I remembered that, from my first visit to their school, I sensed there was something different going on in this school. What triggered that initial thought? It was simply this. As I prepared to offer my hand to make my first introduction to the principal teacher she opened her arms and hugged me. I registered the gesture immediately. It was not what I expected. It disarmed me. My intention to present myself as a competent researcher was disrupted by the invitation of the hug. Looking back now I see that it opened up the space for me enter the dialogue with the principal I was meeting as a woman, a teacher, a human being, a mother and as a researcher. We were and are women teachers and human beings who care deeply about nurturing students and teachers in DEIS schools. The dialogue between Catherine (the principal teacher) and I that day reflected our shared vision. It resonates with me as one of several golden moments that have shaped who I have become as researcher in the process of developing this study.

#### **6.10.3.5.5 Narrative fragment: There are certain people this school wouldn’t suit**

**Caitríona:** *‘And we have thee most phenomenal staff here. I mean like you go out there in the yard and there are more kids hanging out of the principal and hugging him. There’s more kids coming up and giving teachers hugs. There is nobody being pushed away and do you know what we don’t give a crap about the propriety of it.*

**Mary:** *Where do you think that comes from? Does that come from the individuals on the staff or does it come from the collective?*

**Caitríona:** *It’s both. We have been very privileged. We have a certain type of person that has come into the school. I am not being snotty or I am not being snobby or I am not being judgemental but there are certain people that this school wouldn’t suit’.*

#### 6.10.3.5.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'There are certain people this school wouldn't suit'

This fragment begins with 'we have the most phenomenal staff here'. I can feel her pride in her colleagues. I can feel her comfort in being part of their team of teachers. She provides us with little pictures of how the 'phenomenal' shows through. We glimpse 'kids hanging out of the principal and hugging him'. We glimpse 'more kids coming up and giving teachers hugs'. Caitriona is adamant that here 'we don't give a crap about the propriety of it' out in the open in the yard 'nobody' is being pushed away. Elsewhere in the data she talks about the importance of child safety. Here she is conveying to us the values that matter in her school. Children are clearly at the centre of the enterprise. They obviously feel loved. There is a loving atmosphere in this school from the top down. When I ask whether this culture is the product of a number of individual teachers or the collective staff in the school Caitriona attributes it to both.

She speaks of the 'privilege' it is to work with the other staff members. Elsewhere in the data she speaks about the integrity of the individuals and the discernment of their selection in terms of their fit with the needs of the children and the community. Her final phrase is opaque. She says 'there are certain people this school wouldn't suit'. The statement is directed at the school not suiting certain teachers. The inference is that certain teachers wouldn't suit this school. There is a strong sense of identification on Caitriona's part with the community in her school and she expresses strong solidarity with her colleagues.

As I sit at my desk listening again to Caitriona's words, I recollect a transformative moment for me, when the ethos of this school seeped into my consciousness. I was sitting with the principal, Dermot, in his office, putting closure to the fieldwork and explaining to him how I would go forward working with the data. There was a loud, assertive knock on the office door. A bright eyed boy, maybe eight or nine years old bounced into the room. He said to the principal 'my teacher said I had to come down to tell you, it's my birthday today'. Dermot got out of his seat, came around the desk, beamed with a smile and shook the boy's hand warmly. He said to me 'isn't that an important day, Mary'? Then he poked

around in the corner of the room and produced a large sack. He said to the boy ‘put your hand in there now and pick a present for yourself’. When the boy picked a little wrapped parcel out the principal said ‘now that looks rather small, why don’t you dip in again for a second one’. The boy sailed out of the room grinning from ear to ear.

It was a privilege to witness this golden moment, to see a child valued and celebrated by the principal. This is a ritual that happens for every child on their birthday in this school. It verified for me, independently from Cairtriona’s account, that this school places children at the centre of its agenda. The school community is rich with evidence that helping children feel happy at school is an important shared goal. As I drove home I reflected the affirmation the encounter must have given the little boy. Though the principal was in a meeting with a woman (me), the boy’s birthday was a legitimate reason for the meeting to be interrupted. Celebrating the child’s birthday, letting him know that he matters, that he is valued and cherished, was by far the most important issue on the principal’s agenda. I smile remembering being a witness to that fact. I suspect the boy’s experience might shape the story he might tell in the future about his experiences of school.

#### ***6.10.3.6 DEIS Schools within communities experiencing multiple disadvantages***

The DEIS designation stands for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. The fragments below provide glimpses of how participating primary teachers understand the needs of the communities in which they teach, and how they respond to those needs. There is potential here for us, as readers, to deepen our understanding of the acute needs of some families in these communities, and some children in DEIS schools. There is also potential for us to better understand the challenges teachers face, and the skills teachers need to hone, in order to reach some parents, and some children, experiencing multiple disadvantages.

#### 6.10.3.6.1 Narrative fragment: They are doing it the best way they can

**Caitríona:** *'First of all it's home/school community liaison coordinator. So home is forty per cent, forty per cent of my job is home visits. That's very personal. I am so privileged because people allow me into their home and they trust that I am not judging their home. I am quite comfortable going in, emptying half the stuff off the couch and shoving it over into the corner and sitting down. I will bring a packet of biscuits in case somebody feels 'Oh Jesus, I have no biscuits and Caitríona is after coming in'. So I say 'I hope you don't mind, I'm starved. I had no time for breakfast' and I throw a packet of biscuits down on the table and it takes the pressure off. I have a big ugly bus. I don't look like a social worker. Everybody knows it'.*

She continues later in our dialogue to reflect on what she is learning from the parents with whom she works.

**Caitríona:** *'I am humbled by people's ability to cope. I am humbled by parents, (she pauses), who might not always have their priorities right and they might not do it the way I would do it but they are doing it the best way that they can. They still want the same things for their children that I want for mine. If I was in those challenging circumstances I don't know where my priorities would be either. To be truthful education is not high up on the list of priorities if your home life has gone to hell in a hand basket'.*

#### 6.10.3.6.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'They are doing it the best way they can'

Caitríona's perspective on supporting the needs of children and families is built from the understanding she has developed over many years as Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinator. In sharing her insights we get glimpses of Caitríona as a woman, a human being and a teacher alongside glimpses of the context of the community in which she serves. Let's begin, as she does, with a focus on her home visits. Two phrases resonate with me from her narrative account. In the first phrase she frames home visits as 'very personal'. In the second phrase she counts herself as 'so privileged'. I interpret the 'very personal' in two ways. Firstly Caitríona is entering a family home, their personal and private space. It is a close encounter to allow somebody to come into our homes. I also read it as 'very personal' for Caitríona to enter that space. She values the access she has

been given to cross the threshold into people's homes. Her second phrase verifies this where she counts herself as 'so privileged' to be in this position.

We have learned in the Prologue that Caitriona hails from a large family, one with seven brothers and a mother with a big heart who always had extra in the pot for anybody who needed it. I have no doubt that her comfort level entering homes, clearing a space on the couch and especially producing the biscuits, draws on her own learning in her family of origin. When she says 'I throw a packet of biscuits down on the table and it takes the pressure off' we could be distracted by the suggestion of the throwing and miss the rest of the message. Caitriona has a finely tuned awareness of the pressure some families are experiencing and she is proactive in her gesture to 'take the pressure off' when she does a home visit. Her awareness of the impact of poverty on families she visits makes her offset any embarrassment by bringing the biscuits. I detect her delight in boys in the local community offering to mind what she calls 'her big ugly bus'. She is aware that 'she could leave it wide open' and 'nobody would touch it'. I see that she feels honoured to be offered such protection on the basis that she was somebody's 'cousin's aunt's teacher years ago'.

The second fragment pulls back from the home visit to an overview revealing Caitriona's perspective on parents experiencing multiple disadvantages. There is no mistaking her empathy with their situations. I remember the pace at which Caitriona's words poured out to me. They tumbled out rapidly, quick fired. They are deeply reflective but delivered with a fiery passion. Caitriona admires parents' courage in their 'ability to cope'. She feels humbled by it. She is able to separate how she might feel things should be done with how life sets a different set of priorities for some parents at times of duress. We understand Caitriona's respect for these parents in recognising 'they are doing the best that they can' under the circumstances in which they find themselves. She collapses her hopes and dreams for her own children with theirs seeing that as parents 'they still want the same things for their children that I want for mine'. From this perspective Caitriona is identifying as a mother and as a parent, with these parents. In the cadences of her own richly evocative language she accepts that 'if your life has gone to hell in a hand basket' education is not high in the list of priorities. I am struck by Caitriona's realism. She sees

the reality some families are facing in communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. Elsewhere she names these challenges as including domestic abuse, drug and other addictions, debt to money lenders, violence and intimidation from criminal gangs, homelessness, family member in prison, illiteracy, poor parenting skills and weak family supports. She does not resist the truth of the negative impact of those realities on the place of education as a priority in the lives of some families in the community. She is not judgmental. Instead she imagines herself in the shoes of these parents and that 'in those challenging circumstances' she doesn't know 'where [her] priorities would be either'. She is building trust with parents in her community from a place of respect for how they cope with the challenges of their lives. She is striving to bring them better support. I am humbled by her deep respect, integrity and passionate support for these parents. It seems crystal clear to me from our engagements together that Caitríona is doing what she loves and loving what she is doing.

#### **6.10.3.6.3 Narrative fragment: The school is like a little beacon of light in that community**

**Jessica:** *'I was trying to think, in the email you asked about what motivates you to continue? Well these things like when the parish priest comes up and says 'so-and-so said in the community said what a difference you are making' or 'how much the school has improved in the last two years'. Or it's like we had our concert last Friday and you see the people who come together for that, who really appreciate what you are doing for their children. Even there was a parent from the Parent's Association she had gone to the incredible work and effort of putting hampers together...As she said 'it is my son's school and I would do anything for this school, you know'? So it's those kinds of things. It does feel like the school is like a little beacon of light in that community. Especially in recent years a lot of trouble has gone on, on that stretch of road, where we are because of families who have dominated and brought unsavoury things to this community. You see it's an old community that would have been so very well established and there's elderly people living there. So I think it's very difficult for them to see, to be living there when all of that, I mean there are things like joy riding and such things going on. There are terrible disturbances. I think the school does hold great significance for them because we are so opposed to that'.*



#### 6.10.3.6.4 Tracing the narrative threads of ‘The school is like a little beacon of light in that community’

This fragment resonates with echoes from the community it serves. In the first half of the fragment we hear Jessica’s account of precious feedback for teachers from the community. The echoes come through the priest’s account of members of the public remarking on ‘what a difference you are making’ in the school for the community. Jessica amplifies these voices back to me to explain that they motivate her to continue teaching in a DEIS school. This positive feedback matters to her. More echoes resonate from the recent school concert with parents and family members expressing appreciation ‘for what you are doing for their children’. The hampers encapsulate one mother’s expression of thanks as she explains ‘it’s my son’s school and I would do anything for this school’. The narrative threads above are richly stitched with warmth, appreciation and recognition from the community about how they value the work of the teachers and the school.

The beautiful metaphor bridging the fragment depicts the school as ‘a little beacon of light in that community’. Jessica sees the school as ‘a little beacon’ dispelling some of the darkness in the community, a light providing a glimmer of hope. The second half of the narrative fragment casts shadows. It sketches the darkness. It provides us with glimpses of why light becomes so vital in the context of what happens on ‘that stretch of road’. We imagine a settled community with many elderly people unsettled by an influx of ‘families who have dominated and brought unsavoury things into the community’. Jessica punctuates her narrative with references to ‘joy riding’ and ‘terrible disturbances’. I get the picture. I also understand from Jessica’s account that the school provides a small but significant counter culture nurturing positive behaviour on ‘that stretch of road’.

Jessica’s reflections turn my attention to fragments of my aunt’s story over the past few years. She is now very elderly. She lives in Cork city, alone, in a small cul-de-sac. She is the eldest member of the small community there. Her neighbours are not very much younger than she. A family in need of housing were allocated a rental property in a house directly across the street from her about six years ago. The six years during which the family

occupied the house were a baptism of fire for my aunt. Let's just say she saw 'unsavoury things' and there were 'terrible disturbances'.

I noticed a number of changes in behaviour in her street during that time. Firstly, the elderly neighbours ceased to stop and chat at their garden gates, as had been their habit. They were being goaded so they drew their conversations indoors. Secondly, many houses added blinds or lace curtains to hide from view as well to view while hidden. Thirdly, it was a challenging task of emotional labour to support my aunt to cope with the challenging behaviour. I tried to help her distinguish between some of the behaviour which was certainly disruptive and more of it which was not so. I also encouraged her to consider the rights of families to be re-housed and settled in neighbourhoods that offer them and their children some respite from far more 'terrible disturbances'. Fourthly, I detected a shift for the better in the behaviour of the children in the new family over the six year period. In the beginning when I parked outside my aunt's house they told me to 'fuck off'. Over time they said 'hi Mary'. I suspect living in a community where they were free from the pressures of other teenagers may have lifted the pressure for them and allowed them to relax over time. They knew I wasn't a threat. I never responded to their rudeness. However, I did respond to their politeness.

The story ended happily from my aunt's perspective. On the day of her ninetieth birthday, balloons swaying from the gate, we had a party for her friends and our family. Her neighbours were on their doorstep. The smokers from our party were on our doorstep. They adults across the street were firing verbal missiles at the smokers. The only fire coming from the smokers were the lighted tips of their cigarettes. That day the family left the neighbourhood for good. The doorstep standoff was the final salvo. My aunt considers their leaving as the best birthday present she ever got in all her ninety years (up to that date) and an answer to her ardent prayers. She has begun to relax. I am glad for her.

However, I wonder how those teenagers are doing now? I already heard that the youngest boy is in trouble with the police. He is also, though just seventeen himself, about to become a father. He had already dropped out of school when he lived in my aunt's street.

My question as an educator is how could the DEIS school he attended have served his needs better? How can education support his needs now? How can education support the needs of his future child so that precious child can have the choices all our children deserve? Like Jessica I believe that schools can be beacons of light only if 'they reach' not 'just teach' children and teenagers. Meg bears witness elsewhere to the fact that 'we are failing young people in education'. Taking responsibility as teachers, educators, policy makers and researchers challenges us to be honest about how and when we are failing young people and creative about working together to develop more effective solutions to support our most vulnerable students, especially.

#### 6.10.3.6.5 Narrative Fragment: To develop that kind of empathy in children

**Rachel:** *'Home/School really opens your eyes to what the kids are coming from. I know going into houses. I remember one little girl and going to the house. The door was slightly ajar. There was all rubbish in the garden. I was kind of knocking and shouting in the house to see if anybody was home. There was a little baby, a teenager... minding the baby...a mother upstairs. I was just thinking all this chaos is going on and this girl always came to school with a smile on her face. Like, if you met her you would never think there was anything wrong. She would be the child you would say 'I would just love to see her do well'. I would love to. She deserves it, because at home she is kind of in dual role as mammy because older sisters are having babies, and in some ways they are being pushed to continue their education. So if they are going to continue with their education then the younger ones need to stay home and mind babies and stuff like that. But always, she was a great kid. She left us and they moved down the country, which I thought was probably a good thing for her... I would love to know whether she is doing well and is she still in school. She should be in first year, in school now'.*

In a later narrative she reflects back on how the knowledge she gathered in the HSCL role is shaping her current role as a classroom teacher.

**Rachel:** *'Because I worked in home/school...it also allowed me to see where the children are coming from. So that kind of made me more aware of, I suppose it gave me an awareness of my expectations and where they should be for the children. So not to accept children to be disrespectful or to be lazy but to kind of know they have come out of a chaotic house and where you can cut them some slack. Just knowing when you can push a child and when you can't, to be the best that they can be. For me I suppose it kind of in some ways has moved away from actual learning of reading and writing and it is kind of developing little citizens and*

*little people. I would think even the feelings check, I think that is a really important thing just so that the children are learning how to develop and express themselves and you know that it's ok to say you are feeling sad, and it's ok. Somebody else might say something to them like 'you can come with me, you can play with me if you are sad' or 'I will mind him teacher'. To develop that kind of empathy in children and the caring that they have for each other. I do think that is really important. Because you are working in a disadvantaged area for me it's really important that the children are happy in school and that they enjoy it'.*

#### **6.10.3.6.6 Tracing the narrative threads of 'To develop that kind of empathy in children'**

I selected two of Rachel's fragments to compliment each other. The first fragment is a reflection of the inferences Rachel draws from the glimpses she sees of a little girl's home life in her role as HSCL Co-ordinator. The narrative begins with the image of 'rubbish in the garden'. It moves to a teenager minding the baby downstairs, the mother upstairs. Rachel reads chaos in the scene. The fact that this little girl always came to school with a 'smile on her face' amazes Rachel now that she is aware of some of the challenges at home. Rachel warns us about younger girls missing school as their older teenage sisters, now mothers, are encouraged to return to education. Rachel's reflections echo those of Sophie, elsewhere in the findings, observing the same pattern in her secondary school students. Rachel's empathy for this girl is palpable. I hear in her aspiration that this girl 'is doing well' and 'is still in school' the fear that she may well not be.

In the second narrative fragment Rachel applies her learning from the Home/School role to her classroom teaching. Being aware of the chaos of the backstories of some children she 'cuts them some slack'. What does she mean by this? She is sensitive to 'where the children are coming from' without accepting disrespectful behaviour on their part. Caitriona also refers elsewhere to a girl giving her 'the nod' to indicate I am struggling today, please cut me some slack. These teachers are finely tuned to the emotional cues of the children and teenagers they teach, watching mindfully for signs of stress and providing latitude when they do see it. Rachel takes stock of how the knowledge she has gathered has changed her priorities as a teacher over the past thirteen years. Her focus has altered from teaching children to read and writing towards 'developing little citizens and little people'. She identifies the feelings check as an important space in which to nurture this development. This is a safe space encouraging children to express how they feel and

encouraging children to empathise with each other. I hear the emotion in Rachel's voice when she quotes one child as saying to another 'you can come with me, you can play with me if you are sad'. In my view this work has powerful and transformative potential to provide a safe context in schools in which children and adults are encouraged to express how they are feeling and encouraged to support each other.

Let me describe the adult experience, my experience, of the feelings check. I was scheduled to visit Rachel and Hannah's school for a day of fieldwork. Rachel asked me in advance of the visit if I would like to sit in on her infant classroom to observe how the team works and to see how the children relate together and engage with the work. It was December. It was early morning. I had just driven from Limerick. The children were arriving into the classroom. They found their coat hooks. They placed their bags. Some were chatting in groups. Others were quiet and solitary, maybe sleepy still. The little red chairs were placed in a circle. Rachel was saying to the children 'come on now, let's do our feelings check, come on into the circle now'. I was feeling very relaxed.

Then she turned to me and said in her teacher's coaxing voice and with a slight grin on her face 'come on now Mary, don't be shy, take your chair, we are going to do our feelings check'. Suddenly, I knew I was out of my comfort zone. I was not expecting this. I was prepared to do research not to do a feelings check. The infants looked at me with curiosity. Rachel said this to the children 'this is Mary'. They all chorused 'hello Mary'. Rachel began by naming how she was feeling. She held a small speaking object in her two hands as she did so. It was a multi coloured beanbag ball. Then she passed it on to one child who in turn passed it to another. I listened to the first few children speak. One said 'I am happy because my daddy came home for good'. I looked at the child's face and it radiated the feeling of happiness she had expressed. Then my focus shifted uneasily. I realised I was becoming very nervous as the speaking object advanced my way. The children were comfortable with the process. I was not at all comfortable. When a little boy passed the ball to me I said 'my name is Mary. I am feeling very nervous because I don't know many people in this school. Rachel is the only one I know in this room'. A little girl next to me looked me straight in the eye and with great sympathy said 'aah!' Rachel smiled.

In the evening as I drove back to Limerick I began to examine what had been going on for me emotionally as I squeezed into the little red chair and anxiously awaited my turn amongst the five year olds. I turned up to the school prepared for the fieldwork and highly motivated to meet the participating teachers and to hear and respond to their stories. My professional, competent, sociable, researcher self was on show. Rachel disrupted the professional face I was wearing by inviting me to share what I was feeling with the infants, and with her. There was no place to hide. The truthful telling of the children encouraged me to be honest with myself, with the children and with Rachel about how I was feeling. I was in fact feeling deeply challenged as a human being, a woman, a teacher, a researcher to be crossing the threshold into a school space with which I was not familiar. The feelings check helped me drop my mask. It literally disarmed me. Rachel now knew exactly how I felt. I looked overwhelmed with emotion. I felt overwhelmed with emotion. The encounters that followed that day were enriched for me by the morning invitation to join the feelings circle and express how I felt. I realised, looking back on the experience, that I had a lot in common with five year olds who might feel nervous or reticent on a given morning. Narrative inquiry provides a space and means by which I am encouraged to record my own learning as a researcher as part of the co-constructed tapestry of knowledge that emerges from the data. My emerging narrative as researcher, teacher, woman and human being is interwoven with Rachel's narratives and the children's narratives expressed in the feelings circle. They are now interwoven into my emerging story as a researcher, a teacher, a woman and a human being as well as being interwoven in the research story.

#### 6.10.3.6.7 Narrative fragment: I say 'you are a legend', they say 'I am a leg end'

**Rachel:** *'They don't even realise they are learning...when you say to them 'what did you do in school today'? they will say 'nothing' or 'we played' (she laughs)...Really, like at the moment we have started narratives and they are really enjoying it. I have a little autistic boy and he is like 'did you make those cards', because I made pictures of characters and pictures of scenes. He says 'did you make the pictures of the robbers and the prince for me'? I said 'yes, I made them for you'. He says 'God, I knew it, I knew it'. He is so excited that he is going to write this story about 'once upon a time'. I enjoy that, seeing them get a kick out of it.*

**Mary:** *It's fantastic. I mean, the concept of building narratives with senior infants, it's so interesting.*

**Rachel:** *They can do so much like, they are just so, like the bunch that we have at the moment are very good. I suppose you have to watch that you are not push, pushing. We have a few weak ones but they are nearly being brought along, by the bright ones. They like doing well. I would say 'you are on fire, hey get the hose there's another boy on fire'. They think this is hilarious. I say 'you are a legend' and they say 'I am a leg end', (she laughs)'.*

#### 6.10.3.6.8 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I say 'you are a legend', they say 'I am a leg end'

Rachel is a senior infant teacher. The powerful potential of working with infants through narratives, echoes through the engaged responses of a little boy with autism to the story building. He asks Rachel 'did you make the pictures of the robbers and the prince for me'? When she affirms his suspicion and speaks the words he uttered, her voice resonates with his self-affirmation and excitement, 'God, I knew it, I knew it'.

As I reflect on their dialogue together I intuit her self-affirmation as a teacher in sharing the joy of stories with this little boy and in knowing that he has experienced the joy. She says 'I enjoy that, seeing them get a kick out of it'. The joy encompasses them both. This moment in time resonates with Julia's passion, expressed earlier in this chapter, about sharing the joy of narratives with her secondary students and helping them explore their identity through engaging with stories, prison stories. These teachers' reflections remind us as educators and researchers of the potential power of stories as lenses through which we can explore the world of our own experiences and imagination and those of others. Rachel and the little boy are engaged in narrative inquiry. Their dialogue draws on the same well from which this research narrative draws inspiration. Their narrative methodology is mirroring the methodology of this research narrative inquiry. These narratives reveal the interwoven layers of our lives. Rachel's storied reflections of responding to story making together, nestle within the heart of this research story and provide its heartbeat. We are immersed in a storied landscape. Hopefully, we are learning to explore the interwoven narrative threads that create the texture of the research tapestry and reveal the patterns of our interwoven storied lives.

Returning to the fragment again we learn that the weaker children in the class are swimming along with the tide of the 'bright ones' in class. Towards the end of the fragment Rachel's remarks to the children, mirror her pleasure in their engagement with narratives, as much as they mirror her pleasure in teaching. I am listening to her recording again as it echoes her words, spoken to a child, back to me saying 'you are on fire, hey get the hose there's another boy on fire'. I know in that moment she was also on fire, she was having fun, she was being creative, she was fully present as a teacher. She was loving being a teacher and teaching with great love. Imagine going home from school and telling your mother that my teacher said 'I am a leg end'. Imagine as a five year old being told and believing you are a legend? I suspect, on the basis of my life experience and teaching experience, that there is little difference between adults' needs for affirmation and children's'. Recognising and believing 'we are on fire' is, I suspect, as important to us as teachers, women, and human beings as it is to the five years olds or the fifteen year olds we might be privileged to teach. This study is interested in building our self-belief and celebrating what we do well as teachers, as women and as human beings.

#### **6.10.3.6.9 Narrative fragment: What we are here about is sharing stories**

Caitríona provides a context in which she explains the goals of shared reading<sup>10</sup> to parents, and to us readers.

**Caitríona:** *'I would call all the parents in for a meeting and it's all about shared reading...Children of pre-school age love this. You get your own little cúinne (corner) somewhere be it on the corner of a couch, be it a beanbag, be it at bedtime snuggled up against the pillows. They need to find their sacred space. What you are really doing is you are carving out special time with your child'*

Later she explains the approach to shared reading:

**Caitríona:** *'We have parents coming in and going 'do you know this wasn't as hard as I thought'. There is a huge emphasis on vocabulary and a huge emphasis on story telling, as opposed to story reading. Because we have literacy issues with*

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<sup>10</sup> Shared reading is an interactive reading process whereby children and adults, teachers or parents, share in reading a book together.



*parents, I tell them to ignore the story (reading)...‘That’s not what we are here about, what we are here about is sharing stories with children...So what I tell the parents is ‘the very first night you look at the pictures, you ignore the words completely and you tell the story as you think it is’. The second night, and you are kind of gone into the routine, you ask the children to tell you the story’.*

Finally she talks about the impact of story sharing on children and on parents.

**Caitríona:** *‘It gives the parents gi-normous confidence because it is not about the reading, it is about the story telling...I would also say in the meeting ‘look, you are natural born story tellers anyway’ because you say ‘when I was small I did this’. Children love to hear about when their parents were small. I say when you are going to the shop say ‘well I came in here last week and I meant to get this but I got that’. We are always telling stories’.*

#### **6.10.3.6.10 Tracing the narrative threads of ‘What we are here about is sharing stories’**

Part of Caitríona’s role as HSCL co-ordinator is to be an advocate for parents. In these fragments she provides us with a glimpse of how she supports parents to be the primary educators of their pre-school children, through running a shared reading programme with them. In the first short fragment she gives us a context within she frames the intention of the programme. The intention is simple. The goal is that parents and children share stories. Caitríona is communicating to parents the importance of creating a nurturing place at home, which becomes a comfort corner making the association between ‘snuggles’ and ‘stories’ for their pre-school children. She says to parents that children ‘need to find their sacred space’. This phrase interestingly evokes the sacred both in the sense of a safe, secure, inviolate space and in the sense of being a blessed, holy and reserved space for parents to share storying and ‘snuggling’ with their small children. Of course the expansion of language and imagination are goals of sharing stories with pre-school children. However the deeper intention communicated by Caitríona to parents is that ‘you are carving out special time with your child’.

Caitriona's second fragment encourages story sharing as the aim of her work with parents, as distinct from story reading. In doing so she is mindful that all parents can tell stories though some parents may be unable to read stories. Caitriona outlines a number of goals for the work: to build parents' confidence in themselves as educators; to nurture positive encounters between small children and parents centred on story sharing; to build children's confidence, vocabulary, imagination and a positive attitude to stories and to books. Nurturing their capacities to tell stories gives children a voice through which they can express their little selves, expanding their creativity and language at the same time. This dialogic story sharing echoes the fieldwork process for this study. I began with sharing with teachers, some narrative fragments, storying my own teaching life. They in turn shared their stories of being teachers with me. I responded by retelling my interpretation of their stories back to them. The words 'what we are here about is sharing stories' resonate. They capture what Caitriona is doing to support parents in the shared reading programme and to expand children's learning. They also capture what this study is attempting to do, support teachers to share their stories in order that they, and we, deepen our understanding of their relational context in DEIS schools.

The third fragment reflects Caitriona's ability to encourage parents. It also reflects her views about the positive gains parents can derive from being involved in it. Her homegrown expression 'gi-normous confidence' captures a sense of the colossal potential she sees for growing parents' confidence in themselves. She credits parents with being 'natural born story tellers'. She demonstrates practical examples of how they are already storying their experiences to their children. She is acknowledging what they are already doing well and she is encouraging much more of it.

As I listen to her recordings now I am reminded of Caitriona's innate talent as a storyteller. She is lyrical, passionate, theatrical in the telling, and her turns of phrase are rich and evocative. She has a great sense of humour and great charm. I can imagine her sharing her gifts as a storyteller with parents. She encourages them to have fun with stories by creating fun with stories. She is modelling the practice she is encouraging. In the data there are pages of narrative in which she vividly describes how she teaches parents to spin a basic simple story into dozens of possible alternative stories with extra characters and

different twists in the plot. In my head now, I hear her voicing new storying possibilities to parents by saying, 'oh, do you know, I never noticed that dog in the corner over there, until now'. By adding this twist she opens up for parents a range of possibilities for how introducing a 'dog in the corner' might inspire a new story for sharing.

As I pull back from this final fragment in the findings I become suddenly aware that I have prepared for the fieldwork in much the same way as Caitríona prepared parents for story sharing. In my introductory session I mirrored the story sharing I envisaged with teachers by sharing fragments of my own story with them. These fragments were shared not for their own sakes, but as demonstrations of transformative moments from which I learned something new or different about being a teacher or about how I might teach. These fragments were signalling that I was not seeking a barrel full of teachers' stories recounting what happened to them or what happened at school. Instead I was mirroring the process for teachers of sifting through their stories to scope out what they had learned from what happened in school that day or from how they responded to a student in a particular context. In doing so, I was adding a particular twist to stories by placing a learner in the corner, rather than a dog. I was orienting the stories towards answering the question: how else does the teacher focused on distilling learning from her own stories begin to understand about being a teacher, being a women, being a human being working in a DEIS school?

#### **6.10.3.6.11 Conclusion**

The focus of primary teachers' reflections has been on the grounded contexts in which they teach. Four lenses have been used as filters through which they teach us about teaching in their school settings. These are: Leadership in context; Community and culture within DEIS schools; Schools in communities experiencing multiple disadvantages; and finally teaching in DEIS school contexts.

### **6.11 Stitching the Contextual threads together**

Act Three, *Being Teachers: Contextual Insights*, depicts participating teachers' storied accounts of teaching in DEIS school contexts. I presented these accounts by selecting and organising narrative fragments into two sections. In the first section five secondary teachers related their storied lives in a shared DEIS school context. In the second section four primary teachers related their accounts of their school contexts. These stories reflect their lives DEIS school contexts. Four distinctive narrative threads weave through the storied reflections of participating teachers on their school contexts. These threads trace the patterns of leadership, community and culture within and around sDEIS schools; and pedagogy in DEIS contexts.

## **Teachers' Storied Lives**

### **Epilogue**

## **Teachers' Artefacts**

## 6.12 Epilogue: Teachers' Artefacts

During the fieldwork I considered the possibility of asking teachers to choose artefacts to represent 'being teachers' or 'teaching' to them. Two things prompted me to do so. The first was reading Clandinin's reflections on artefacts as field texts (2002:114). The second was the lessons I was learning from Victoria, as a visual artist and as an Art teacher, about the significance of the visual medium as an avenue to self-expression and to learning, for her students and herself. Teachers were open to the idea of choosing an artefact. Some were reluctant. Having a huge data set of conversation to draw on from teachers' stories, I recognized that choosing an artefact would provide teachers with an alternative means to story being teachers.

Some teachers brought their artefact along to our second working session together. Most teachers took a little longer to think about choosing an artefact. I photographed the objects during which time teachers explained the significance of the object for them. In our final session together I returned their stories to them orally by 'reading' the mind maps back to teachers (see Appendix O). They contributed a title for their artefact during this fifth and final working session with me.

I considered including an artefact, representing my story as a teacher/researcher, but there was no found object that resonated with me. However, I had a creative idea for developing a conceptual map in order to communicate the research at my viva voce and to communicate the findings of the research study to a variety of audiences, academic and non-academic. This conceptual map has become my artefact and so it is now included as Figure 10, in the Epilogue. Figures 11 and 12 provide the colour code and symbol code legends by which to interpret it.

Throughout the research story narrative threads have been a guiding metaphor. I suspected I might therefore create an weaving threads in some manner to map teachers evolving storied lives.

I have also, as have the other teachers, named my own artifact as 'A Re-stor-y-ing Tree'. It is 'a' re-stor-y-ing tree because it is one tree in the forest of research trees, each contributing uniquely to our understanding of teaching and teachers. I have played with

the word re-stor-y-ing adding another dimension of meaning to the storying reference. The tree both re-stories the narrative inquiry but narrative inquiry also functions to restore in the sense of repair or renovate. It provides participating teachers with an opportunity to re-establish knowledge that may have become lost or may have been out of sight and is restored to the storyteller, the teacher, in the process of re-storying. Teachers' evaluations (see Appendix N) provide evidence of the restorative benefits of re-storying.

This symbolic tree is a conceptual and methodological device. It is more than a mind map, it is a conceptual map of the narrative inquiry. Choosing a tree as my symbol is both conceptual and highly personal. Conceptually the tree is a growing thing, alive changing, dependent on its context, it's relationship with other trees in the forest, each branch interdependent with its neighbouring branch. My symbolic tree is an oak, the symbol of wisdom. It is the appropriate symbolic tree because the inquiry sought to trouble teacher awareness and the fit between it and the responsibility for supporting the learning needs of students in DEIS schools. The oak, being alive, subject to change and having a long life span mirrored for me the changing nature of how we story our lives and the span of a teaching life which may be over several decades. The oak requires sustenance from the earth, nutrients, water, sunlight to successfully grow and develop itself but equally to produce resilient seedlings, the tiny pearls symbolising pupils stitched in a row onto each teachers' branch of the tree. The artefact is also a methodological and pedagogical device by which to communicate to any audience, academic or otherwise, the story of Being Teachers, Being Women, Being Human.

Personally the oak has significance for me. I am a keen gardener and have learned a great deal about nurturing and creating the ideal conditions for growing plants and trees through experimentation including through my experiences of failure as a gardener. I understand now that in order to grow something I must understand it, the conditions that it needs to thrive and I must provide them. As my experience has grown so too have my gardening skills. I have learned to be vigilant, to be aware of the signs of growth and of distress in plants. I also understand now that timing my interventions is vital. I must respond in a timely fashion to signs of disease, otherwise a plant may die. It certainly

won't flourish. Gardening mirrors, in my view the challenges of teaching to provide the conditions that encourage particular students to grow and develop, building their skills and resilience and confidence over time. It is also a good metaphor for nurturing teachers, developing more effective ways to grow their strengths and support their particular needs in a timely fashion. The skills those who love gardening need to develop to become effective gardeners, in my experience, resonates with our love for our children as mothers and our need to develop finely tuned skills to create the conditions nurturing each of their unique requirements for growth.

Social anthropology has provided a lens through which artefacts might be used as a means to understand the different ways people interpret the world. We could draw a correlation between the use of artefacts in this way and the use of narratives. Hendry, for example, alerts us to the significance of gifts where 'exchange is an important means of communication which expresses social relationships at various levels' (1999:53). Several of the artefacts, chosen by teachers in this study, were gifted to them by children or by others, for example: the child's drawing to Jessica; the ceramic plaque to Victoria; the 'best teacher' key ring to Caitriona; the bear puppet/key ring to Sophie; and the ceramic cross to the school, chosen by Meg). Chua and Salmond draw our attention to the fact that 'ethnography inevitably unfolds within a richly artefactual environment' (2012:1). Referencing the 'agentive turn' in the 1990's Chua and Salmon note how anthropologists 'began to focus on what artefacts *do* rather than viewing them as metaphors, texts or symbols' (ibid: 3). We could apply this 'agentive turn' to considering the use of the bean bag ball by Rachel; the yoga mat by Hannah; the mirror by Nicole; the library book by Julia; the key ring by Caitriona and the ceramic cross used in school rituals and celebrations by Meg. Kieran's perspective on 'sacred objects and human encounter[s] with the divine 'in the 'bits and pieces of everyday' echoes with Meg's identification of the cross as her chosen artefact. Meg sees her role as lightening the load of students in a marginalized community in helping them carrying their crosses. She sees this shard carrying as potentially transformative for both her students and herself. Chua and Salmon, citing Miller (1987) remind us that 'materiality is inescapably constitutive of the social and cultural: of identity, relations, exchange, memory and so on' (ibid:8). Arguably the artefactual provides us with another lens, a social anthropology lens, with which to inquire narratively.



### 6.13 List of artefacts and their titles chosen by teachers

<b>Figure No:</b>	<b>Teacher:</b>	<b>Artefact:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
1.	Nicole:	mirror	'Reflecting'
2.	Sophie:	blue bear puppet	'My Little Pal, Charlie'
3.	Victoria:	ceramic angel plaque	'Help Them to Fly'
4.	Hannah:	yoga mat	'Minding and Developing the Self'
5.	Julia:	library book	'Possible Futures'
6.	Jessica:	child's pencil drawing	'Teachers Holding Hearts'
7.	Meg:	ceramic cross	'We Carry Each Other'
8.	Rachel:	soft bean bag ball	'Speaking Object'
9.	Caitríona:	bear key ring/keys	'Resonances'
10.	Mary:	tapestry	'A Re-stor-y-ing Tree'
11.		Colour code legend for participating teachers as represented in Figure 10	
12.		Symbol code legend for factors as represented in Figure 10	



*Figure 1 Nicole: 'Reflecting'*



Figure 2 Sophie: 'My Little Pal, Charlie'

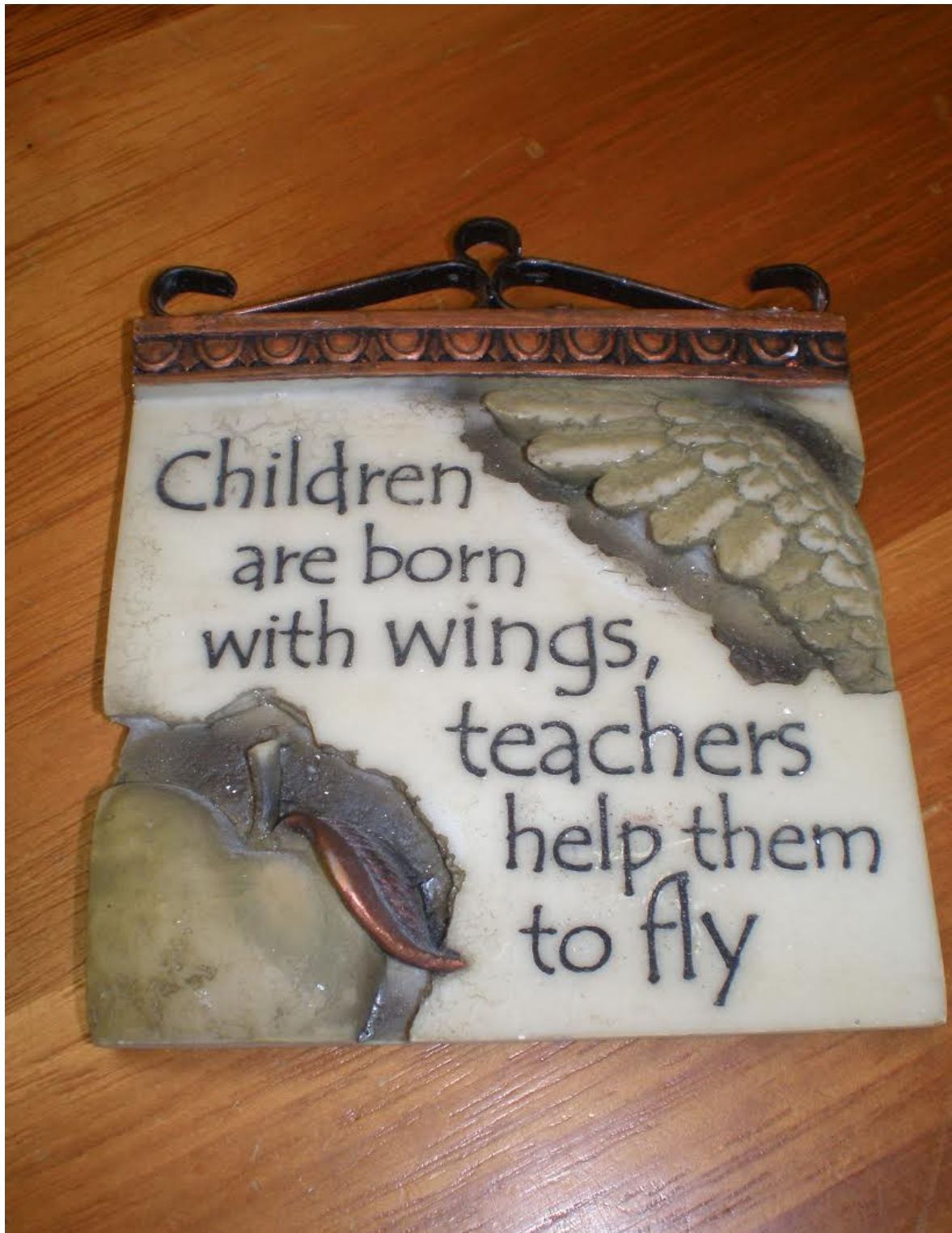
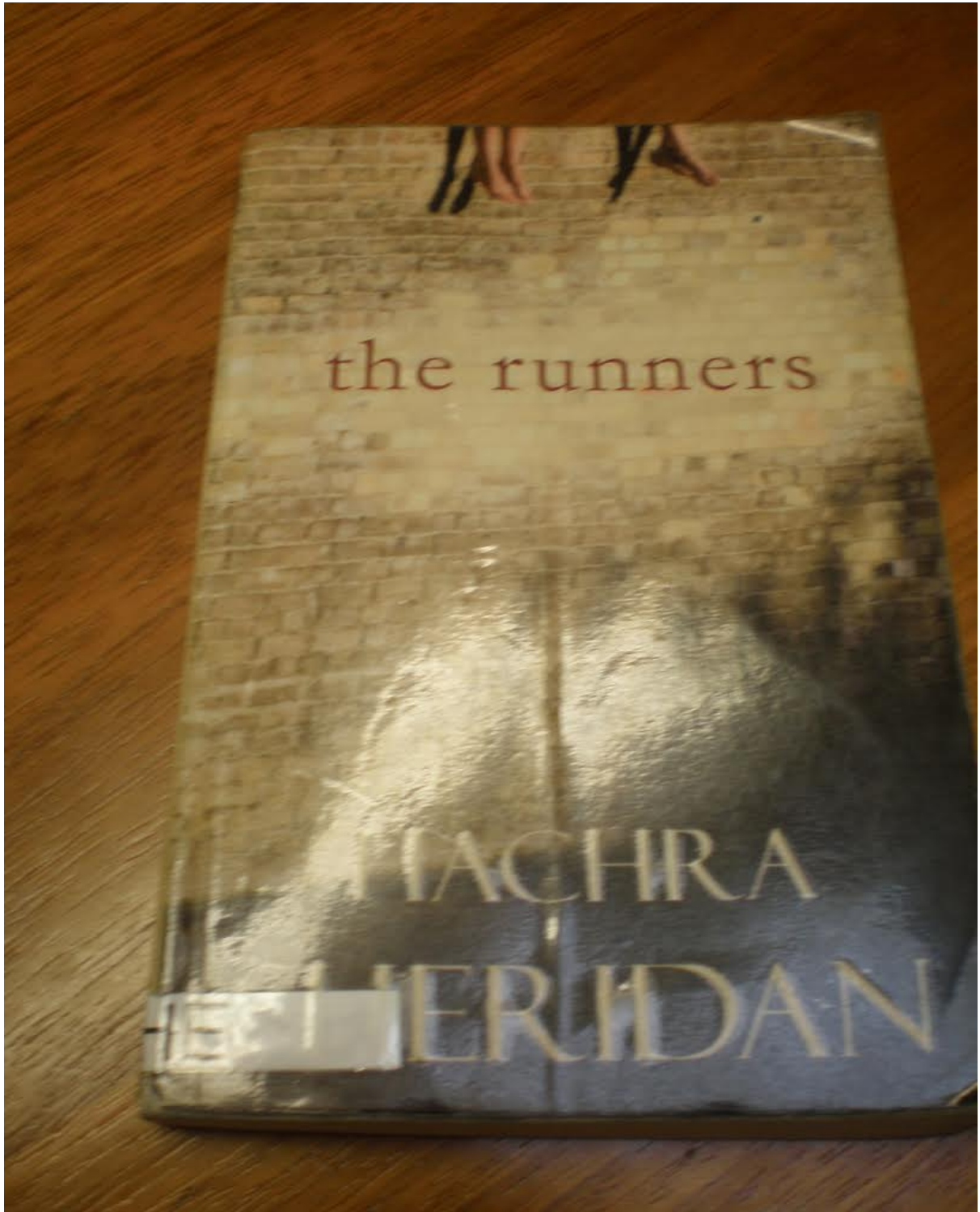


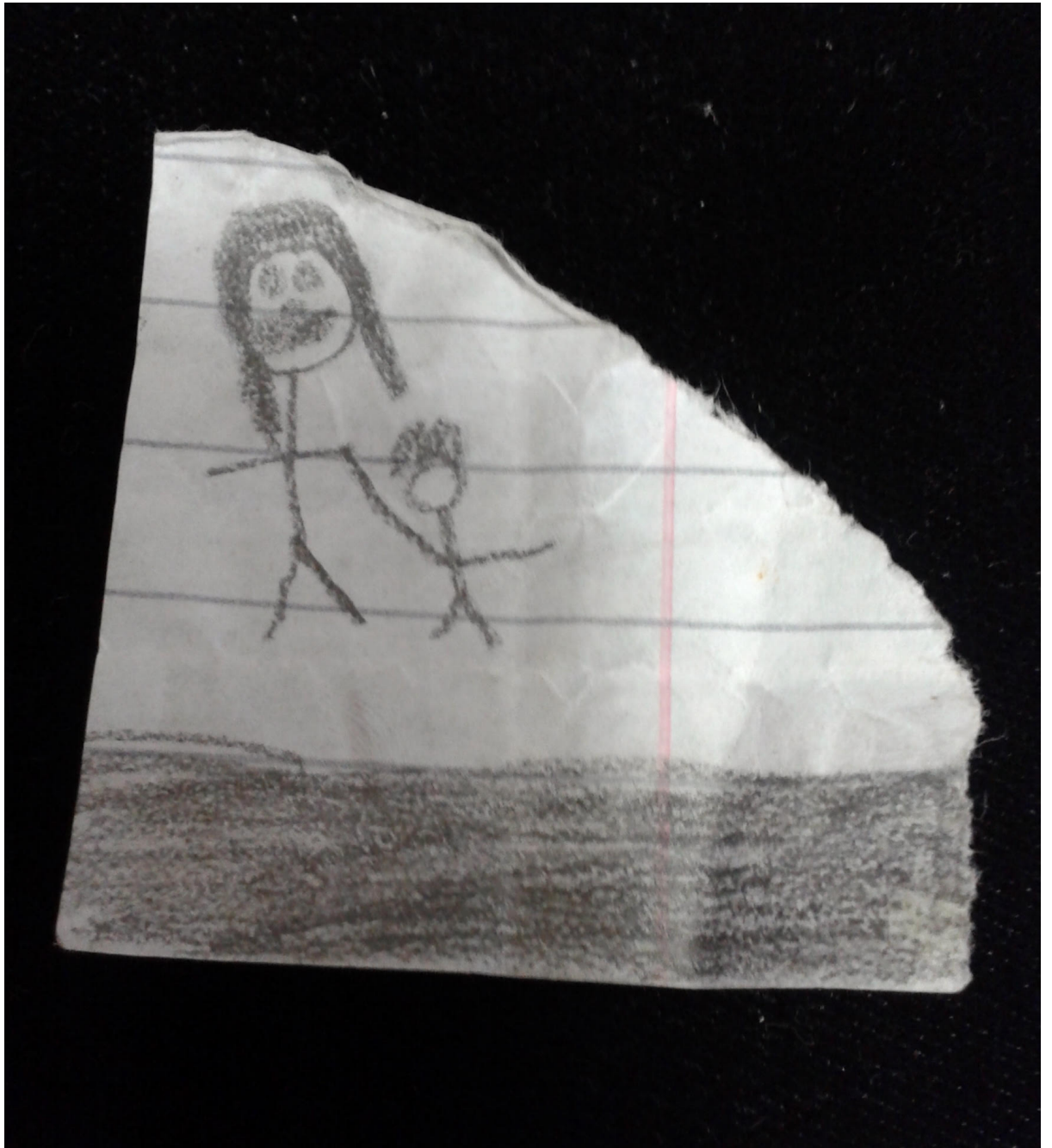
Figure 3 Victoria: 'Help Them to Fly'



*Figure 4 Hannah: 'Minding and Developing the Self'*



*Figure 5 Julia: 'Possible Futures'*

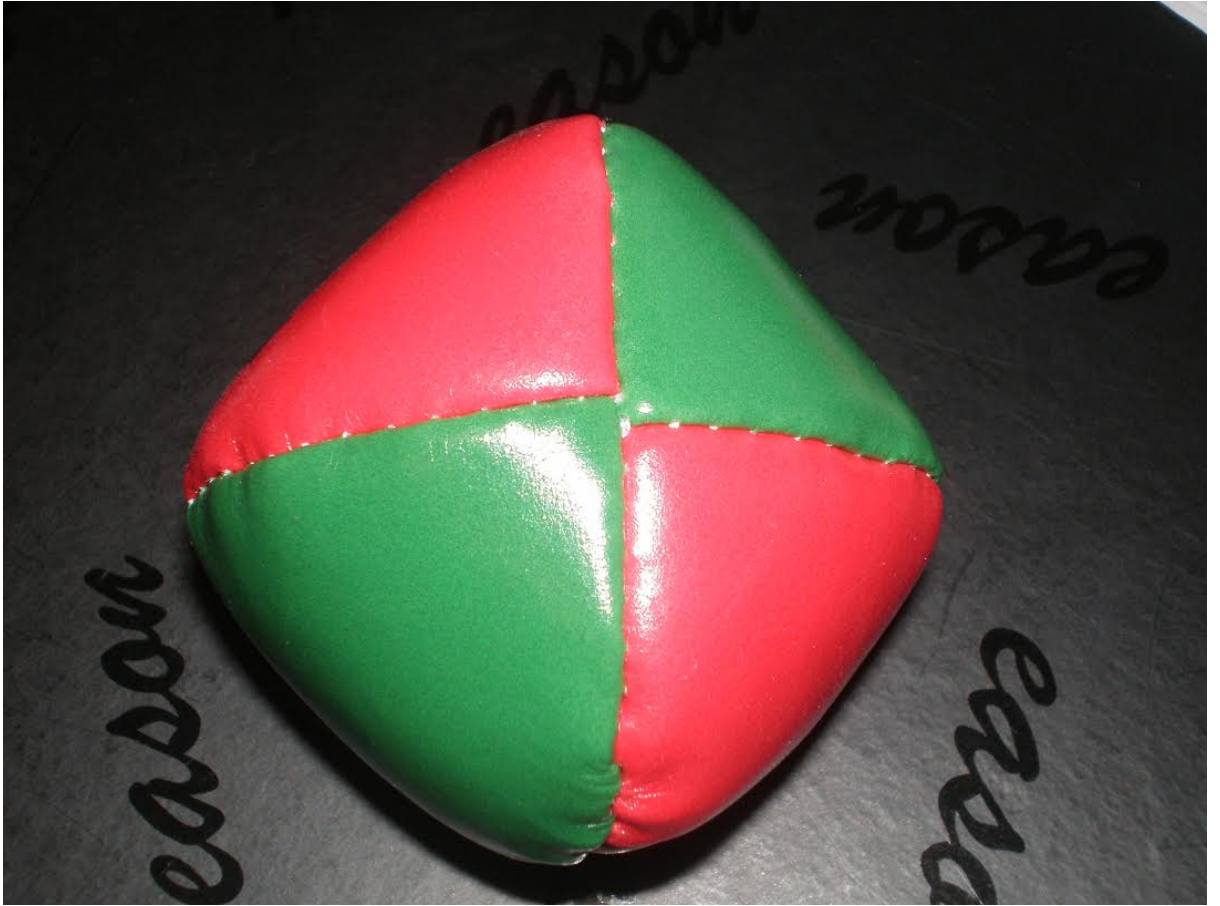


*Figure 6 Jessica: 'Teachers Holding Hearts'*



*Figure 7 Meg: 'We Carry Each Other'*





*Figure 8 Rachel: 'Speaking Object'*



Figure 9 Caitriona: 'Resonances'



*Figure 10 Mary: 'A Re-stor-y-ing Tree'*



Figure 11: Colour code legend for participating teachers as represented in Figure 10

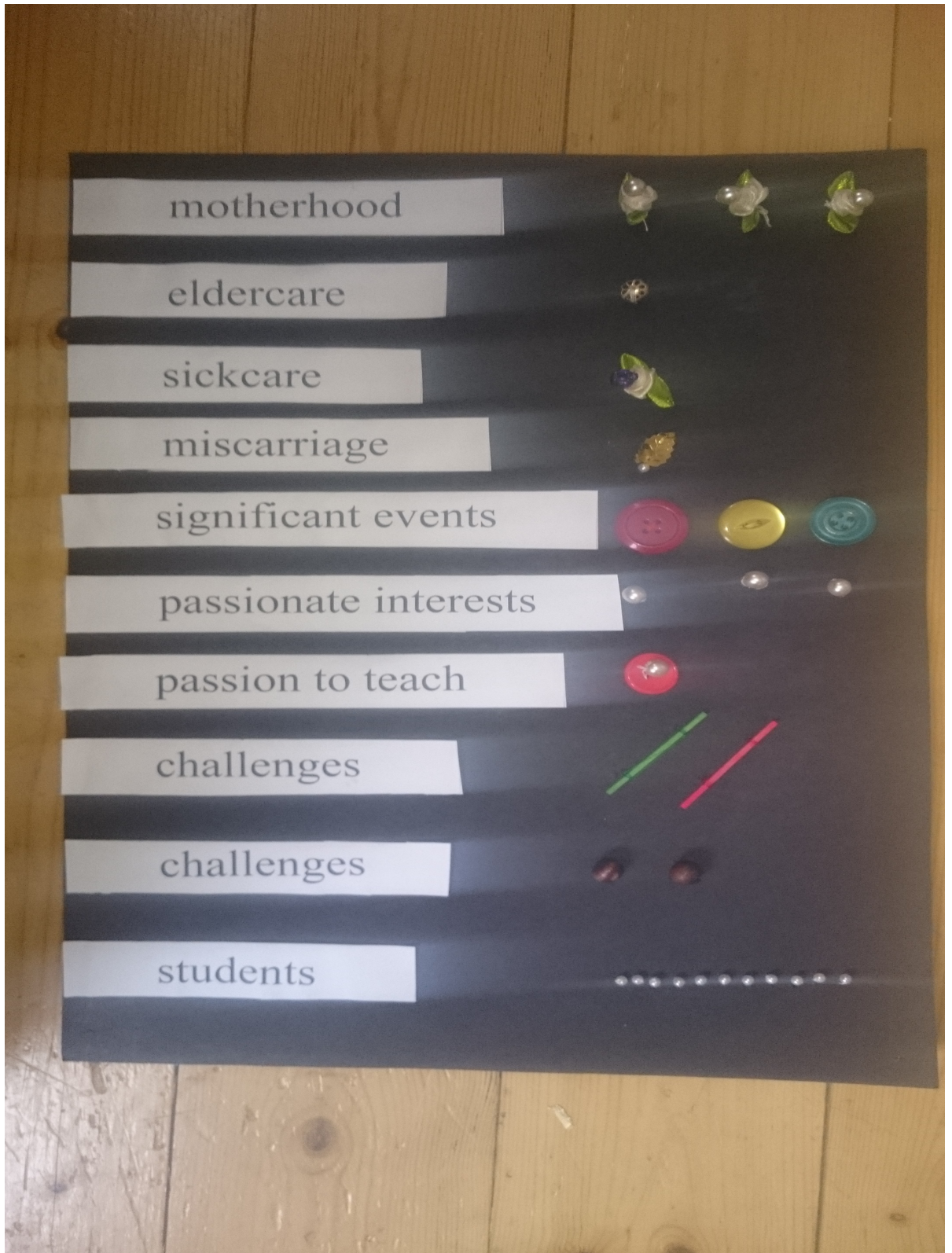


Figure 12: Symbol code legend for factors as represented in Figure 10

## **7 Chapter Seven: Creating a New Critical Conversation**

### **7.1. Purpose of this chapter**

The purpose of this section of the study is to weave a discussion between the narrative threads, tracing teachers' insights across the study findings and interweaving them with the literature review. Teachers' storied insights will provide the warp for the discussion. Insights from the selected literature will provide the weft. I create a narrative inquiry space to engage these insights. My intention is to facilitate a grounded and theoretical, interpretive and analytical, critical and creative, honest and animated conversation amplifying the voices contributing to this study. Participating teachers, researchers and theoreticians are educators. We will co-create a new conversation together, honouring our own voices and each other's voices as educators. Through this process we will engage in challenging discourses, dispositions, relationships and conditions currently silencing or distorting teachers' voices and students' voices. The conversation will engage current challenges and envision future possibilities for being teachers. Otherwise, how can we claim to support students experiencing multiple disadvantages, and nurture them to be and become their fully articulated selves. In the process of engagement together, lies the transformative possibility of becoming our best selves as teachers and as human beings.

### **7.2. Visualising the narrative loom**

Narrative inquiry is the loom across which teachers' stories, interpreting the '*contextual relationality*' of being teachers, women, and human beings, teaching in DEIS schools, are stretched. The theoretical threads stretch down the narrative loom. The colours, textures and patterns created by these threads emerge in the struggle for pedagogies oriented towards the possibility of delivering equality in education. The newer seasonal theoretical yarns, their colours and textures, are shaped by Feminist and Critical pedagogies and by Post-Modern, Post-Structural, Post-Colonial and Post-Critical influences shaping debates about equality and education. Of course these newer seasonal theoretical yarns draw on the previous crafting of more traditional yarns such as Pragmatism, Phenomenology and

Critical theory, presented in Chapter Three, of this study. Teachers' stories are stretched across the loom, the colourful narrative threads representing their storied lives through memories, artefacts, present reflections, future hopes and fears.

All participants in this narrative inquiry, teachers, theoreticians and myself, are educators. We are practitioners, professionals, theory makers, communicators, and human beings in relationships in grounded educational contexts, and outside them. We have visions, missions, values, beliefs, dispositions, skills and responsibilities as educators. We are of course all inscribed by our: identities; experiences; commitments; contexts; perspectives; beliefs; values; relationships; support systems; access to resources; and capacities. These inscriptions shape the stories we tell and how we hear the stories others tell. I will weave this conversation honouring the participating voices interweaving their storied insights to create a new conversation together. At the end of the process my hope is that the horizons of our understandings of ourselves as readers and our awareness of each other might be expanded. Developing better awareness holds possibilities for learning and therefore for continually becoming our best authentic selves.

The emerging conversation will create a new story with a tensile strength, stronger than any particular narrative threads used to weave it. This is because it will be co-constructed from the different participating voices in an imaginary conversation in the mode of Horton and Freire (1990). The process is likely to reveal regular and irregular patterns, synchronised and clashing colours, different tensions in the threads, smooth and uneven textures, continuities and ruptures. It is a work in progress, an emerging conversation until this chapter is completed. Let's engage together in creating this new conversation exploring where it can lead our mutual understandings.

### **7.3 Purpose for weaving the narrative threads in conversation**

The purpose for setting up the conversation is to interweave two types of narrative threads, derived from different sources. The first selected threads will be drawn from teachers' storied lives reflecting how they narrate their experience of being girls, women, teachers and human beings. The second selected threads will be sourced from the theoretical body of narratives presented in the literature review and supporting this study. My task as the weaver, is to work the threads together to co-create a new conversational tapestry. In undertaking that task I will be actively seeking resonances and dissonances between the educators participating in this new conversation, troubling the prospects for progressive change. I will be working the threads whose colours and textures blend and contrast, revealing the patterns to guide our way.

I anticipate loose threads that snag, snap, knot, resist, pucker, end up on the weaving room floor, threads not fit for this purpose. Some loose threads may be gathered and may contribute to future projects, new narrative tapestries yet to be constructed. Some threads may need to be discarded. As educators and human beings, we all face the challenges change brings. That challenge includes learning to let go of, or transform, stories that no longer serve our needs, or the needs of our students. It also includes supporting our students to let go of, or transform stories, that do not adequately support their needs as young people, as learners, as human beings.

### **7.4 Designing the process**

All educators participating in this conversation will be designated by their forenames, in the spirit of equally honoured voices. Participating teachers will be identified by their pseudonyms. Theoreticians will be designated by their forenames, with surnames in brackets for identification and attribution of their ideas. Rachel's insight about the significance parents attach to the invitation to call teachers by their first names impels me to use forenames for the researchers. The intention is to avoid distancing the voices of the theoreticians from the voices of the teachers. We are all educators. Our contributions



provide equally valuable insights in co-constructing this new conversation. All quotations from educators will be presented in italics. My contributions will be presented in plain text. Occasionally I will insert a word to front load a quotation or to make the narrative flow. In that case my insertion will be within plain brackets. Consequently, the reader will be clear, at all times, about who is speaking.

## **7.5 Opening up the heart and mind: Getting comfortable with uncertainty**

The task I outlined above sounded easy enough. But, now the din of teachers' voices and theoreticians' voices is buzzing in my ears. It stops me in my tracks. There is a litany of narratives to choose from, theoretical narratives, teacher narratives, my own narratives always running in the background. Then there is my task as weaver to co-create an authentic conversation by interweaving the narratives threads into a coherent cloth. The responsibility of devising a way to proceed, honouring the voices of educators, feels like a daunting task and an intricate balancing act. I suspect it will prove to be both.

However, I am encouraged by Clandinin and Connelly to go forward, with courage and openness, mindful that we are always 'writing research texts in the midst of uncertainty' (2000:144). This uncertainty is uncomfortable of course. I cannot provide a pattern in advance of the process. It is a creative and constructionist endeavour. As researcher I see the challenge to let go of control but assume full responsibility for what emerges. I need to develop the courage to co-create this conversation as an open-ended one. I need to make judgements, as the author, about the spaces particular voices occupy in it.

The process of narrative engagement pushes me out of my comfort zone as a researcher. Previously, in that role, I would have packed this Chapter with a vast line-up of theoreticians to re-assure you again about the solidity of my findings. The more big names I put in brackets, drawn from the extensive literature review, the more assurance I might have felt about how you the readers might perceive the 'discussion'. I would have ended the 'discussion' with all the loose threads tied off neatly, a fully finished garment. Instead,

here I am in uncharted territory. This feels exciting. This feels very risky. So, this is what it means to be a narrative inquirer. I have to trust myself, and you the reader, to journey with me. So, I will have to begin elsewhere and progress otherwise. I will 'begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:40).

## **7.6 Valuing teachers' storied lives and my storied life**

Using lived and told stories as a starting point has a tactical advantage because it places teachers' storied lives at the heart of the discussion. That is exactly where they should be. These stories signify the lives of the teachers who shared them with me, from their perspectives. They matter to the participating teachers. The stories convey how teachers make sense of their world and themselves. These stories also matter to me. I am implicated in these stories at a number of levels. As researcher I have a responsibility to represent these stories faithfully and to assist the reader to think narratively about the storied lives of teachers in DEIS schools.

Participating teachers' stories are implicated in my stories. They have helped me to think narratively about previous accounts I gave of myself as a teacher, a woman and as a mother. Teachers' stories also matter to me at a personal level because the nine participating teachers and I have shared a research journey together. We are no longer strangers to each other. Our storied lives have been interwoven for a time. Teachers' stories also matter because they inspire and inform the study.

The work of participating teachers in this study, teaching on a daily basis in DEIS schools, matters in the world. How they interpret that task, and how we interpret our task as educators, shapes how we teach and live our lives as teachers, as women, as human beings.

## **7.7 Valuing theoreticians' stories and what they teach us**

The literature underpinning this study contributes a robust and rich base, articulating the scholarship of a wide range of educators relevant to this study. I am mindful that I too am implicated in their theoretical stories. Since the nineteen eighties, teaching and learning social theory and educational theory has helped me to make sense of my own experiences as an educator and the challenges equality in education poses for education systems and societies. Theoretical perspectives, especially critical perspectives, offered me a set of lenses through which to view and better understand the deep-seated challenges delivering equality in education poses for educators and policy makers. These perspectives provided me with a language and conceptual frameworks through which I can explore my challenges and responsibilities as a post-critical feminist teacher and researcher. So, I will embrace the task here, threading the lived and told stories of these educators into the tapestry of conversations in this space. My intention is that 'where narrative's power of specifying combines with theory's power of generalizing, even more inclusive and multiplistic standpoints for knowing become possible' (Plath Helle, 1991:63).

## **7.8 Preparing to facilitate the conversation: Sorting the research threads**

I realise that though I have been designing the discussion over the past week, I have yet to set up the narrative loom for the discussion. In preparation for that task I have been sorting carefully through the narrative threads in the literature reviewed in Chapter Three, Classical Literature Review: Interpretative and Critical Perspectives and Chapter Four, Contemporary Literature Review: Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life and in Chapter Five, Narrative Inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum. Chapter Five presented selected narrative research on teaching. My approach to sorting and selecting the research threads for use in this Chapter has been both visual and narrative. With the findings fresh in my mind from Chapter Six, Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play in Three Acts, I have been selecting the research threads and recording them on colourful mind maps (see Appendix P). The threads I have selected are the ones

resonating with teachers' insights across the study. These are: voice as a pedagogical category; relational insights; and contextual insights. We will begin by considering voice.

## **7.9 Introduction: Re-storying considerations of voice**

Teachers' narrative fragments amplify their voices into this conversational space. Consequently, voice will be the first concept I will engage to stimulate the conversation. Teachers' stories, in this study resonate across time, amplifying past, present and future prospects of being heard, being partially heard and not being heard. Teachers' stories convey insights reflecting on a continuum of experiences between teachers having been heard/silenced as girls, students being heard/silenced in schools and teachers being variously heard/silenced in schools.

The concept of voice, communicating peoples' storied lives, resonates both epistemologically and axiologically, through many theoretical perspectives underpinning this research study. Voice is a central concept in narrative inquiry. Voice is also a central concept in Feminist, Post-colonial, Post-critical and Post-modern perspectives. We exercise our voices to articulate stories through which we make sense of our world in an attempt to communicate that sense to others and to ourselves. Ellis posits emotional sociology as providing readers with a means to weave the cognitive/emotional experiences and insights of the researcher into their own knowledge reservoir (1991: 123). By providing a layered account an attempt is made:

'to invoke in the reader the emergent experience of 'being' and to use many voices to induce in the reader a comprehension of an alien voice while at the same time fostering the understanding that we are all processual, emergent, multivoiced entities living different situations yet sharing similar lived emotional experiences' (Ronai, 1992:123).

Voice also reveals relationships of power and control. Dominant discourses amplify the stories, and therefore the voices, of those they privilege to speak, crediting their stories as

truths. Foucault's scholarship has helped unearth the construction of the archaeology of knowledge to such an extent that he asks 'How can the subject tell the truth about itself' (1994:128). We are consequently aware that dominant discourses particularly silence, marginalise or misrepresent 'subaltern' voices to such an extent that it becomes essential to question whether 'subaltern' voices can speak (Spivak, 1993:6).

Voice, consequently, has been a pivotal concept in theoretical work examining differential power relationships predicated on the injustices created by sexism, racism, slavery, homophobia, classism, ethnocentrism and other inequitable systems. Feminist, Critical, Post-critical, Post-structural, Post-modern and Post-colonial theorists provide conceptual frameworks within which to trouble the concept of multiple and multi-layered voices. Teachers' storied fragments will lead us into the conversation about voice, in this Chapter, helping us to engage with the complexity and significance of voice in considering the possibilities for critical pedagogies focused on delivering equality through education. I use 'voices' purposefully, the plural version of the word. In doing so I acknowledge my learning from the theoreticians about the multiplicity of voices, and the complexity of layers through which an individual expresses the different registers amplifying one person's voice, communicating their storied lives. Voices heard require a response in order to understand that their story has been heard, acknowledged and understood. Voices silenced demand an urgent response from us as teachers, because as educators our challenge is to teach, thereby to support students to articulate their voices and support them to create better stories to live by. This task is at the heart of teaching and learning.

### **7.10 First conversation: Re-storying considerations of voice**

**Meg:** *'There were seven of us growing up and I wasn't heard, in the way I should have been...I was listened to on so many levels but I wasn't listened to on some very important levels'.*

**Mary:** Does your story of being heard and not being heard in the way you should have been, link to your story of becoming and being a teacher?

**Meg:** [Well], *'I was living in Leinster Square. Kids used to knock on my door. I used to just banter with the kids on the road. Something about the children just spoke to me'.*

**Mary:** I remember you said 'something about the children spoke to you'. Something in the in the children's voices resonated with you. In our conversations, you linked that recognition clearly with eventually finding a pathway into teaching.

**Meg:** [Yes], *'I went into this [teaching] because I wanted to give children a voice'.*

**Mary:** So, that is the source of your motivation to teach. I know from the stories you shared that you use the arts as a vehicle to encourage students' self-expression. That of course includes nurturing voice as a means of self-expression. The backstory you shared helps me to understand your present story as a teacher. Your passion for theatre animates your mission to give children a voice. From your storied reflections I am discerning that your passion and your mission converge in your teaching. Do your colleagues share your mission for nurturing children's voices?

**Meg:** [Well, here is an example], *'this child just put her hand up and said this is really unfair miss, you promised we could go at half three and here we are at four o'clock. I stopped and I said, you are so right and I am really sorry and I will make it up to you...But, I followed a teacher into the staffroom and all I heard her saying as I walked in was those Arts kids have lost the run of themselves, giving off to Meg for doing what she needs to do. And, I thought she doesn't get it, she doesn't get it that these kids actually have a voice'.*

**Mary:** So some teachers feel deeply threatened when children articulate their voices to argue for fair play in school. I hear you saying that not all your colleagues share the same vision and mission. However, I remember you saying that the child who challenged you about going home at half past clearly felt she had permission to state her case to you?

**Meg:** [Yes], *'I think in DEIS schools we are actually blessed in one sense in that kids vote with their feet...In this school, if a kid feels they are not learning they say it'.*

**Mary:** Caitríona will you join the conversation here. Were you in a school where your voice was heard, as a little girl?

**Caitríona:** [No]‘the múinteoir [teacher]...was a lightening bitch. I actually had a wasp sting She wouldn't listen to me as to why I let a cry out of me, a roar out of me. I got a whack for disrupting the class.’

**Mary:** It strikes me as interesting that this is the experience of being a girl in school, which you choose to tell me. I can see it resonates strongly with you still. How did you feel about that experience?

**Caitríona:** ‘I just remember thinking ‘when I am a teacher, I’m going to be a nice one...I think I wanted to cancel her out’.

**Mary:** Wow, that’s a strong and focused intention. So, you already knew you wanted to be a teacher then. You also had a mission. You wanted to erase this teachers’ negative imprint, ‘cancel her out’ by being ‘a nice one’. You have been a teacher for many years now, in a DEIS primary school. What challenges does being a ‘nice’ teacher demand?

**Caitríona:** ‘I think you have to be coming in with the belief that these beautiful people are relying on you and that you need to be there to hear them’.

**Mary:** So children need to know they can rely on you and that you are committed to hearing them. I remember, in our conversations together, you spoke about the simple gestures letting children know that they are being heard, that they can rely on you, that they each matter, that they are beautiful. Caitríona, I feel really emotional now again, remembering your words. I could see how much you cared about the children.

**Caitríona:** [I want], ‘that they learn, if nothing else, that there are people who care...If it is only someone to button your coat or zip your coat up on a day in the yard when it is cold or tie your laces or give you an old cuddle when you are feeling miserable or for somebody to recognise that you are feeling miserable’.

**Mary:** I am struck by the contrast between how you articulate your role as a teacher and the story you shared about your own experiences of your teacher, when you were a girl. Nicole can I invite you to join the conversation. We have been exploring the issue of children’s voices, beginning with when teachers were girls, because that’s where some of you began storying with me. Some teachers have shared multiple experiences of being

heard on the one hand and not being heard on the other hand, as young girls. Some have spoken about experiences at school, others about experiences at home. What experiences resonate with you Nicole?

**Nicole:** *'I had my granny down the road... I was extremely close to her... I think of her telling me stories at a very young age, I mean, as in life stories...She was just a brilliant listener...You know, I realise now and what I miss most about her is that you could come home and even say 'I want to be a teacher' and she would just sit down and listen. She always seemed to have time'.*

**Mary:** So she heard your voice and she was a brilliant listener. Nicole did your experiences at school help you to articulate your voice, express yourself?

**Nicole:** *'I went to a country school. I remember the knot in my stomach walking down the road. It wasn't the hitting, it wasn't the verbal abuse, it was actually just the atmosphere, so tight, so tight'.*

**Mary:** How have those experiences shaped you as a teacher?

**Nicole:** *'I have to be a little bit mindful of the way I say something, you know, so that it doesn't cause stress. Even in my own life, when I got stressed I got nothing done. There is no learning in it really'.*

**Mary:** I hear from your stories, shared with me, that you have integrated that painful lesson, into a positive objective that students in your classroom feel at ease.

**Nicole:** *'I think that the greatest thing you can give a child is confidence then...they learn in a completely different way...I think sometimes teachers...if they stopped for a minute and asked, would a child that is having a difficulty come back and ask me for help'?*

**Mary:** That's a really good question. I suppose a child with a difficulty would only come back and ask for help in a classroom where they felt their voice would be heard and where the invitation to seek help was openly offered. Hannah, how was your experience as a girl, in terms of your voice being heard or not?



**Hannah:** *'My mother...when I was younger and I was the oldest, I had her to myself for three and a half years...You know if I asked why the sky is blue, she went as far as she could to answer that for five minutes...She would be a very good listener and she would be the one who I would go to, to talk.'*

**Mary:** I know when you described yourself to me as a deep thinker. I joked then about your mother's influence and said 'look what she started'. I suspect getting positive responses encouraged you to ask more questions. Meg, Caitríona, Nicole and Hannah, you have identified mixed experiences of being heard and silenced as girls. I find it interesting that those of you who tell stories of negative experiences as girls, seem to have transformed them into a firm commitment to hearing children's voices, to being nice, to not wanting to cause students stress. What about articulating your voices as teachers? Would any one of you like to reflect on being heard or not being heard as teachers and maybe on the challenges of listening, the other side of the speaking equation?

**Meg:** *'I was validated by my principal...Tim Kavanagh [my first principal] and I was validated by Fred Winters [my second principal]. They just got me and they just trusted me.'*

**Mary:** So those principals got you, trusted you. They listened. They heard your voice as a teacher. So, how are you as a listener?

**Meg:** *'I think that is what I lacked in my early years in teaching, a capacity to listen to my colleagues. I think I judged very quickly. I did a lot of work on myself. So...it was easier to nurture that in myself this stillness and a capacity to listen.'*

**Mary:** I remember you spoke about doing a solo run and being allowed to, in your early years as a teacher. I know you now see the value in teamwork. What about speaking out as teachers, would somebody like to comment on that?

**Victoria:** *'Sometimes, you know, teachers are afraid to say that they have had a bad time because they think they are bad teachers...Teachers can be very, very hard on themselves...'*

**Mary:** Meg suggests teachers can also be hard on each other too? If teachers are 'afraid to say' could this be a reflection of a school culture that silences them? Could this be a reflection of their own self-doubt or self-criticism or both? What helps you in this situation Victoria?

**Victoria:** *'Even just to sit and have a five-minute chat with a colleague to say God, I am feeling so tired, and maybe they are feeling exactly the same'.*

**Mary:** So telling what you are experiencing and feeling by sharing your story with a colleague can lighten the load. Are there other experiences of being heard or not being heard as teachers, that you would like to share?

**Nicole:** [Well for example], *'I don't know have you taught LCA Mary [Leaving Certificate Applied]?...Preparing for the inspector to come in we were looking at it and saying we could improve this and this...[We said], let's go to Management. Let's talk about it and we have practical solutions for how we can bring it together. I can't see that happening. I did go. I did explain. Nothing has happened...So in order for the child, like in my view, it should be totally student centred...But that doesn't seem to be the drive and you are just kind of going, oh, [she pauses]. I get really disillusioned because I then kind of go, well then what is it about like?'*

**Mary:** Nicole you are reminding us, like Meg, that the student's voice has to be at the centre. However, I am hearing your experience of proposing solutions and not being heard yourself. So as a teacher, in this instance, your voice is not being heard. Kathleen would you like to join in here? We have been discussing the degree to which the teachers felt heard or silenced as girls and feel heard or silenced as teachers. I know you have things to say about the significance of voice in the classroom Kathleen.

**Kathleen:** [For me], *'voice is related to the means whereby teachers and students attempt to make themselves present in history and to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds'* (Weiler, 1998:xiii).

**Mary:** The teachers in this discussion, and in their conversations with me in the fieldwork, have been asserting their own voices by storying their lives. In remembering being students themselves they are sifting through their own positive and negative experiences of variously being heard and being silenced at home and at school. Their own backstories are helping them to explore how to best create the conditions in their classrooms now in

which their own students, especially their most vulnerable students, are most likely to speak, be heard, and have their needs addressed.

**Kathleen:** [They are using] *'the concept of 'voice' as a pedagogical category to examine the interaction of teachers and learners with the knowledge they both bring to the classroom, as well as the knowledge they create together'* (Weiler, 1998:xii).

**Mary:** I think that really helps me to think about whose voices predominate in the classroom space? Whose knowledge is valued there? Kathleen you will know, from the evidence in Chapter Six, about the acute tensions teachers identify between the high value attached to curricular knowledge and the shrinking spaces afforded for creativity, innovation, self-expression and the development of social and emotional intelligence in schools. I think that your concept of 'voice' as a pedagogical category helps us to inquire into who speaks, how they speak and whose ideas are valued in schools. Carol would you like to join in this discussion about 'voice'?

**Carol:** [I think], *'the way people talk about their lives is significant, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world they see and in which they act'* (Gilligan, 1982:2).

**Mary:** I understand that. It is why I choose narrative inquiry to be the lens through which to examine teachers' lives. Teachers' stories reveal what is significant for them, how they perceive their lives as women and as teachers now, and how they make sense of their earlier lives as girls. I wanted to create an inquiry space where teachers could explore their own stories. Perhaps I was creating the inquiry space I sought but never found in teaching. I had to create it for myself.

**Carol:** *'My interest lies in the interaction of experience and thought in different voices and the dialogues to which they give rise, in the way we listen to ourselves and to others, in the stories we tell about our lives'* (Gilligan, 1982:2)

**Mary:** Carol you are helping me to consider different layers of experience and thought within the voices of individual teachers, and across the voices of teachers, participating in this study. Meg, Caitriona, Nicole and Hannah, you have shared your experiences as girls telling us tales of being heard and being silenced in different contexts and in different ways. The negative experiences, where your voices were silenced, seem to have focused

your intentions on becoming teachers determined to listen and hear the voices of the students you now teach. Your reflections on positive experiences of being heard, validated and valued as girls, also provide us with signposts towards the identities you now name as teachers. It seems that for you four at least, re-storying your lived experience as girls helps you, and us, to better understand some influences shaping your current identities, values and motivations as teachers. Sonia would like to respond to this issue?

**Sonia:** [I will]. *'Autobiography is part of teaching...Whether it is their own identities or the experiences they had as young people or even later in their lives, these can make a difference in teachers' staying power. Autobiography, however is not destiny' (Nieto, 2003:123)*

**Mary:** Teachers' stories in this study resonate with what you argued Sonia in your inquiry about the significance of identity and experience for teachers' capacity to stay in teaching (2003). However, you don't argue that autobiography is deterministic. Clearly Nicole, Meg and Caitríona show that it doesn't have to be. They have transformed their stories of not being heard as girls into a very specific positive vision and mission about how they want to hear their students, now as teachers. So, how can we improve our ability to listen to our students, to ensure that they are not silenced in our classrooms?

**bell:** *'Giroux suggests that professors must learn to respect the way students feel about their experiences as well as their need to speak about them in classroom settings.'* [He reminds us that] *'students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we cannot deny it'* (hooks, 1994:88).

**Mary:** Participating teachers in this study grapple with the challenges to create those conditions in their classrooms in DEIS schools every day. How can we critically engage in a way that values the distinctive voices of different students in schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages?

**bell:** *'I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build 'community' in order to create a climate of openness...It has been my experience that one way to build community in the classroom is to recognize that value of each individual voice...To hear each other [the sound of different voices], to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition'. It also ensures that no student remains invisible in the classroom'* (hooks, 1994:40-41).

**Mary:** bell, teachers committed to critical or 'engaged pedagogy' (hooks, 1994) are aware of how students, especially students experiencing multiple disadvantages, irrespective of age, can be silenced in classrooms by teachers. The teachers participating in this research study are aware of the risk that they may be silencing rather than encouraging voice. However what challenges does developing a 'community' of learners such that 'no student remains invisible' or unheard pose for teachers and for how we engage in our classrooms?

**Caitríona:** [bell, Mary, it poses big challenges. My context is primary teaching.] *Sometimes it's the ones that are making the most trouble and they are out there and making noise and getting noticed. Sure the little quiet creatúrín [creature, term of endearment] down in the corner, they are staying under the radar. They are not weak enough that you are having serious concerns about their academics. They are not making any noise. They are not making any trouble. They are pliable. They are engaging...They are the ones that I worry about. Because you have so many jack-in-the-boxes in your room, they are hidden...but sometimes they can be in awful big trouble and you didn't realise it. They are the ones that break my heart. They are the one that upset me. They are the ones I worry about and bring home in my head. Sometimes you get a sense of it and sometimes you can be drawn away, distracted by the guy who is launching himself across the room at somebody else and your mind is momentarily taken...It might be just an impression, a gut feeling, or a flash which is fairly important and you don't always pick up on it. They are the ones that frighten me. They are the ones that worry me'.*

**Mary:** So your concern is for those who remain silent, or feel silenced, the students who are not making noise, the ones under the radar whose needs might be missed because they do not assert their voices compared to other students who seek and gain attention in the classroom. Nicole, in our dialogues together I recollect that you were concerned for the fate of those students also. Would you like to comment on that?

**Nicole:** [Yes], *'I try to look out for those quiet ones who will do work but may not be, they never will cause a bit of bother but yet...they don't get the same attention as the children who cause bother... they are not really academic either, they are in the middle. I was the middle person...a struggler'.*

**Mary:** Clearly it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure the conditions where attention is given to these students, the ones under the radar, the quieter ones. How can teachers make that possible?

**Nicole:** [Well for me, it is possible because] *'I probably can identify with the struggles...I think the greatest thing you can give a child is confidence...Once they get a little bit of confidence...they learn in a completely different way. I was just so hung up on feeling inadequate, afraid of making a mistake and not that I didn't try but I would have needed that encouragement to go that little extra bit'*.

**Mary:** So as teachers we need to create the conditions that nurture students, invite them to articulate their voices, encourage them when they speak, demonstrate that we are hearing them, respond to their expressed needs, be mindful of the ones they don't express and build their self-belief. Paulo would you like to add to our discussion on the conditions in education promoting the expression of different voices, as the basis for dialogue between teachers and students?

**Paulo:** *'Dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not want the naming...Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education...Through dialogue...the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach'* (Freire: 1972:53-65).

**Mary:** Thank you all for your insightful contributions helping us to explore together the complexity of supporting our students to find their voices while respecting each other's voices. These contributions have helped us to explore the conditions promoting or restraining the expression of students' voices in the classroom. In terms of commitments to equality your concerns have gravitated particularly towards those students whose voices are most likely to be silenced or suppressed. I think this dialogic process of engagement has made me more aware of the conditions in classrooms cultivating silence and the conditions cultivating self-expression and mutual respect. We need to be aware of the qualitative difference between experiences of being heard and not being heard to enable us to support the needs of our students to articulate their stories.

## 7.11 Introduction to: Re-storying relational engagements of teaching

Freire opens *Education for Critical Consciousness* with the assertion that 'to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world' (2007:3). Teaching is an intrinsically relational engagement. Insights from teachers' stories, reflected in Chapter Six, Act Two, demonstrate the resounding significance for teachers of the relational dimensions of teaching. Teachers clearly identify the pivotal relationships on that landscape as those between themselves and their students. In sharing their insights with us the teachers reveal the tremendous possibilities and deep-seated challenges implicit in negotiating and re-negotiating relationships with students. The continuum of teachers' reported experiences, in this regard, reflects on relational engagements from the heart warming to the heart breaking. Teachers' storied fragments also reflect inwardly, exploring teachers' relationship with and understanding of themselves, and exploring the tensions between their awareness of the need for self-care and their commitment and capacity to exercise it.

The following conversation focuses on educators' insights drawn from across the study findings.

## 7.12 Second conversation: Re-storying relational engagements of teaching

**Mary:** Which of you would like to share your insights on the challenges and possibilities of the relational engagements implicit in teaching and learning?

**Caitríona:** [Ok, Mary, I will start], *'I have a big huge set of keys...I used to have those little pixie photo pictures on it and my three children were on it...They were on it and Tim was on it as well, my husband. And this boy was looking at the pictures one day. And he said 'who is that'...and 'are they your babies'? I said 'they are'. He said 'who is them's daddies'? And I said 'he is their daddy'. I said, 'I love the bones of him, the same as I love the bones of you'...Every single day...he would look up at me and say 'do you love the bones of him'? And I would say 'I do, I love the bones of him the same as I love the bones of you'...He kept checking because if I loved the bones of my husband still, then it meant, I still loved the bones of him'.*

**Mary:** I am struck by the little boy's recognition and response to the invitation he was receiving from you. You were communicating to him that he was loved as deeply as your loved ones in the pictures on your key ring. No wonder he was coming back to the well, to draw some more love from you each day. How do you feel now about his response to your photographs and to you?

**Caitríona:** *'Isn't it amazing. I think it's just wonderful. It would tear the guts out of you. It would tear the guts out of you' (she becomes emotional as she says this).*

**Mary:** It is amazing. It is wonderful. Your heart is open to this child and he knows it. You invite him in and he and takes you up on your invitation every single day. You say it is gut wrenching. I think I know what you mean by that. It's the good kind of gut wrenching. It moves you emotionally, gives you butterflies in your tummy and goose bumps on your arms. I am moved hearing you re-story it. This is an example of amazing moments, that teaching can offer us, if we are open to the possibilities of being fully present to our students. I carry some of these in my own heart to remind me of why I teach. Meg you want to join in this discussion?

**Meg:** [Yes,], *'the other thing about the kids I work with is they are so forgiving...I would get cross with a child or I could be impatient but they always allow me to say sorry. And they always say 'you're alright Miss', do you know, extraordinary, extraordinary. I have been blessed...My life has been absolutely enriched by these kids'.*

**Mary:** Meg your insight suggests we as teachers have so much to gain in relationship with our students. You have experienced their capacity to forgive. 'You're alright Miss' is an affirmation we all need to hear and one we value as women, as human beings and as teachers. As teachers we do get it wrong sometimes. We are human. We are not perfect. In Chapter Six, teachers testify to these realities. We do need to take responsibility when we get it wrong. We need to try to get it right. We are no different than our students as human beings. However our position is different from theirs, since we are adults and their teachers. We are responsible for becoming better aware and more discerning in our behaviour and in our speech, about how to engage respectfully in relationships with our students, thereby honouring them and ourselves. Nicole do you want to come in on this issue?



**Nicole:** [Yes, I do], *'like last Friday, I had a disastrous day with first years in that they were burning curries all over the place...There was a box of milk tray (chocolates) in my storeroom...I said 'I am after...giving out for surely an hour and twenty minutes. So, I really am apologetic...I was just going 'look guys, it's Friday and I don't want you to end up with a negative experience. So we are just going to have a laugh about it...'[So], we all got chocolate. And they are going 'are you sure you want to give us chocolate'? And I am going 'I think we all need chocolate'.*

**Mary:** I admire your commitment to restoring the balance of relationships in the aftermath of burning curries. You apologise. I see that you want the students to end the school week with a good taste in their mouths, of chocolate. I read your phrase 'we all need chocolate' as a guiding statement about life, as well as about teaching. You are reminding us that there are times when we need to share chocolate together, restore our composure, re-energise together, park negative experiences and create a new chapter in our shared story. I see the gesture of offering chocolate as cleansing the palette, leaving a sweet taste in the mouth to ease us into the next teaching/learning engagement. The sweet taste of chocolate replaces the acrid taste and smell of burnt curry. You are restoring the relationship, setting yourself and your students up for a more positive encounter next time. Victoria what significance do relationships with your students hold for you?

**Victoria:** *'I think what is important to me is just being a part of a young persons' life. I absolutely love it... What is important to me is that relationship with them. The only way that I could get that relationship was getting involved with them outside of the classroom... You have to get to know them and you have to allow them to get to know you, to see that teacher has a sense of humour, teacher can laugh, teacher can dance...My relationship [outside the classroom] filters back into the classroom'.*

**Mary:** I am struck again, hearing you say this Victoria by how excited you are to be part of their lives. You are willing to let yourself be known to them. You want them to know you as a human being, a woman, a mother, a hip-hop dancer maybe and an artist, not just as a teacher. You understand that they deserve the same liberty. You want to know them as young men and women with lives and interests outside of the classroom. Would anybody else like to comment on this?

**AnaLouise:** [I have been] *'drawing on indigenous teachings and my classroom experience...explor[ing] the theoretical and pedagogical implications of positing interconnectivity as a framework for identity formation and social transformation'* (Keating, 2007:18)

**Mary:** So you are testing interconnectivity as the basis not only for classroom interaction and relationship building, as Victoria uses it, but also for shaping identity and achieving social change. Can you tell us more about how you understand this potential for interconnectivity?

**AnaLouise:** *'The stories we tell ourselves, and those we learn from our cultures (our families, schooling, religion, friends, the media, etc.) deeply matter. They influence our beliefs, which in turn affect our perceptions, and these perceptions affect how we act. Our actions, in turn shape the stories we tell, the stories others tell about us, the ways they perceive us, the ways we perceive ourselves. Yet we rarely reflect on this creative power. All too often we assume that our perceptions and beliefs accurately reflect the entire truth about reality'* (Keating, 2007:18).

**Mary:** So you are encouraging us as educators to examine these stories, those given to us, and those stories we construct ourselves. You are asking us to challenge their veracity, the assumptions they take as truths. I also expect you want us to test the effect they have on our capacity for interconnectedness, whether they connect us to each other or divide us against each other?

**AnaLouise:** [Yes], *'such assumptions narrow, limit, restrict our worldviews and inhibit our actions. I describe these limiting assumptions as status-quo stories...they deny the possibility of change'* (Keating 2007:18).

**Mary:** AnaLouise, what you have to say about unmasking status-quo stories reveals their potential to be divisive. They keep us attached to fixed and rigid erroneous beliefs about ourselves, and each other. Maria you also recognise the significance of interconnectivity as the means to achieve social change by developing mutual understanding?

**Maria:** [Yes, I do], *'We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking'* (Lugones', 1987:8).

**Mary:** Many of the participating teachers in this study understand that we are fully dependent as teachers on our students, and on our colleagues, for being understood.

They understand the qualitative difference between teaching and reaching students. They know that when we are capable of being truly present ourselves, and to each other, there is a possibility for mutual understanding. These aspirations resonate for me with your concept of an 'engaged pedagogy' bell?

**bell:** [They do], *'teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in manner that empowers students'* (hooks, 1994:15).

**Mary:** Let's probe at that concept of self-actualisation for a moment in order to absorb what bell has said about it being a pre-condition for teaching as empowerment. Parker you have spoken and written about the need to know ourselves and let ourselves be known, as bell, Meg and Victoria have been saying. Would you like to help us explore these ideas?

**Parker:** [Yes], *'We teach who we are...Teaching holds a mirror to the soul...Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are...The work required to 'know thyself' is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge'* (Palmer, 2007:2-3).

**Meg:** [Parker, my experience resonates with yours], *'I know that I am a better teacher when I meditate every morning. I know I am a better teacher when I choose carefully what I read and what I watch on television...The stiller I am the less afraid I am of the world and the less mistakes I make... So it's that balance and I can't nurture that balance in my working life if I am not taking care of that balance in my personal life'*.

**Parker:** [Meg, I agree], *'fear is what distances us from our colleagues, our students, our subjects, ourselves...As a teacher, I am at my worst when fear takes the lead in me, whether that means teaching in fear of my students or manipulating their fears of me'* (Palmer, 2007:36).

**Nicole:** [Parker, I can respond to what you said about teaching holding a mirror to the soul]. *'I was thinking of the thing you asked [Mary] about what kind of thing represents you, [an artefact or object]? So I brought my little mirror, my two faced mirror, because I keep reflecting on my own practice...I still feel I have lot's to learn. That's my journey through life. That's why I brought that mirror...I thought I am a reflector...I look at my own self and I say, right, how have my experiences helped me with learning? I often say to the kids 'look, I found this particularly difficult' but this is the way I learned'*.

**Mary:** Nicole, you are helping to connect the discussion to Dewey's concept of reflective thinking. However are there potential problems of perspective relating to what we ourselves see reflecting back at us in our own little mirrors into our worlds?

**Charles and Jean:** *'We are cautious in our metaphor of thinking as a mirror, as it does not adequately reflect Dewey's idea that we live in both 'a' world and 'the' world. We always live in our world...one always still unfolding...We played with the idea of a shattered mirror that for us, could be an uncertain situation within both narrative inquiry and reflective inquiry in order to show the tensions and the overlaps between what we see as perspective in both reflective inquiry and narrative inquiry'* (Downey and Clandinin, 2010:391).

**Mary:** That makes sense to me. I have used the metaphor of switching lenses in teaching theory as a reminder of the danger of assuming that what we see through any particular prism of thought as a totalising account of how things are in 'the world' or 'with us' in a given moment. It is an attempt to remind myself and my students, to be alert to blind spots, to what might be obscured or distorted as much as what might be illuminated by adopting a particular theoretical lens.

**Charles and Jean:** *'We played with the idea of a shattered mirror, that for us, could be an uncertain situation within both narrative inquiry and reflective inquiry in order to show tensions and overlaps between what we see as perspective in both...A tension lives between reflective inquiry and narrative inquiry in how the 'strewn' bits of mirror are understood and in the ways multiple alternative perspectives are understood (as multiple possible framings or as multiple possible tellings and relivings) as both lead to action...Narrative inquiry focuses one eye on stories lived and told and the other on the stories that live at their edges'* (Downey and Clandinin, 2010: 391-392)

**Mary:** Let us take what Charles and Jean have said and focus it on Hannah's lived and told story then mindful of how the narrative fragment presented below, may be a small shard of the possible mirror and might be understood in terms of its possible tellings and also in terms of the possible 'stories that live' at its 'edge'. Hannah, I recall you helping me understand the relationship you see between the holistic development of the self and the capacity to teach by explaining how the yoga mat represents you. Would you like to re-tell it?

**Hannah:** [Well Mary, you asked me to bring an artefact, an object representing myself as a teacher], *'I brought my yoga mat...So, I will start by saying it represents for me...time out. It represents reflection. It represents preparation. It represents self-care. So they were some things I thought were really important...I had been interested in yoga, so I started an intensive year course there in the beginning of last month...I needed to do something outside of school for me, to help me, which would then help my teaching...So time-out for me to develop which then improves me as a teacher because then I am a better rounded individual, do you know'.*

**Mary:** Charles and Jean have reminded me to keep an eye on the stories that live at the edge of the one you have been engaged in telling Hannah. I remember the backstory to this fragment as one of loss. It is against the shadow of that loss, that the told fragment can be understood, without us necessarily speaking of the loss here. The awareness arises, in how you signify the yoga mat in the context of re-storying and re-living in response to loss. bell, Hannah's telling has brought well-being and teaching to our attention as reciprocal, in her experience. Would you like to comment on the connection between these issues?

**bell:** *'Engaged pedagogy'...emphasises well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that the "practice of the healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed towards his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people' (hooks, 1994:15).*

**Mary:** Meg, I recall you had insights to offer about this relationship between self-awareness, learning from and with the children, and developing mutual resilience. Would you like to speak to that?

**Meg:** *'The wonderful thing is, journeying with the kids in the inner city, it's like I am as resilient as they are. So I would meet them head on and they would meet me head on but we really helped each other...I had [ ] to show up and give the kids what they deserve. It helped me. It gave me meaning. It gave me extraordinary meaning in my life, being in the inner city. Sorry, I am getting emotional now...I think we get brought to where we need to be brought to in order to learn about ourselves. So while people would say to me you are amazing you have worked in the inner city, they are amazing. They [the children] have taught me so much about myself, [she gets emotional again].*

**Mary:** Paulo you have written about this mutuality of learning available to teachers and students where ‘problem-posing’ education ‘embodies communication’ and is oriented towards ‘the practice of freedom’ (Freire: 1972:53).

**Paulo:** *‘The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in the dialogue with students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow’* (Freire, 1972:53).

**Mary:** Can I ask the teachers what is your vision for teaching/learning? Does it relate to ‘a process in which all can grow’? You already shared your reflections on these matters with me in the ‘Passions and Pathways’ section in Act One and in the Relational Insights section in Act Two, Chapter 6. I think sharing some of them again here would remind readers about what motivates you to teach and what matters to you.

**Jessica:** *‘I suppose what matters is, that you want to have a positive effect on the lives of the children that you are teaching. I suppose you don’t want to just teach them, you want to reach them and touch them in a positive way and in a way that, you know, will equip them for life really, so that they will have a better life as a result of being under your care...through education. I suppose that is what ultimately matters. It also matters very much to me that they would be happy while they are with\_me, you know, especially because of the context in which I teach, it being DEIS’.*

**Mary:** I think your distinction between ‘teaching’ and ‘reaching’ reflects a deeply embedded vision and mission to make a positive difference in the children’s lives. This goes way beyond the confines of the prescribed curriculum and a teacher’s job description. It speaks to me of a willingness to connect, to empathise, support and touch the lives of the children with whom you work. Can you relate to this distinction between teaching and reaching Rachel?

**Rachel:** *‘I would always say that my thing is that obviously I want the children to learn when they are with me but I want them to be happy and to feel safe. That would be one of my motivations as a teacher and I suppose as a teacher in a disadvantaged area...So I suppose when I am here that’s what I want, just that they are happy... I would think even the feelings check-in, I think that is a really important thing just so that the children are learning how to develop and express themselves and you know that it’s ok to say you are feeling sad. Somebody else might say something to them like ‘you can come with me, you can play with me if you are sad’ or ‘I will mind him teacher’. So to develop that kind of*

*empathy in children and the caring that they have for each other. I do think that is really important because you are working in a disadvantaged area'.*

**Mary:** Rachel you are a primary teacher, and Julia you are a secondary teacher. I observe resonances between your reflections on what matters to you as teachers and your commitments to supporting students to express themselves and empathise with each other. Julia would you like to comment on that?

**Julia:** [Yes], *'I suppose how I feel about it [teaching] has changed. I always enjoyed the teaching of English in that it was about stories and about how I respond myself to a story and how I express myself. I suppose then it became more about I already enjoy this and I want to share with you how much I enjoy this...With that particular group it would have been silent reading...So they would have read to us. That's where the most interesting conversations would have happened, where they would have asked 'why did this happen' or even told you 'something like that happened to me' or 'that sounds like me in the story' I think it was lovely for them to be able to say that...and you know it gives you [the teacher] the opportunity to say 'you know what you are not failing and we are going to work really hard you get you a good education'.*

**Mary:** What does the research have to say about commitment to reaching students, to helping them express themselves emotionally, empathising with them and promoting empathy between them? Who would like to start?

**Margo and Catherine:** [We will], *'Feminist pedagogy... insists on a wedding of affect and intellect...teaching is not viewed as a strictly cognitive delivery of information but rather as a complex intellectual and emotional engagement' [Culley and Portuges, 1985: 2-4].*

**Mary:** You are both speaking of the Women's Studies classroom as the testing ground for exploring pedagogy capable of providing a learning space supporting women's learning, combining the affective and the intellectual. However, your reflections resonate with the priority participating teachers place on the affective dimensions of teaching and learning in the classrooms in which they teach in selected DEIS schools in Ireland. Maeve, I know you have worked on issues relating the affective dimensions of care, solidarity and support to contemporary education. Would you help us explore these issues?

**Maeve:** [Yes, I will], *'The call to care and be in relationship as an educator is not to perform charity for the oppressed in our care, or to fill the schooling deficits of the 'educationally disadvantaged' with more of the same schooling. To be a radical educator and to offer real alternatives, in Freire's terms, and that of the care scholars, means that we make ourselves vulnerable as educators, that we enter into a dialogue to facilitate and hear the naming of the world by those who, are oppressed in order to understand and feel the oppression of those in our care...In this way, we can begin to work with and alongside rather than for those who are oppressed, to find solutions and to help develop the tools of critical literacy that will equip us in this co-operative process'* (O'Brien, 2013: 29-30).

**Mary:** Kathleen would you, and your colleagues, like to help us understand the implications neglecting issues relating to affective equality has had on thinking in education?

**Kathleen, John, Sara and Judy:** [We identify] *'Education was and is defined as being about the development of reason...Thus the student is being prepared for economic, political and cultural life in the public sphere but not for a relational life as an interdependent, caring and other-centred human being...The close and growing link between formal education and employment also contributes to the neglect of the affective'* (Lynch et al, 2009:15-17).

**Mary:** How would you like to see education re-defined bell, on foot of the current rational instrumentality driving it, in the service of the public sphere?

**bell:** [Well], *'Whereas Freire was primarily concerned with the mind, Thich Nhat Hanh offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasised wholeness, a union of mind, body and spirit'*, (hooks, 1994:14).

**Mary:** bell, that emphasis on wholeness echoes Meg and Hannah's reflections in the findings. Mindfulness and yoga have been pathways through which they seek to develop that unity of purpose as teachers, as women, as human beings.

**bell:** *'Progressive, holistic education, 'engaged pedagogy' is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices it emphasises wellbeing'* (hooks, 1994:15).



**Mary:** The subject of self-care and wellbeing formed a substantial part of the relational insights in Chapter Six, of this study. Would some of the participating teachers like to help us to explore the tensions between the demands of teaching and the necessity of promoting the wellbeing of students and teachers' wellbeing?

**Meg:** *'I was reared a swimmer, I loved it. Movement and physical activity just help keeps the balance in my life...I realise now, in my fifties and as a teacher, that when I love myself in every way and nurture all of my senses and my body and soul and mind, although soul, I will take away that word again because I haven't fully worked out what that is. When I nurture my body and my spirit and my mind, I come in to work much more grounded'.*

**Mary:** Caitríona can I put the question of well being to you. I had to really persist to finally get you to address this issue in relation to yourself, during our conversations together. Your son has challenged you strongly on this issue, would you be willing to share that with us?

**Caitríona:** *'He said 'no mum, I know you would die for me'. He said 'I know I feel completely loved. I know there is nothing you wouldn't do for me but when was the last time you read a book, you love reading and you haven't read a book in about a year and a half'. I kind of went 'ok'. And he says 'how long are you married? I went 'whaa, what' (she laughs hysterically)? Now this came at speed, I mean it was like verbal diarrhoea. He was obviously thinking about this for a long time. The main message was 'I am really worried about you mom'. That was the message that was coming though this'.*

**Mary:** I am aware of the energy you pour into your role as a teacher and as a mother. However, I am struck that in supporting parents to parent in your role as HSCL you quote yourself as reminding them 'happy mammy, happy baby' and in that order. You remarked to me your acceptance of that wisdom for other mothers but not for yourself.

**Caitríona:** *[That's true] 'I am so busy doing it for everybody else that I am not taking time out for me'.*

**Mary:** I know the challenge of striking that intricate balance well, Caitríona. I observe that your son is challenging you to re-claim the habits he remembers you enjoying. He mentions gardening and reading in particular. He is challenging you to re-story and thus reclaim your 'time-out'. I relate to your honesty in addressing the need you see to take

time out for yourself and the difficulty of living that in the context of 'doing it for everybody else'. Your telling prompts me to think narratively about being 'busy doing it' in my mother's life, as an example of the challenge for me to strike a healthy balance for myself. Thank you Caitriona for reminding me of how challenging it is to create a new version of my own story. I see that version, as one where I commit to promoting my own well-being while encouraging my mother to name and promote her own well-being. The story at the edge of this fragment is the one I struggle to hear, her narrative testimony, told at times with courage and at other times with fear, witnessing her own deterioration. Teachers in this study echo the challenges you have named in their own efforts at balancing self-care while safeguarding the wellbeing of others such as their students and/or their own children. Victoria, I remember you expressing these tensions in response to my question, to you, about how you look after your own needs.

**Victoria:** *'I am going to be honest. I knew I was meeting you and that is one question that keeps running round in my head. I have no answer, because sometimes I have good days and sometimes I get very frustrated and sometimes I get very angry that I am still here at five pm. Sometimes I just work it through. Sometimes I can get home to my kids and I keep going but I live in a constant state of guilt. Am I doing enough in work? Am I being at home enough as a mam? It's just a constant state of guilt for me...It is just constant juggling... I also think as well it's a very stressful job. I think since I have gotten older I can feel it in my heart and in my chest. I can feel the pressure of the job building like when I don't have enough time in the day to get things done.'*

**Mary:** We seem to be well aware of the need to strike a healthy balance between addressing the needs of others and addressing our own needs as teachers, as women as human beings. Our stories are highly articulate in naming the problem. The body doesn't lie. You are aware of the tension in your heart and chest. How can sharing our stories help us to think narratively about our lives and re-story them in such a way as to ameliorate the effects of panic, guilt and tightness in our hearts and chests?

**Rachel:** *'I suppose, like, here we are very lucky that there is very much a team aspect to everything we do. Like I teach with two other girls in Senior Infants and we are very much a team. We plan together and any resources that we are getting we get for the team. So it kind of divides out the pressure because people are willing to share the load very much.'*

**Mary:** So Rachel, team teaching lightens the workload at school and eases the pressure because both the responsibilities and resources are shared. Hannah and Nicole, in our dialogues together during the field work, you told stories about needing to step back at times in order to restore balance between your working lives and your personal lives. Would you like to help us explore these tensions?

**Nicole:** *'I would say I had a crisis of sorts in that school became my life, too much so, in that in this kind of environment nobody said 'stop' or nobody said 'you have done enough'...After the whole school inspection...I decided I needed to do a course, I needed to educate myself. I didn't realise until I was filling in the application form last night, I spent from 2005 to 2010 doing courses. I really enjoyed it...You see my mind-set has changed, where I used to see school as hard and negative...I am doing it for me now'.*

**Mary:** 'Nobody said stop' but you did. You identified further education as a restorative to the energies you were expending at school. In the context of the stories you have shared about your experiences at school as a girl, where your needs were not met by your teacher, it makes sense to me that you are re-storying yourself as a learner/teacher by satisfying your own needs to learn this time round. Hannah you tell of stepping back to redress the balance also, will you share that?

**Hannah:** *'I know this year is significant as well. I know we have talked before about how I am doing resource [teaching] this year. It was partly to learn about resource (teaching) and learning support [teaching] but also maybe to take a little step back from the classroom for me, for my own personal self. So and then I started taking up, I had been interested in yoga, but I started an intensive year course there in the beginning of last month'.*

**Mary:** In the telling you are narrating the stepping back as a commitment to your personal self and deepening your learning and commitment to practising yoga to maintain balance. I can see that most of the participating teachers name the need to fill the well from which they draw so much energy in their teaching lives. Most teachers have clearly named personal practices, hobbies or interests that they recognise as restoring some of that energy and balance in their lives. However, in other versions, stories closer to the edge, reveal ongoing tensions between stated commitments to self-care and frequently lapsed practices. As Nicole pointed out about her experience as a teacher above, nobody says 'stop', 'you have done enough'. Stories recognising this gap provide us with an invitation to live a healthier alternative story, to take responsibility for stopping, taking stock and re-storying. Jennifer you might address that question based on your research with primary teachers in the United Kingdom?

**Jennifer:** [Well Mary], *'Using interviews with, and a few written accounts by practicing teachers, I have attempted to present an account of primary teaching as work, from the perspective of the practitioners...Part 1... [focuses on] the importance they attach to a sense of personal identity: they exist as people before they become teachers and their work calls for a massive investment of their 'selves' (Nias, 1989:2).*

**Mary:** Markers of personal identity featured strongly in teachers' stories shaping this study also. Their significance was evident in the stories of both the participating primary and secondary teachers. The 'Prologue' and the 'Passions and Pathways' sections of Chapter Six mapped the connection between the girls who existed before they became the teachers they are now. Teachers' narrative fragments reveal glimpses of how they identify themselves presently in terms of their past experiences, and their values, beliefs, dispositions, commitments and interests. Teachers in this research study testify to how teaching both draws deeply on the well of the self but also fills the well of the self. It encompasses the continuum from the heart warming to the heartbreaking within the relational engagements of teaching. Sonia will you join in this conversation and share your insights from *Why we teach (2005)*?

**Sonia:** [Yes, I will], *'Why we Teach includes reflections from 21 teachers who work in U.S. public elementary, middle and high schools in a variety of settings...These are teachers who care about kids, who love what they do, and who would choose to do it over again. Some are also frustrated, angry, and concerned about the state of public education. In asking them to tell their stories, the only guidelines I gave the teachers was to ask them the central question'* (Nieto, 2005:ix-x).

**Mary:** Participating teachers in this research study also express love for their students, and care about what they do. They also experience frustration, anger and deep concern about public education, especially the conditions in DEIS schools serving communities experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage in Ireland. In asking participating teachers to share their stories the central question I asked was 'what matters to you as a teacher'? Sonia what conclusions did you draw from engaging with the stories of the twenty-one teachers in your study?

**Sonia:** [In the conclusion], *'I want[ed] to propose a set of attitudes and sensibilities, apparent in the essays. I suggest[ed] five core qualities shared by teachers. The five qualities...[were] a sense of mission; solidarity with, and empathy for, students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge; improvisation; and a passion for social justice'* (Nieto, 2005:204).

**Mary:** I found it very helpful to read your work defining those core qualities. In this work however my lens of inquiry is not to search for core qualities that account for why we teach or qualities that might indicate hallmarks of 'good' teachers. I am trying to inquire into how we story ourselves and each other through the narratives we choose to share representing ourselves as being teachers, women, human beings. In the process of the telling and the hearing, the study provides an inquiry space inviting us to think narratively about the fit between the stories we tell, and hear, and the lives we and others live.

Where we find the stories we tell are too constricted to define the complexity of our lives as teachers, women, human beings, we have the possibility of expanding them. We can let go of old versions of stories and re-story our lives to better represent who we are continually becoming rather than who we thought we were. As teachers we also have the responsibility to help students develop stories that fully honour and articulate their rich complexity and uniqueness. The focus is less on telling stories and more on thinking narratively about what we tell and hear from each other about our lives as teachers. Thinking narratively offers us opportunities for broadening the 'horizons' of our understanding (Gadamer, 1989). Mary Catherine, you focus on the possibilities of learning by exploring the 'inklings of alternatives' (Bateson, 1994:8)

**Mary Catherine:** [Yes], *'in trying to adopt, we may need to deviate from cherished values, behaving in ways we have barely glimpsed, seizing on fragmentary clues'* (Bateson, 1994:8).

**Mary:** In discussing my research with my supervisor, a long time ago, he spoke about the need to let go of 'sacred cows' in the research process. I relate this to your concept, Mary Catherine, of 'cherished values'. I think he meant loosening attachment to those theoretical and personal perspectives we carry into the research space based upon our own identities, commitments, cultures, beliefs, values, research experience, teaching and life experiences and theoretical affiliations. I am not either naïve or dishonest enough to assume that it is possible to clear the space of all our 'sacred cows'. However, if we begin to see them as less 'sacred' and more as 'cows' the field may expand to include other fine specimens not previously within our view. In doing so creativity becomes possible as the research study is allowed to open to the possibilities of what might emerge. In fact the journey of letting go of my grip on previously held assumptions has been deeply liberating for me as a thinker and a researcher. It has allowed me to explore new 'landscapes' in my own 'learning' (Greene, 1978). This willingness to let go of familiar versions of research stories about teachers, has allowed me to hear the stories of the participating teachers and allowed those stories to more fully occupy the inquiry space. The more I let go of the stories I knew, when I constructed the inquiry space initially, the more I trusted the narrative inquiry process itself. Consequently, my ability to listen with close attention to the participating teachers, to support them to articulate their voices, and to pay attention to their silences, developed in proportion to my willingness to let go of what was familiar to me. Learning to let go has enabled me to deviate from 'cherished values' as Bateson (1994) suggests we may need to do in order to open up the spaces in which we can learn together. Mary, you and your colleagues encourage delving beneath the routine, the familiar thinking about teaching, through listening intently to teachers' stories?

**Mary and Joan, with Gloria:** [Yes], *'We argue that teachers' stories, those positive and negative accounts of our lives in classrooms, are central to the type of inquiry and reflection that leads to professional development and personal insight. Educators must delve beneath the routine, the surface, the business-as-usual if they are to unearth the heart of teaching and, in the process, nurture their souls as teachers'* (Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995:xvi)

**Mary:** Thanks to all for enriching and expanding our conversation concerning the relational dimensions of teachers' storied lives. The process has engaged us in the challenge of thinking narratively about their stories, and our own. Let us move on now to the final conversation in this chapter. It will focus how we might learn from how teachers story the contexts, in which they teach.

### **7.13 Introduction: Re-storying contextual perspectives on teaching**

I will facilitate a conversation in this section between how educators story the possibilities and challenges of delivering equality in schools in the context of educational disadvantage. The Contextual Insights section, in Act Three, Chapter Six, directs us to the significant narrative threads stitching through the stories participating teachers tell about their contexts. These include: reflections on leadership; the community and culture of their schools; DEIS school contexts; and pedagogy in context.

### **7.14 Third conversation: Storying contextual perspectives on teaching**

**Mary:** Leadership has emerged as a common thread across the study. Let us begin with this narrative thread tracing what educators story about leadership. Would the teachers like to lead us into a discussion on how your stories of leadership shape your perceptions of your teaching contexts? Maybe the secondary teachers would like to start?

**Meg:** [I will start, for me], *'Always having just one person in Senior Management believe in me has been why I have been able to do what I do. So that was crucial..., Fred [the principal] ...when he saw that this Arts thing was working, and he didn't really know much about it, he allowed us, the group of us who did this work, he allowed us to experiment with the curriculum...'*

**Victoria:** [He], *'was an amazing principal who allowed me to grow as a person and as a teacher. He allowed a group of teachers in here to develop that kind of community, that extra curricular, that learning through the arts. He believed in us and he believed in it. He may not have fully understood it, but he supported us.*

**Nicole:** *'I loved him. He just said, 'you just try out whatever you like'. I was like 'listen, that is not an answer, (her voice is animated). I need a curriculum. I need structure. I need rules'. But, actually it was the best answer...He was always hugely positive...I slowly started to trust myself. Yes, it's about trust but I didn't have the confidence when I came in here.*

**Mary:** In your telling, I am hearing the words trust and belief stitch across your storied extracts. I am also hearing your descriptions of working with Fred, your shared principal, as independently verifying the permission and support you each experienced encouraging you to experiment, to innovate, to be creative. Primary teachers, what are your experiences of leadership in your contexts?

**Hannah:** [Well] *'A lot of it has to do with Catherine. Like when the principal spots things, you know, randomly sends somebody somewhere. She spots a spark in you and lets you run with that, you know. Since that Amnesty thing, I have never really stopped. I have set up the Student Council. I have just done lots of things. But, she has never gone 'what are doing there now'? She just lets me off'.*

**Rachel:** *'I suppose for me like, I think, the relationship with the principal is really important. I think a principal being visible, and if the principal wants something done they are willing to do it themselves...So, I think it is really important for a principal to kind of know that it is important to do that. I think she is very good at that'.*

**Mary:** Hannah, in hearing your story I pick up resonances of the secondary teachers' stories, about their lived experiences of leadership. You describe how your principal 'lets you run with that' it echoes the freedom the secondary teachers experienced in the support but freedom to innovate they experienced working with their the first principal teacher in their school context. Rachel your narrative fragment expands our shared story on experiencing leadership. You tell of the importance you attach to witnessing your principal 'walk the talk'. You respect and value your principal because she engages in the training she hopes to persuade her staff to support at a whole school level. In other words she is mirroring the leadership she hopes to nurture in her team. She is also committing

her time to the enterprise signalling the value she places on the learning, herself. Could we consider the other dimensions of leadership threading through your stories, for example, the experience of learning to lead by taking on leadership roles? Would some of the secondary teachers like to comment on this dimension in your contexts?

**Victoria:** [I will], *'I am a big believer in using in-house experience. I have given classes to the staff on how to be more visual and teachers have gone, 'that's wonderful, great, fabulous'. So it's not only being a teacher to students, it's being a teacher to each other too...Newer teachers coming in now, some of us are so conscious that they need some of us to help them. You have to take that on board as well. I mean it can be frightening... They need the support there and I am very happy to give it'.*

**Meg:** *Another key moment for me in my education was learning to really respect teachers and listen to them and accept that quite a significant number are not used to a child having a voice, a strong voice and that sometimes it just takes time for that to change...The key to education working is when the teacher feels validated, valued, challenged, challenged in terms of finding a determination about how to get it right and also challenged when they do things wrong to be gently guided towards an awareness of what they have done wrong. That's one of the biggest challenges I think we now have in education. Teachers, leaders in education, are afraid to challenge people who are getting it wrong and being unprofessional. Self-reflection and discernment is something that not all teachers have, not all humans have. Working as we do in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage it's crucial that we have discernment and self-reflection and that we look at how we speak and act with the kids. And some don't, so that's really tough. But, it is really heartening to see how many just love their job and feel validated and that's an awful lot to do with who is in charge'.*

**Mary:** Your stories of learning to lead echo each other in some respects and resonate differently in others. I hear in both of you the willingness and readiness to take on responsibilities as leaders. Victoria I hear you tell of your willingness and pleasure I suspect in sharing some your skills with other teachers and especially your willingness to support younger teachers. Meg, in the telling your story leads us to contemplate the challenges of leading. You name the challenge of learning to respect, to listen and to wait patiently at times. This reflects on the how leadership is exercised as a developmental rather than an enforcing process. You accept the fact that some colleagues do not yet recognise that children have a strong voice. You help us to think narratively about the context in schools where teachers deserve to be validated and valued but also deserve to be challenged. The valuing and the challenging of course need not be mutually exclusive. However, you identify a failure in courage by leaders in education to challenge behaviour and speech by teachers lacking in discernment and failing to self-reflect.



You remind us that in schools serving communities experiencing disadvantage the development of discernment by leaders and the need for them to exercise courage to challenge unprofessional behaviour is vitally important for students. Equally valuable is leadership valuing teachers, acknowledging what they do well, and encouraging the development of their creativities. Primary teachers will you enrich our discussion on learning to lead with stories reflecting on your lived experiences in your teaching contexts?

**Jessica:** [I will start then], *'I think it began when I was doing a course in Special Education...There was...a lecturer there, and she had done a lot on whole school approaches to discipline...I said I think that could work in our school... There was a new principal...I became deputy and you know that meant stepping up to that role. I felt that was my responsibility to do something, you know, about this. So, and then because I knew I was facing that fifth and sixth class, well whatever about the fifth, the sixth did have a lot of need'*.

**Rachel:** [For me, it's been through] *'the mentoring as well...cos they know [the young teachers], like it has always happened in this school where I would either go into the classroom or Catherine (Principal teacher) would go in and do an observation and tell them what is going well and ask what do they need... there is that kind of atmosphere of openness. Myself and Ide [a colleague] would do a lot of team teaching and there are connecting doors. So there are a lot of people working together and people are in and out of your classroom. So I think people feel comfortable then coming to say 'well, so-and-so did this and I have tried to sort it out but I can't'. So they know if there is something serious in behavior it comes to me, if they can't sort it out'*.

**Mary:** Seeing your story fragments lined up side-by-side here, I am struck by the obvious fact that you are both deputy principals in primary schools. Interestingly you both gravitate towards supporting the development of positive behaviour in your schools. Rachel, I know from our conversations together, that you work in the context of a very large primary school with a young staff. You have specific responsibility for mentoring recently qualified teachers doing their Diploma in Teaching, by supporting their needs. Jessica, in stepping up to the role of deputy principal you have also assumed responsibility for devising an approach to positive behaviour relevant in your DEIS school context. The wider conversations with both of you reveal the importance you attach to continuing education and training in supporting you to develop into your leadership roles. This includes learning about positive approaches to behaviour supporting students but also educating teachers about their own behaviour including learning to intervene positively. John would you like to speak on this?

**John:** *'All education which develops the power to share effectively in social life is moral'* (Dewey, 1929:263)

**Mary:** Based on your comments John then we could assume that leadership nurturing positive approaches to behaviour, including perhaps restorative practice or mentoring, or mindfulness or human rights work, might help us share effectively in social life, particularly social life of schools. Arguably education promoting this type of capacity to share effectively could be deemed to be moral education. The leadership supporting it could therefore be identified as moral leadership. However, I suspect it is in the '*praxis*' taking action to lead, reflecting on that action and modifying the action appropriately that any proposed leadership intervention could be seen as moral, evaluated by the degree to which it develops the power to share effectively (Freire, 1972:60).

**Henry:** *'No democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way'*(Giroux, 2011:19).

**Mary:** So, if that is the case, how can we support the development of mentors or leaders committed to developing critical, self-reflective and knowledgeable teachers willing to make moral judgments and be socially responsible? Fred you approach the development of these qualities through what you call *core reflection* and you use the onion model to illustrate this. Would you tell us about this concept and process?

**Fred:** [Yes], *'The six layers of the onion model include [working from the outside in ], the environment, behaviour, competencies, beliefs, identity, [and] mission. In the core of the onion we may locate the person's core qualities, [the layers of beliefs, identity and mission...when these core qualities influence the outer onion layers [i.e. when there is a 'radiation' from the inside out], the person experiences flow. The process of reflection on these layers [levels] including reflection on the inner layers and one's core qualities is called core reflection'*. (Korthagen, 2013: 33)

**Mary:** So I understand that the objective of core reflection is to bring the inner layers into harmony with the outer layers including identifying where there is friction between the layers and addressing the cause? Some of the teachers have storied their experiences helping us recognise the need for balance in their lives for harmony between their inner lives and their lives as teachers, their lives outside of school and their lives inside school.

**Fred:** [Yes], *'The core reflection approach is acknowledging the interrelatedness of cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects. This is based on insights from psychology showing strong connections between cognition and emotion. This means that in core reflection... the power of possibilities in creating a simple yet deep connection with one's huge inner potential'* [is cultivated], (Korthagen, 2013:40).

**Mary:** These connections are frequently made by feminists arguing for radical and critical pedagogies reflecting on power and authority in the Women's Studies classroom. Margo would you like to articulate what you have been learning about leadership in the Women's Studies classroom context?

**Margo:** *'The feminist teacher can be a potent agent of change...[she] has power and must claim her authority if her students are to claim their own...It is only in accepting her authority – by this I mean the authority of her intellect, imagination, passion, that students can accept the authority of their own like capacities'* (Culley, 1985:211-215).

**Mary:** I have been reflecting on what you have said Margo about the necessity for critical educators to claim authority encouraging the expression of passion, imagination and intellect in their students, as well as for themselves. Fred you have reminded us about the necessity for exploring the strong connections between emotion and cognition in order to facilitate core reflection among teachers and students. However, if we are to assert our authority as teachers and support the authority of our students in DEIS schools or Women's Studies classrooms then we have to accept as Meg says that 'these kids have a voice' of their own, or these women have voices of their own, or these men have voices of their own. We might not like what they have to say. It might challenge our white privilege, our middle class privilege or painfully remind us of the sexism we experience as women. Recognising and honouring the affective dimensions of cognition is likely the lead to the expression of frustration and anger in our classrooms, stories about lived experiences of injustice in communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. The anger might turn on other students, or on us as teachers. How then can we exercise authority and manage anger in a constructive way in the classroom?

**Margo:** *'Anger is the energy mediating the transformation from damage to wholeness. If done with an awareness of the [ ] risks, letting anger out of its Pandora's box and into the classroom can be an important and manageable act...Manifestations of anger in the classroom setting may include denial and other defensive reactions, as well as the fixing of anger on inappropriate objects, including other students and the instructor herself...The*

*goal is to permit the acknowledgment and claiming of anger as one's own, and to direct its legitimate energy toward personal and social change' (Culley, 1985:211-212).*

**Mary:** Thinking narratively about the stories teachers have shared about whole school approaches to positive behaviour provides a template for teachers to learn how to respect, validate and empathise with students and helps provide a space for students to empathise with each other. However, critical and feminist theorists recognise anger as a powerful way of naming the world, telling it like it is, naming lived experiences of injustice and using them as a means to mobilise personal and social change. Of course anger needs to be channelled constructively. However, it needs to be heard also. Teachers need to know how to re-direct anger if students turn it on each other or on teachers themselves. As Meg said in an earlier fragment to two of her students who attacked each other, 'it doesn't need to be like this'. What she was challenging was how they took their anger out on each other by behaving inappropriately towards each other. She was not denying the legitimate source or the strength of the pain they were each experiencing at the time. Of course teachers experience anger and frustration too. However, learning positive approaches to behaviour management is teaching them how to acknowledge their own feelings and channel them constructively. Being able to do this enables teachers to exercise their authority while managing their own emotions. Clare, would you like to comment on the significance of emotional competences as necessary capacities for teachers to develop?

**Clare:** *'The extent to which emotional behaviour can be emotionally challenging for teachers was supported by our research in the Working Together Project. The evidence leads one to conclude that teachers need to understand and develop their emotions for three reasons...Firstly, they need to be able to maintain positive relationships with children that will facilitate in fulfilling their potential...Secondly, they need to be able to build and maintain positive relationships with other adults...[thirdly], they need to develop their emotional strengths...need to be able to care for their emotional selves' (Lyons, 2012:105-106).*

**Mary:** In fact all of these issues emerged strongly in teachers' fragments presented in the Relational Insights section in Act Two, Chapter Six. However, they emerge here again because you are reminding us that emotional competence is a necessary strength teachers need to develop. Therefore developing leadership amongst teachers requires developing their emotional competence as part of their cognition. So we have been helped to reflect on the psychological perspectives by Clare and Fred, on the moral, social and political perspectives by Henry and Margo. This brings us to a point where it may be useful to explore how sustainable leadership is understood and implemented through leadership.

**James:** [I], *'take a distributed perspective on school leadership?... [It], is first and foremost about leadership practice. The practice is framed in a very particular way, as a product of joint interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation such as tools and routines...From a distributed perspective, leadership involves mortals as well as heroes. It involves the many and not just the few. It is about leadership practice, not simply roles and positions. And leadership practice is about interactions, not just the actions of heroes'* (Spillane, 2006:3-4).

**Mary:** I find your model very helpful in shifting my thinking about leadership away from the actions of heroines and heroes and to the interactions of a team of teachers. I note the shift from role, function and structure of leadership to the practices of distributed leadership in your work. Your lens helps us focus on how leadership is practised in the situation through the use of tools and routines and through human interactions. What James has to say seems to resonate with your earlier view Max?

**Max:** [Yes], *The art of leadership [is] about liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible...Leadership is much more an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice'* (De Pree, 1989:1-148).

**Mary:** The participating teachers certainly relate good experiences of leadership with being liberated and supported to develop effectiveness and humanity in response to situations in their schools. However, there are mixed messages about leadership, citing failure in courage by leaders to address unprofessional conduct and to guide teachers to discernment and best practice. So, in the grounded contexts of the DEIS schools of participating teachers, the practice of leadership is neither consistent nor necessarily always constructive, from teachers' storied accounts. Does this surprise you?

**Ulrich and Deborah:** [No, we], *'recently had the opportunity to conduct research with currently practising principals. We talked with twenty individuals from all levels of schooling...With the exception of the prophetic vision of leadership and a few other isolated examples, the silence in the words of our principals was the absence of a moral or a spiritual discourse...other than attaining high test scores, they did not hint at any vision for the types of human beings they want their students to be and become'* (Reitzug & West, 2009:78-88).

**Mary:** So you found that principals are attending to teaching to the test, acting as ‘vessels of the state’ as you claim rather than collaboratively building a vision and mission to include all actors in the school community (Reitzug & West, 2009:83). Michael and Andy, what practices would you propose principals develop in efforts building and sustain a shared vision and mission in schools?

**Michael and Andy:** *‘The principal’s role as supporter and promoter of interactive professionalism is essential. This should involve helping teachers to understand their own situations in ways that provide insights and means of improving...We suggest eight guidelines to highlight the action needed...[They are], Understand The Culture; Value Your Teachers; Promote Their Professional Growth; Extend What You Value; Express What You Value; Promote Collaboration, Not Cooptation; Make Menus, Not Mandates; Use Bureaucratic Means to Facilitate, Not to Constrain; and Connect with the Wider Environment’* (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996:84-85).

**Mary:** So, again you are reflecting on a distributed model of leadership, one that safeguards choice, promotes connection and collaboration, nurtures growth, values and validates teachers, promotes effectiveness, increases capacity and challenges teachers to expand their beliefs and intervene positively. Andy and Dennis will you explore this model of leadership with us?

**Andy and Dennis:** *‘Distributed leadership draws change from the everyday knowledge and capacities of staff rather than driving reforms through them...Distributive leadership is a crucial element of what one of us has defined as sustainable leadership. Distributed leadership is grounded in and advances a compelling and inclusive moral purpose’* (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009:96-97).

**Mary:** Can I draw together some of the thinking on leadership that we have shared in this part of the discussion? Participating teachers, you shared your stories of supportive leadership helping us think about the qualities it embodies. You identified good leadership as: supportive, trusting teachers, building teachers’ self-belief, creating freedom for teachers to innovate and express creativity; improving teachers’ capacities; allowing teachers to develop without micro-managing their efforts or controlling the outcomes. Some teachers named the hallmarks of poor leadership noting especially where management is unresponsive and unsupportive. The absence of political leadership courageous enough to both challenge unprofessional behaviour and to provide the necessary support to guide teachers towards best practice was also identified.

Thinking narratively about the told stories draws my attention to the stories at the edge. I approach with interest the fact that few truly negative stories of leadership were told, though they linger at the edges of the told stories. I say that because on a few occasions during our shared conversations, teachers asked me to turn off the tape. In all but one of these instances the stories they shared were about negative experiences of leadership. I am marking them as very interesting silences breaking the rhythm of the recorded voices. These are told fragments shared but not to be shared publicly, off the record. These off-the-recording moments raise questions about the extent to which teachers within schools feel safe to comment, even in a one-to-one conversation, in a closed room, and using pseudonyms, on aspects of management and leadership that are failing them.

Learning to lead also draws inspiration from working with good leaders and learning from them. It also relies on teachers being encouraged and supported to develop their leadership skills individually, and as colleagues. Leadership also challenges teachers to step up, assert their authority, expand and share their skills and take on more responsibilities in their schools. In school contexts enabling leadership can be traced in how leadership is practised. The hallmarks of good leadership practice are in interactions and in the provision and distribution of relevant tools and resources to support teachers to develop their best selves.

Theoreticians have brought a number of disciplinary lenses to the discussion to help us expand our capacity to think narratively about leadership in DEIS schools. Some of these lenses focus on positive psychology and emotional competences. Others draw on the moral and ethical dimensions of practising leadership. Feminist and critical theorists focus on harnessing the potential of leadership practices to transform the inequalities reproduced by life in schools and life outside schools. It strikes me as a teacher, a woman, a human being, a mother, that we need to use all of these disciplinary lenses in order to be able to better understand and realise how to practice leadership in such a way as to actively counter the negative inscriptions we all bring to exercising power, in the best interests of our students and ourselves. I suggest we now shift our focus from leadership to discussing the community and culture of DEIS schools. This discussion will bring together perspectives on the community and culture within schools and the communities DEIS schools serve. This discussion combines two of the major subsections in Chapter Six, treating the DEIS context and the culture and community DEIS schools serve as a single focus, here. These are in fact complimentary gazes at the same landscape, DEIS school contexts. The community will refer to the bonds between people within the school and the people within the wider community who are served by the school. The culture of DEIS schools will reflect the norms, values and material goods teachers identify with their contexts, through their storied lives. Would the secondary teachers like to begin?

**Victoria:** [I will], *'Part of the job is looking after students but part of the job is looking after each other as a staff too. That's huge, being there for each other, and even if it is just a chat or a hug, some thing. You know, we are really a good staff in here. We are over worked...I think it is important to have some time for staff to have together and it's not very often that happens'*.

**Mary:** So support from colleagues, empathy between teachers, makes a positive difference to the lived experience of being a teacher in a DEIS school. Nicole I think your remark, like Victoria, on few opportunities for staff to spend time together. Would you like to story that piece for us, from your perspective?

**Nicole:** [Yes], *"I had a really close friend who retired and like that he was a mentor/listener for me. When he retired...I really noticed his absence in school...I think the whole culture since I even started teaching, I think it is changing so fast and it's nearly like everyone comes in does their job and out...I am going stop, stop and take a bit of time, do you know what I mean? I really do think a mentor...in the school is phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. I really do. I think people should look at ways of doing that. The irony of it is we are doing more Croke Park hours<sup>11</sup>. We are doing more Haddington Road hours and I can honestly say objectively, and I am not saying it with bitterness, I am talking less to my colleagues'*.

**Mary:** I can hear that you feel the loss of your mentor keenly. I also hear the constraints on your time, as the pace of the environment and the demands of the workload increase. Despite extended working hours under the two industrial agreements you mention, you identify less and less time to reflect with colleagues. What consequences might the loss of mentors, though retirements and teacher mobility, and less time to talk to colleagues about the work, have on teachers and teaching?

**Julia:** [Well] *I was very lucky here in that there were a number of teachers that would have been very supportive and again would have had the backstory to different students. It just made you feel you could just go and vent and say 'I had this terrible class, how do I manage or why did that happen'? I have seen how it has changed over the last few years. Those older members of staff have retired. We have newer, younger staff coming in, and no one has the time or the knowledge to share with them. It changes the whole atmosphere of the school...I think it is devastating for the children because they don't have as many people now who are able to support them.*

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<sup>11</sup> Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements refer to agreements between school management, the teachers' unions and the Department of Education and Skills.



**Mary:** So the loss of older staff members through retirement has meant a loss of knowledge about students, their families and the community. Experienced teachers have lost some of their mentors. So there is a draining of valuable knowledge out of DEIS schools. There is also increasing pressure on your use of time, as workloads have increased. Though your working hours have increased ironically you have less time to spend with each other. You also feel the loss of time to reflect together and learn from each other. I am also reflecting on how you say it is 'devastating for the children' but I am intuiting from how you tell it that it is also 'devastating' for the teachers. Meg how do you story the changes?

**Meg:** *'So, what a teacher is, is changing. I think at the moment there is a huge amount of paper work. I think teachers are erring on the side of litigation and doing the paperwork to the detriment of following through the vision. I see really strong creative people just closing up. We have a new vibrant young staff, about ten new people. I just see them being chipped at and I think they are not even aware of it. I see the older people and I think our school is exceptional, I think we are a great team but the paperwork is huge. I see the older people kind of just clocking in sometimes. I say the older people, I mean the people who have been here longer.'*

**Mary:** So Meg, you story the vision of teachers as being swallowed up by the increased administrative burdens imposed on them. You see this hurting at both ends of the teaching life cycle, closing down the creativity of young teachers and inclining some older teachers to merely 'clocking in'. Are there other issues resonating with you about the culture and community in your school?

**Nicole:** *[Yes], 'I feel quite sad, there are two or three colleagues in here who are so negative and they come in and they are in that negative frame of mind.... I can't even tell you how bad I feel for them. It's not that I am being judgemental thinking that they are bad teachers... I think that is the scariest thought, to be going into a job every day and hating it, not liking it, because, ok number one, you are affecting yourself and I think you have to be affecting the students.'*

**Mary:** Your story Nicole resonates with what Meg said earlier about the failure of courage by leaders in education to challenge unprofessional behaviour amongst teachers and to steer teachers towards increasingly professional and accountable behaviour. You story what you suspect the impact to be on those teachers themselves and on their students. I also hear in your story the negative effect of observing these teachers on your own

morale. It raises questions about how teachers can be challenged and supported to re-engage in all schools, but especially in DEIS schools where the learning support needs of some students deserve to be better supported. Meg, you brought up issues about the resources, the material goods, available to DEIS schools. Who would like to speak to these issues?

**Meg:** *'Now in DEIS schools I think it is hard to stay focused on that [being an educator], I think, because we aren't given proper resources. I mean it's a disgrace. It's an absolute disgrace. In two years going from class sizes of seventeen to thirty and we are a DEIS school...I mean why (she sounds perplexed), why have thirty kids in a class?...We have kids and the facts are some of their parents don't know how to care about their education and we still have them in class sizes of thirty. It's so wrong, it's so, so, wrong'.*

**Mary:** So the cutbacks in education, during the economic recession, have depleted resources to DEIS schools and almost doubled the pupil teacher ratio in your classrooms. If some parents are not in a position to support their children's education then for those students being in classes of 1:30 means their learning needs cannot possibly be met. Julia you made reference to the effects of cutbacks on your work with students with special learning needs.

**Julia:** *'Well, with cutbacks now, in first year they always get four hours of English and one of those hours is spent in the library. Previously the special needs classes would have got, four hours in second and in third year as well. But, we have had cutbacks so it's just three hours a week now. You can see the difference there. I mean you can see a lot of the work you have done, it has just been lost, again just in terms of organising themselves and getting into trouble and feeling bad about being in school'.*

**Mary:** Nicole's comments about the importance of building self-belief, spending more time with students, slowing down the pace is borne out by your experience supporting students with special learning needs. It is pretty shocking to reflect that within DEIS schools, already designated as serving the communities experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage, the pupil teacher ratio has radically dis-improved. Even in DEIS schools there has been a total failure to ring-fence resources to support students with special learning needs, according to teachers' accounts. Are there other events in the life of the community of the school that resonate with you? Sophie, as a teacher in a DEIS school, tell us about your side of the story?

**Sophie:** [Well Mary], *'we have some extremely difficult students. The students you know, there are times when I just want to go home and cry and I say 'what am I doing'? Just give me a nice little Loreto school (private) where the students want to learn...and I won't have all this chasing around. I won't have to be ringing parents up and parents saying 'well he won't get out of bed for me, What do you expect me to do? You are his fucking teacher, you get him up and you sort him out'. And I say 'hang on, how far does my job go? It is not a case of we can just come in and just do a job...Like I also think that sometimes teachers in inner city schools...I mean I have seen dangerous situations here in the classroom. I honestly think that we work, and I mean I suppose I am being biased, we work ten times harder than teachers in the likes of schools like the Loreto. We don't get a bit of credit for it and sometimes we can put ourselves in danger over a situation...Don't get me wrong, I Love the kids. I love the school but there are times when we have to put up with dreadful things, you know what I mean?'*

**Mary:** I am struck by the extreme demands and the dangers you name in storying your experience of being a teacher in a DEIS secondary school. More than likely they resonate with the experiences of some teachers in DEIS, and in schools not designated as DEIS. From the previous section on leadership I know that teachers need and deserve appropriate supports to deal with challenging behaviour and managing dangerous situations in the interests of students' safety and learning and in the interests of teachers' safety and freedom to teach. Sometimes these supports are inadequate to deal with the challenges. However, I trouble the phrase 'extremely difficult students'. I accept that it is easy for me to do so here and now, in the safety and silence of my study and not on the front line in your classroom or in any other classroom in a DEIS school, or in any other school. However, thinking to the wider issues of challenging behaviour is it also useful to consider an alternate way of telling this story, perhaps by telling of students 'experiencing extreme difficulties' and consequently whose behaviour is 'extremely difficult' to manage. Tweaking the telling opens up a space for possibly different perspectives on the challenges and perhaps the opportunities for responding in a different way. Meg would you like to story your perspective on what you see as particular to the community and culture in your DEIS school?

**Meg:** *'Well, I tell you, I think in DEIS schools we are actually blessed in one sense in that kids vote with their feet... In the middle class schools and the private schools, when I was growing up, boy you didn't challenge. You didn't say anything about the learning. In this school if a kid feels they are not learning, they say it...That creates a rigour around pedagogy. That gets back to a teacher. Now the challenging thing is there are teachers here who naturally self-reflect but there are teachers here who are deluded, who are too scared to take on board what is coming at them. So what I like about where I am working here is sometimes those teachers become so exposed that they have to deal with it. Some leave. Some deal with it and break through'*

**Mary:** I am aware of the discontinuity you name between your own class background and the background of the students you now teach. I am struck by the contrast between your own experience as a girl of being silenced in ‘middle class and private schools’ and your students telling it as it is, in your school. I have been in your classroom. I have watched you teach. Your students are encouraged to speak. Your story helps us to think narratively about possible other stories that might evolve from your observations. The stories of those who self-reflect, might present a particular set of possible outcomes, assuming that those who self-reflect are likely to look to the inscriptions of their own values, beliefs, experiences and ways of habitually acting, to learn about the ways in which how they are teaching is not resulting in their students learning. You sum up the impact of truth telling by students as imposing a rigour on pedagogy that is welcome. That includes telling how some teachers who struggle, eventually break through the challenge to reach a better solution, serving their students better and improving their capacity to teach. Some teachers leave, as you say. Nicole’s words resonate in my ears when she tells her story about those who seem to hate their job as teachers. Meg has accounted for the self-reflective teachers, the committed who take up the challenge and break through and those who wisely leave teaching in a DEIS school. She also accounts for those teachers who are deluded and lacking in the courage to face the legitimate challenges students are putting to them. Nicole and Meg’s storied fragments point to the courage and skills colleagues and managers in schools need to develop in challenging the unprofessional behaviour of teachers while supporting those teachers to improve their capacities by sharing skills and providing relevant training and CPD. What about primary teachers’ perspectives, Rachel will you begin?

**Rachel:** [I will], *‘Parents have said to me, when I was home/school...they found even being able to use our first names. They find that breaks down a huge barrier. Some of the parents could be older than me, and if they still have to call me by my surname...Whereas if they are able to call me by my first name they don’t have a problem. It breaks down that, I am better than you, you are only allowed use my surname. But they said they really liked that, that we were able to do that’.*

**Mary:** I am keenly aware that yours is the only school, amongst the four schools participating in the research study, where parents, and children, address teachers by their first names. I am hearing your testimony that parents interpret this equality of naming as very helpful to them, as an invitation to come talk to us about your child. Thinking narratively about how you tell it I see this school policy as telling parents we respect you as partners with teachers, in supporting your children’s learning. The story you tell about parents’ feedback testifies to the symbolic power naming has for parents in your school. It sends out a powerful signal about how the culture and community of this DEIS school values parents. The naming ritual is inclusive rather than exclusive, inclusive of parents

and of children. Hannah, you are a colleague of Rachel's what resonates in your story about the culture and community within the school?

**Hannah:** [Well], *'Myself and Rachel and Catherine (principal teacher) did the Restorative Practice course during the year. It was for training the trainers, so we could train other people (on the staff)...I know that it has changed how I deal with my relationships...All the staff are getting trained in it, it must effect our interconnectedness, do you know, it must do... That has a huge knock-on effect on the kids...If we can feel good about each other and feel good about ourselves and have good relationships, you feel better, that well is fuller and you can teach better'*.

**Mary:** I see you open the scene with naming a team, yourself, Rachel and Catherine. Already you are signalling a shared community of teachers collaborating together on something you value in the school. The restorative practice training is of course about learning a process of restoring the balance in relationships after there has been a misunderstanding or breakdown in communication or behaviour. It teaches simple practices to challenge people to take responsibility for their behaviour and make recompense for their actions. I am hearing from you about your observations of the positive knock-on effect of this learning for staff in your school. You understand that when a team of teachers feel good about each other and develop their skills to resolve communication issues between them, they are more likely to be able to collaborate as a team of teachers. Because the school community values the practice of R.P. amongst staff, teachers like Hannah and Rachel are therefore learning the value of the skills they want to share with the children by using them themselves. Tell me how you read the community and culture of your school Caitriona?

**Caitriona:** [Well, Mary], *'we have the most phenomenal staff here. I mean like you go out there in the yard and there are more kids hanging out of the principal and hugging him. There's more kids coming up and giving teachers hugs. There is nobody being pushed away and do you know what we don't give a crap about the propriety of it... We have a certain type of person [teacher] that has come into the school. I am not being snotty or I am not being snobby or I am not being judgemental but there are certain people that this school wouldn't suit'*.

**Mary:** I notice you begin by describing the team you work with in this narrative fragment, as the 'most phenomenal staff'. You admire them. You think they are great. Your description of the affectionate responses between the children and the principal, in the schoolyard, signal to me how the affective dimension is highly valued from the top down in the community of your school. I am learning about the values embodied in the culture

of your school. In our conversations you spoke to the importance of child safety but not allowing legitimate concerns about child safety create an environment where when a child who wants a hug, or needs a hug, is refused a hug. There is emotional intelligence at work here and a palpable love for children in the atmosphere of the school. I have seen it. I have felt it. I have heard it. I have sensed it. In crediting the wisdom of those who have recruited staff in your school you remark that 'there are certain people this school wouldn't suit'. I know from our wider conversations that you recognise that the children in your school deserve teachers who care about them and are committed and courageous enough to show it. Your reflections help ground issues of affective equality in the day-to-day interactions between children and teachers in DEIS schools. I read the culture and community of your DEIS school through your story. What about the community outside the DEIS school?

**Jessica:** *[Well, Mary], 'I was trying to think, in the email you asked about what motivates you to continue? Well these things like when the parish priest comes up and says 'so-and-so said in the community about what a difference you are making' or 'how much the school has improved in the last two years'. Or it's like we had our concert last Friday and you see the people who come together for that, who really appreciate what you are doing for their children...It does feel like the school is like a little beacon of light in that community. Especially in recent years a lot of trouble has gone on, on that stretch of road, where we are, because of families who have dominated and brought unsavoury things to this community....There are terrible disturbances. I think the school does hold great significance for them because we are so opposed to that'.*

**Mary:** I hear how important it is for your morale and for the morale of the team of teachers in your school, to hear feedback from the community that you are making a positive difference in the lives of their children and in the lives of the community. You use the metaphor of the school as a beacon of light. I see that light juxtaposed against the shadow cast by the terrible disturbances caused within the community because of the behaviour of some families. The school shines as an important symbol in the community upholding the values the community honours and contesting the anti-social behaviour dishonouring, disturbing and endangering members of the community. Thinking narratively about 'the stretch of road' it is a stretch shared by the school, elderly people, and families, including some families causing grief and trouble within the community. It makes us aware of the real impact inequalities exert on communities deprived of opportunities for growth, employment, education and development. The damage is evident in the behaviour of those who abuse others within the community but it is borne by the community, by the families trying to do the best for their children under difficult circumstances. Jessica, you see the school through the eyes of those parents who recognise the work the teachers do as not only nurturing their children but also providing a ballast against the anti-social these parents abhor. Caitriona and Rachel you have both

been HSCL co-ordinators, so your work has been deeply engaged with building relationships and supporting parents and families in your communities. What have you learned?

**Caitríona:** *'I am humbled by people's ability to cope. I am humbled by parents, who might not always have their priorities right, and they might not do it the way I would do it, but they are doing it the best way that they can. They still want the same things for their children that I want for mine. If I was in those challenging circumstances I don't know where my priorities would be either. To be truthful education is not high up on the list of priorities if your home life has gone to hell in a hand basket.'*

**Mary:** I hear the respect you have for parents in challenging circumstances. You recognise they are doing the best they can. I see you identify yourself as a mother with these parents who, like you, want the best for their children. Your role as HSCL co-ordinator is to support them, to support their children's learning. You accept the reality that education is not high on their list of priorities because of their challenging circumstances. In our conversations you named homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, serious mental and physical health issues, poor familial and social supports and poor parenting skills as some of the challenges with which parents and families are living. In storying your reflections I see your identification with the circumstances of some families as reflecting your respect for their capacity to endure the challenges with which they are living. Rachel you were in HSCL role for a number of years. How has what you learned shaped how you are as a teacher now?

**Rachel:** [Well], *'Home/School really opens your eyes to what the kids are coming from. I know going into houses. I remember one little girl and going to the house. The door was slightly ajar. There was all rubbish in the garden. I was kind of knocking and shouting in the house to see if anybody was home. There was a little baby, a teenager... minding the baby...a mother upstairs. I was just thinking all this chaos is going on and this girl always came to school with a smile on her face. Like, if you met her you would never think there was anything wrong. She would be the child you would say 'I would just love to see her do well'. I would love to. She deserves it...'*

**Mary:** I am thinking about the scene you describe Rachel. You use the phrase 'all this chaos' to describe the context in which you perceive the girl living. I wonder what percentage of teachers can relate to such a scene and consequently understand and empathise with the support and learning needs of the child living in challenging circumstances who presents to them for school every day? How has your knowledge, of the challenges some families and children face, shaped you as a teacher now?

**Rachel:** *'It also allowed me to see where the children are coming from...to kind of know they have come out of a chaotic house and where you can cut them some slack. Just knowing when you can push a child and when you can't, to be the best that they can be. For me I suppose it (teaching) kind of, in some ways, has moved away from actual learning of reading and writing and it is kind of developing little citizens and little people. I would think even the feelings check, I think that is a really important thing just so that the children are learning how to develop and express themselves and you know that it's ok to say you are feeling sad and it's ok. Somebody else might say something to them like 'you can come with me, you can play with me if you are sad' or 'I will mind him teacher'. To develop that kind of empathy in children and the caring that they have for each other. I do think that is really important. Because you are working in a disadvantaged area for me it's really important that the children are happy in school and that they enjoy it'.*

**Mary:** I am aware that your stories reveal a deepening of your missions as primary teachers over time in DEIS schools. Words resonate from across many of your narrative fragments echoing the desire to 'reach' as distinct from just 'teach' students. Your goals have altered, from teaching reading and writing, to developing empathy and solidarity between children. I also hear a strong empathy amongst you, with the challenges some families face in the communities you serve. You speak of these challenges non-judgementally. You express solidarity with families and the community. You are seeking ways to better respond to children and their learning needs, and to better support their parents to in turn support their children's education. How can we engage with these challenges Paulo?

**Paulo:** *'As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word...Within the word we find two dimensions; reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part - the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis...To exist humanely, is to name the world, to change it. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity' (Freire, 1972:60-61).*

**Mary:** You are referring here to authentic words, words that name the reality that exists, the inequalities that damage, silence, stunt, oppress. I interpret you as saying therefore that how we name the world as human beings, as teachers, must be oriented towards truth telling, towards naming inequalities for the purpose of achieving social change that liberates our students and ourselves. Otherwise, our words are unauthentic, complicit in resisting change. They are either authentic or what AnaLouise calls 'status-quo stories' (Keating, 2013). I am mindful that when teachers name the inequalities some children and families experience, expressing solidarity and support for students and building solidarity between students, there are engaged in *praxis* as you define it.



**Paulo:** *'Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men...Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to other men. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation...As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible'* (Freire, 1972:62).

**Mary:** Your words challenge us deeply as teachers to be brave, to express our commitments to students, and to our colleagues, to challenge what we know to be unjust, unfair, untenable and unacceptable. There is a very simple truth in what you say. The litmus test of whether our praxis as teachers, women and human beings is loving, is whether it generates acts of freedom or not. Antonia, you have written about Paulo's work as 'Teaching as an Act of Love'. Would you like to share your thoughts on that with us?

**Antonia:** *'From Freire's perspective, if we were to solve the educational difficulties of students from oppressed communities, then educators had to look beyond the personal...In so many ways his work pointed to how economic inequality and social injustice dehumanize us, distorting our capacity to love ourselves, each other, and the world...Freire exposed how well-meaning teachers, through their lack of critical moral leadership, actually participate in disabling the hearts, minds, and bodies of their students-an act that disconnects these students from the personal and social motivation required to transform their world and themselves'* (Darder, 2009:568).

**Mary:** Critical moral leadership is visible in those stories where teachers participating in this research study identify with the overwhelming challenges some families and children face as a consequence of the effects of poverty and social injustice on their lives, and in their communities. In these instances teachers empathise with parents and actively support them and their children, especially in the HSCL co-ordinator role to derive the best outcomes possible from education. However, not all teachers in DEIS schools recognise their moral responsibility for acting in solidarity with students. Some choose not to recognise or challenge the oppressive social and economic inequalities that result in vastly unequal outcomes in education for their students. What kind of communities and cultures should we be nurturing within schools encouraging teachers towards moral responsibility and best practice? John, I think your praxis resonates very closely with Paulo's and Antonia's. Would you tell us about it please?

**John:** *'The one thing that destroys the energy of a workplace culture is a climate of fear. Conversely, people's energies are maximised when they feel loved and safe. Love wins over fear every time. Ron Berger has never been so right when he says, 'culture matters' (Tomsett, 2015:89).*

**Mary:** I cannot resist telling the reader that the title of your book from which the above quote is taken is *This Much I know about Love Over Fear: Creating A Culture for Truly Great Teaching*. I intuit your recent work as congruent with Freire's because you condense the challenge of creating a culture where teachers can be their best selves, and serve their students' needs best, as one where 'love' is nurtured and conquers 'fear'. Your words remind me how most participating teachers' stories reveal missions that their students experience feeling loved and safe in their classrooms. However, teachers are no different than their students in that they also need workplace environments where they feel loved and safe, nurturing environments. Mary, tell us about striking a balance between what you call the 'hard stuff' and the 'soft stuff'?

**Mary:** *'This is the hard stuff: the data, the accountability, [ ], the exams. Smart leaders pay equal attention to the soft stuff...So what is the soft stuff? At it's heart it is the 'people dimension'. The soft stuff is about recognising each human being as an individual and about developing them, sometimes in ways that are uncomfortable. It's about noticing the small stuff, paying attention to detail by doing things whole heartedly' (Myatt, 2016:117-118)*

**Mary:** Learning environments then need to strike a delicate balance between the 'hard stuff' and the 'soft stuff'. As Nicole reminded us 'pay attention to the day-to day' the small stuff...The significance of the 'soft stuff' reminds us that teachers, as well as students, are human beings, women and men, with hearts as well as minds that need tending. The contexts and cultures in DEIS schools, and other schools, need to nurture the 'human dimension'. bell how does this conversation resonate with your perspectives on cultures and contexts cultivating love or fear?

**bell:** [Yes it does], *'As we love, fear necessarily leaves...To receive the gift we must first understand that 'there is no fear in love'....Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience...It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies always in sameness, then difference of any kind will appear as a threat. When we choose to love we choose to move against fear-against alienation and separation. The choice of love is a choice to connect-to find ourselves in the other' (hooks, 2000:93).*

**Mary:** Many of the teachers participating in this research study understand that to teach and develop a relationship with your students you have to connect, to allow yourself to be known and to get to know them as human beings. There is plenty of evidence to support this perspective. It is really helpful that you name so clearly the damage that identifying our safety with sameness creates. It makes it impossible to expand beyond our own beliefs, experiences and inscriptions in order to empathise with other human beings with different, beliefs, experiences and inscriptions. Difference then becomes identified with fear, with danger, with threat. Parker you address these issues in *The Courage to Teach*, would you speak to this (2007)?

**Parker:** *'To reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher's part. Our words, spoken at remove from our hearts, become 'the balloon speech in cartoons' and we become caricatures of ourselves. We distance ourselves from students to minimise the danger - forgetting that distance makes life more dangerous still by isolating the self'* (Palmer, 2007:18).

**Mary:** bell, John and Parker, all three of you argue for connection rather than separation, for opening the heart in order to be the best we can be as teachers. Could we discuss the discourses that try to impose separation between us and ourselves, between us and our students, between us and others we perceive to be different from ourselves. Gail, I think your work on Foucault and education could help our discussion here?

**Gail:** *'Foucault understood that the influential, restrictive, rule-bound, regular effects of an era's formulation of its knowledge extends beyond merely opening some possibilities, and also establishing limits for what can be known and how it can become known...They effect what teaching practices we understand to be possible and legitimate, as well as what 'studenting' practices so to speak, we can expect as normal and ordinary from our students'* (McNicol Jardine, 2005:91).

**Mary:** So when Meg says 'these kids have a voice' some teachers hear their voices as a threat to their power. If 'these kids have a voice' and 'tell it as it is' they may challenge narrow teaching practices and limiting beliefs and values out of which some teachers act. Education, according to you Paulo, must challenge limiting beliefs, values, dispositions and oppressive practices with which teachers and students are inscribed by the dominant culture. How can we understand and embrace the courage to engage with the task of educating to expand limiting beliefs and generate learning that can integrate awareness of

differences in beliefs, values and experiences into mutual respect and shared projects oriented towards social and educational change? Megan you propose a pedagogy to steer a collective pathway through the undergrowth the dominant culture has inscribed around differences of race and sexual orientation. You call this a 'pedagogy of discomfort'. Please tell us about it?

**Megan:** *'A pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognise how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see'* (Boler, 1999:176-177).

**Mary:** How can we ensure that the nature of that inquiry is truly critical as distinct from self-justifying and oriented towards change rather than retaining the status quo?

**Megan:** *'Self-reflection, like passive empathy, runs the risk of reducing historical complexities to an overly tidy package that ignores our mutual responsibility...Upon reflection I may tell you, 'I feel defensively angry when you suggest that I examine my privilege'...Thus 'self-critique' easily functions as a form of 'confession'...In contrast...collective witnessing is always understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories and material conditions'* (Boler, 1999:178).

**Mary:** I hear in your warning about the risks of passive empathy and uncritical self-reflection amongst teachers, the dangers of solipsism. There is also the concurrent risk that teachers, I count myself among them, can abdicate both personal and collective responsibility for challenging oppressive systems in the process of self-reflection. Ira you speak of a *third idiom* as an approach to critical inquiry in education, would you tell us about that (1992:254)?

**Ira:** *'In large part, how we learn and make ourselves in the world depends on how we speak and how we are spoken to...When critical dialogue works, teachers and students reinvent their relationship and their modes of communicating. They create a dialogic discourse in a mutual inquiry. I call this invented discourse the third idiom because it is different from the two conflicting ones brought to class by students and teachers: non-academic everyday speech and academic teacher-talk...Students in a dialogic structure do not mimic the teacher's tastes, words, or knowledge. They are invited to criticise the cultures they examine, including their own'* (Shor, 1992:254-260).

**Mary:** Ira your words echo what Meg said about teachers needing to develop and exercise discernment, being careful of how they speak to and act towards students in DEIS schools. Teachers may not be familiar with the concept of 'third idiom' or of the term 'pedagogies of discomfort' but some enlightened teachers are practising pedagogies of presence, engagement and discomfort. However, educational change cannot rely on heroines, enlightened teachers blazing a solitary trail. Teaching is about practices, ways of engaging to promote learning. This raises the question of how we can develop communities of teachers willing to practice engaged or transformative pedagogies.

**Ira:** *'For this empowering pedagogy, I [ ] propose an agenda of values... which describe it as: Participatory; Affective; Problem-posing; Situated; Multicultural; Dialogic; Desocialising; Democratic; Researching; Interdisciplinary; [and] Activist'* (Shor, 1992:17)

**Mary:** Can you explain what you mean by desocialising?

**Ira:** *'Because critical-democratic dialogue questions traditional classroom relations, teacher-talk, unilateral authority, and the official syllabus, it can be thought of as desocialisation...It involves critically examining learned behaviour, received values, familiar language, habitual perceptions, existing knowledge and power relations, and traditional discourse in class and out'* (Shor, 1992:114).

**Mary:** I am hearing you advocate for a pedagogy for developing critical consciousness. Many critical theorists, including feminist and critical cultural theorists, propose ways to provide education promoting critical consciousness and social transformation. We can trace these proposals amongst Pragmatists, Phenomenologists as well as amongst Critical theorists such as Ira and Paulo, who have entered this discussion. John, would you like to speak on behalf of the Pragmatists about the significance of critical consciousness for social change?

**John:** *'Those concerned with progress, who are striving to change received beliefs, emphasize the individual factor in knowing; those whose chief business it is to withstand change and conserve received truth emphasise the universal and the fixed'* (Dewey, 2007:251-252).

**Mary:** John, I see the legacy of your perspective in later generations of critical educators and theorists, including Ira as cited above. He also articulates the situated, affective, problem posing and democratic features characterising education systems committed to critical consciousness and social change. You have helped us grasp the potential for learning and consequently for personal and collective change, in the fluid identity of the self. Will you share that with us?

**John:** *'The moment we recognise that the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action, the whole situation clears up...The wider or larger self which means inclusion instead of denial of relationships is identical with a self which enlarges in order to assume previously unforeseen ties'* (Dewey, 2007:256-257).

**Mary:** The impetus of many of your reflections on the possibility of social and educational change relies on systems connecting rather than separating human beings, including rather than excluding, expanding rather than limiting beliefs, relying on the affective as well as rational dimensions of thinking, co-constructing knowledge rather than inheriting knowledge and becoming critically conscious rather than passive, recognising the self as fluid rather than fixed. Please tell us George, about your perspective on social interaction and on our consciousness of social interaction?

**George:** *'What we are accustomed to call social is only a so-called consciousness of such a process, but the process is not identical with the consciousness of it, for that is an awareness of the situation. The social situation must be there if there is to be consciousness of it. Now it is clear that such a social character can belong only to the moment at which emergence takes place, that is to the present'* (Mead, 2002:74).

**Mary:** I am struck by the synergy between your *Philosophy of the Present* and the possibility for developing awareness as socially situated, co-constructed, conditional and emergent. I recognise correlations between mindfulness and your philosophy of the present. Mindfulness is a philosophy of the present teaching us how to pause and become aware of the workings of our own mind. It trains us to become aware of how our mind attributes fixed realities to thoughts, emotions, perceptions of people and events, though these thoughts, emotions, and perceptions are always arising and passing away. Jon would you help us understand how mindfulness can provide possibilities for pausing and developing a different kind of *praxis* oriented towards transformative personal and social change?

**Jon:** *'Without awareness, without learning how to use, refine, and inhabit our consciousness, our genetic capacity for clear seeing and selfless action, both within ourselves as individuals and within our institutions we are dooming ourselves to the autoimmune disease of our own unawareness...It is our job...to leave the children and grandchildren a legacy of wisdom and compassion embodied in the way we live, in our institutions and in our honouring of our interconnectedness...'* (Kabat-Zinn, 2005:15-16).

**Mary:** I have been learning to become better aware of the working of my own mind through mindfulness practice and training, over the past ten years. I don't know whether it is serendipity at work but three, of the four schools, from which our teachers emerged, have explored mindfulness as an aid to creating stillness, sharpening awareness and focusing attention and intention in preparation for learning. In one of the primary schools all teachers have been trained in mindfulness practices suitable for primary school children and many practice them. Hannah and Rachel teach in that school where there is a whole school commitment to mindfulness. In the secondary school, Meg facilitates a mindful lunch in her classroom, one day per week, for any students and teachers who choose to partake. Several teachers in her school have partaken in mindfulness training in the past. Considering Mindfulness in the context of considerations of expanding awareness brings us back to phenomenology, well documented in Chapter Three of the Literature Review. Ian, would you remind us about what the Phenomenological perspective might add to our conversation?

**Ian:** *'Phenomenology is concerned solely with the structures and working of human consciousness...The argument is that the outside world has meaning only through our consciousness of it...The concerns of phenomenology...see meanings-norms, values and beliefs, etc.–as the central focus of the sociological enterprise. [It is a theory] of persons and of action'* (Craib, 1992:98).

**Mary:** I see a correlation between the challenges phenomenology poses for taken-for-granted assumptions and the challenges mindfulness poses for what we assume to be reality. Both focus on the workings of human consciousness with a view to raising awareness and developing values, norms and consequently behaviours supporting a better shared social life.

Thank you to all the educators for participating in the conversation so far. Teachers you have facilitated a discussion enabling us to explore together the values and beliefs shaping the culture of DEIS schools and the communities within and around DEIS schools. You have helped us to understand how you perceive the grounded contexts in which you teach by sharing your storied fragments with us. Theorists, you have provided us with

lenses through which we can examine *praxis* in the context of actively challenging inequalities through life in schools. Can we now move on to the final topic for discussion, arising from the Contextual Insights, in Act Three, Chapter Six, that is teachers' reflections on pedagogy in DEIS school contexts. Let us see where their fragments lead us, and the extent to which the literature resonates with teachers' stories. Secondary teachers will you begin the conversation?

**Nicole:** *'If you take care of the day-to-day and keep bringing it back to the pupils, That's why we are here...It's just you know I think you have to believe and I am not just saying this in a patronising way. I think you really do have to believe in your students because very often, I find with some of these kids, they don't believe in themselves.'*

**Mary:** Your vision is crystal clear. The students are at the centre of it. I know you see the importance of communicating that vision in how you engage in the day-to day encounters and shared teaching/learning tasks with your students. When I plotted your passion for teaching on a mind map, (see Appendix O), I identified it with building students' self-belief and skills. You also testify to how the first principal teacher, in your present school, helped build your self-belief as a teacher, in your early years in the school. As you witness elsewhere in your storied fragments when there is an atmosphere of fear, discouragement, or disinterest, 'there is no learning in it'. Victoria what is your approach to pedagogy?

**Victoria:** *'A lot of students do struggle. We all don't learn the same way...We all learn in different ways. So we need to tap into the different students because it's not just one individual sitting in front of us, you have a class of twenty four. So it's my job not just to give them the content, it's also to show them what is best suited to them....They will come back to you and they will say, I really enjoyed that, I think I learned more in this one class Miss than I have in the whole two weeks that we were covering a topic. And, I say, well then that is the way that you go...Myself, I am visual. My daughter is visual. So you have to give them the skills and the time to find that path, you know.'*

**Mary:** You remind us that all students are unique individuals with different learning styles. I see your pedagogy as seeking to find the appropriate path to learning for each student. You are listening to students' feedback as the barometer of what methodologies work for them as individuals. You are encouraging them to take time to experiment with different learning styles in order to find their own voice. Are there tensions for teachers between committing time to allow students to innovate and find their path and the demands of the prescribed curriculum?



**Victoria:** *'We are in so much of a rush to get to grades as well, in my subject. I feel very, very frustrated that the kids don't seem get to relax and enjoy it and be more creative within Art...It's disgraceful. It allows for no change and teachers are being told more critical thinking, you know, like the students should have more opinions...We are looking at the grades for college points to get them in but when they get to college, then they need the critical thinking and then the students are stranded....So as a teacher, I have learned, I have to allow that time. So what I have ended up doing is I come in over Easter and I give extra classes after school. That way I can follow the curriculum and within class I can also allow that discussion and let them be, be a little bit more open to their ideas and how they feel'.*

**Mary:** I feel the tension you are describing between an unchanged curriculum in your subject area which now mandates more evidence of critical thinking in students' work but without any adjustment in the curriculum itself to support that objective. Many teachers talk about time as one of the most scarce and valuable resources they can provide to students. In order to teach at a pace and through approaches they know to be in the best interest of students, several teachers at secondary report spending some of their holiday time and sessions after the teaching day providing extra classes. I admire their personal commitment. However, giving the best service to students should not have to rely on teachers' voluntarism. Meg you articulate another perspective relating to the balance between the curriculum and nurturing students. Would you share it with us?

**Meg:** *'An interesting thing for me Mary, this year, is I have taught CSPE, Civic, Social and Political Education. I opted to do a mindfulness course with one class group who were very on the edge of learning and staying in school. It was a decision I made with the previous principal without consulting parents...Some of the kids objected. We were half way through the mindfulness programme when the new principal...became aware of it and said 'you can't do that, you can't just pull a subject off a child for Department reasons, for educational reasons...So I went back to teaching the children CSPE and I had to drop the mindfulness programme. I only have them once a week and we didn't get the course covered. That child I just met down there, his mother said, he came home yesterday and he said stuff came up in his exam that he didn't know and he is going to fail because he didn't know it'. I said to the mother 'that's my fault'...It made me think that while I can have all this wonderful time with the kids a teacher also has a very strong remit, which is to deliver the curriculum. There is that real balance in education, do your job, deliver the curriculum as well as nurture the young people and be creative. And, sometimes, as in the example of what I did, sometimes I get it wrong. I spend more time than I should on the supportive aspects of the work and something like that happened. So I think to be a good teacher in this day and age you just have to be very mindful of the balance'.*

**Mary:** I am interested in the way you tell this story Meg. There is a strong lesson in it about the challenge for teachers of striking the delicate balance between delivering the curriculum and nurturing young people. I am struck by your honesty, with the justifiably frustrated parent, when you put your hand up and say ‘that’s my fault’. Elsewhere you guaranteed her to redress the imbalance by examination time, by completing the course before the final examination. Your honesty in the telling about getting the balance wrong, erring on the side of nurturing rather than curriculum reminds us that we have to be mindful of our responsibilities for getting the balance right. Julia, you spoke about experiences where the balance was right, would you tell us about your storied experience?

**Julia:** *‘We would have a period in the library every week and of course they didn’t want to read...The librarian had a number of books by Paul Williams<sup>12</sup>....Of course some of them would have had parents that were in prison as well, so they had ideas and opinions about all of this as well...There was one particular story...It was a story about a boy whose dad had gone to prison. He was failing in life, failing in school. His friends were falling away from him. He was desperately lonely after his father. At the end of the book he said, that is just like me, [her voice fills with emotion]. And you know it gives you the opportunity to say ‘you know what, you are not failing and we are going to work really hard to get you a good education’.*

**Mary:** I know that as teacher of English you have expressed the joy you experience in stories and teaching allows you to share that joy with students. You demonstrate that stories are a vehicle through which students can identify with sorrows and deeply challenging life events, which might not find expression otherwise. I observe you reassuring the student and committing to put your skills, support and hard work beside his, in order to provide him with a good education and a successful outcome. I am remembering how you told me about the impact of cutbacks in funding to DEIS schools reducing the English contact hours for second and third years, depriving them of the library hour where you reported some of the most significant gains you observed in reaching hard-to-reach students, through shared reading. The loss is profound, not only for students but also for teachers. Our work takes on deeper meaning in these moments when we make a real connection with students, through the subject matter, especially students with the most acute learning needs and the most challenging lives. What circumstances are conducive to supporting teachers to develop the capacity to make these connections with students?

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Williams is an Irish Crime Correspondent

**Meg:** *'I think the difference Ireland will make is if we allow for a reflective space for teachers to look at how they are being transformed by their experiences. I think if the Irish Government, the Department of Education, allowed that to happen within the working week because at the moment it is not perceived as a part of your job to sit with a bunch of people and talk about what you have been doing. We have meetings...but even at those we don't have discussions. We are still being told, being given more information about more policies, about more things to do. There is no space, there is no space in a given week for a teacher to reflect with a colleague and sure that is daft. I mean in business if you didn't reflect on how well or badly you did, you would never grow'.*

**Mary:** It seems counter-intuitive that a reflective space is not a focal point in schools committed to becoming learning communities. I hear you saying Meg that the meetings in which teachers are obliged to partake bring policy and practice mandates, adding to, rather than supporting the workload. Teachers speak of the scarcity of time together, as well as with students. Yet the findings testify to the strong benefits collegiality offers teachers at both a professional and personal level, especially when faced with challenging events, in DEIS schools. There is a resonance between your identification of the need for a reflective space in which teachers can learn together and find mutual support, and my motivation to develop this study. I recognised the absence of a space in which to reflect with others on how I was doing my job as a primary teacher in DEIS schools, during my years as a primary teacher. Later when I became a teacher at third level, I recognised the same gap. To some extent the fieldwork was an attempt on my part to create a safe and critically reflective space where participating teachers could reflect on their storied inside and outside school. So, would the primary teachers like to share their reflections on what you have been learning about pedagogy?

**Hannah:** *'If they are not calm, you might as well be, like they are looking at you and they are showing five or doing whatever they are supposed to do and they are putting their hand up quietly but it's not going in...If you are not able to calm yourself down you won't be able to take it in. I think that even as adults we are still learning that all the time. It's like it's never done and for the kids these are steps [Restorative Practice steps]. Hopefully these are steps on a road... With that class I had the last two years, I just did it [Mindfulness] once...in the morning... then they all lay down on the floor and found their own place and there was no messing. We did our breathing...So every morning I just talked them through it. It just gave them a chance to leave that crap at home. Whatever stuff they came in with, burdened with, not always to do with home, but it just gave them a chance some mornings to let it go'.*

**Mary:** Hannah your story reminds us that the conditions nurturing learning need to be in place in order for learning to actually happen. In your classroom you recognise that children may need to lay down some burdens in order to free up a space in which learning can flourish. Here you reflect on how developing Mindfulness and Restorative Practice provides children with the conditions and the skills to still both the mind, the emotions and the body. Elsewhere teachers have spoken about the ‘feelings check’ as a really significant space in which children can express how they are feeling. It also provides a space inviting teachers, and other children, to respond and support children if they are feeling sad or overwhelmed. Your fragment creates a counterpoint to Nicole’s description of the tight atmosphere she experienced at school. She sees such classroom environments as counterproductive to learning and to building learners’ self-belief. I envisage classrooms where commitment to creating calmness is seen as a pre-condition for learning, as spaces where learning is being actively nurtured. Caitriona in your HSCL role you are supporting parents to create a calm quiet corner at home in which to nurture learning with their children. Can you tell us about that?

**Caitriona:** *‘I would call all the parents in for a meeting and it’s all about Shared Reading... Children of pre-school age love this. You get your own little cúinne (corner) somewhere be it on the corner of a couch, be it on beanbag, be it at bedtime snuggled up against the pillows. They need to find their sacred space. What you are really doing is you are carving out special time with your child...There is a huge emphasis on story telling, as opposed to story reading. Because we have literacy issues with parents...[I say], ‘that’s not what we are here about, what we are here about is sharing stories with children’... It gives the parents gi-normous confidence because it is not about the reading, it is about the story telling...I would also say in the meeting ‘look, you are natural born story tellers anyway’ because you say ‘when I was small I did this...We are always telling stories’.*

**Mary:** I remember you modelling the process of building parents’ confidence as storytellers. You pulled a very simple storybook off the shelves in your office. I remember there was a red bus with black wheels. It was a very simple book with few images on any page. You were spinning multiple stories for at least five minutes. I saw your skill as a storyteller. You were animated, buzzing with ideas, plots and characters. You reminded me, as a teacher, of the potential for learning embodied in stories. The phrase ‘they need their sacred space’ resonates with me from your own narrative fragment. As a teacher, mother, woman, and human being, you understand the need to create still, safe, spaces in which parents can connect deeply with their children, in this case through story. Thinking narratively through your beautiful metaphors of ‘sacred space’ and ‘carving out special time’ with your child I see your work as more than about language development. It is a means to connect emotion, imagination and spirit in a shared intimate encounter, through storying. I reflect on how the spaces we construct or experience as ‘sacred spaces’ or ‘special places’, and ‘special time’ with people we love, whether we are adults or children,

provide emotional sustenance. This pedagogical approach is about hearts, as well as minds. Your work as a teacher is in the HSCL co ordinator role, Caitriona. Rachel you worked in that role previously, but now you teach in the infant classroom. Tell us about that experience?

**Rachel:** *'They don't even realise they are learning...Like at the moment we have started narratives and they are really enjoying it. I have a little autistic boy and he is like 'did you make those cards', because I made pictures of characters and pictures of scenes. He says 'did you make the pictures of the robbers and the prince for me'? I said 'yes, I made them for you'. He says 'God, I knew it, I knew it'. He is so excited that he is going to write this story about 'once upon a time'. I enjoy that seeing them get a kick out of it...They like doing well. I would say 'you are on fire, hey get the hose there's another boy on fire'. They think this is hilarious. I say 'you are a legend' and they say 'I am a leg end', (she laughs)*

**Mary:** Your story of building narratives with the children conveys that it is not just exciting for them, it is also exciting for you. You are 'carving out special time with the children' at school, just like Caitriona helps parents 'carve out special time' at home, through building narratives. In both your storied accounts you want children and adults to enjoy building stories creatively together. I imagine it must be heart-warming for a child to hear their teacher say you are a 'legend'. The word is new to your infant class, Rachel. They echo it back to you as 'leg end' but they know it means 'my teacher thinks I am great'. Herein lie possibilities for building the self-belief and the capacity of children, parents and teachers through storying. The children don't realise they are learning and the teacher feels liberated. John, would you comment on pedagogies that seek to empower students and challenge practices and conditions in schools reproducing inequality?

**John:** *'The child is the starting point, the center, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal...Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal...Learning is active...It involves organic assimilation starting from within'* (Dewey, 1956:9).

**Mary:** Nicole almost paraphrased your words when she said 'keep bringing it back to the students'. You turn our attention to the interior landscape as the place to begin learning about the child and helping the child to learn about herself or himself. It is really helpful to us now to be reminded by you that the goal of education is 'self-realisation'. One of the unique aspects of the findings of this study is the recognition that 'self-realisation' is as important for teachers to become their best selves as it is for students to reach their full potential. Participating teachers name tensions between goals for students' self-realisation and teaching the curriculum. Teachers have named these forces as pulling them in different directions?

**John:** *'Subject-matter is but spiritual food, possible nutritive material. It cannot digest itself: it cannot of its own accord turn into bone and muscle and blood. The source of whatever is dead, mechanical and formal in schools is found precisely in the subordination of the life and experience of the child to the curriculum...Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside of the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as something hard and fast; see it as something fluid, embryonic, vital; and we realise that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process'* (Dewey, 1956:9-11)

**Mary:** Teachers' stories bear testimony to the intricate balance that needs to be struck between the interests of the child and the teaching of the curriculum. Sometimes teachers report feeling submerged, along with their students by the weight of the demands of the curriculum, at both primary and secondary level. However, the imbalance can strike from the other side where the curriculum can be subsumed by the prioritisation of the developmental needs of students. Teachers bear responsibility for getting the balance right. However, at primary and secondary levels teachers testify to the predominance of the interests of the curriculum over the developmental needs of students, in most storied accounts. The significance of the accreditation outcomes at secondary for controlling access to third level, dictate priorities in these schools. Inspection regimes at primary and secondary levels are, according to teachers, driven by national testing standards and assessments. In these instances teaching to the test and national standards can become the yardstick, with which to beat teachers or at least dissuade them from putting their energies into what is neither valued nor credited within the system. Sonia you have examined these issues in exploring why we are motivated to teach. You identified two competing contemporary discourses relating to public education in U.S. Public schools. Will you help us understand what these discourses are and how they compete?

**Sonia:** *'One is the 'official' discourse, embodied in the language of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation and other mandates with a focus on accountability, standards, credentials, and testing and accompanied by punitive measures meted out to students and teachers failing to live up to them'* (Nieto, 2005:5).

**Mary:** Participating teachers in this research articulate the straight jacket these official discourses impose on their lives as teachers in DEIS schools. They see their time and energy being diverted to increasing administrative workloads in the service of accountability, quality, and fears of litigation but at the expense of time with students and time to reflect together on how we teach. Committed, empowering and transformative work by teachers in developing students' social and emotional intelligences and aesthetic

intelligence is consequently undervalued and discredited. The result is demoralising for critical educators who recognise the value of developing these life intelligences. How can their students, coming from communities experiencing multiple disadvantages, fully flourish intellectually without prioritising their social, emotional and aesthetic needs? Sonia, you describe a 'counter-narrative' to the official discourse?

**Sonia:** [I call it ] *'the 'discourse of possibility', a way of thinking about teaching and learning, embraced largely by teachers and others who view public education as [ ] an elusive and unfulfilled but nonetheless significant goal in the quest for equality and social justice'* (Nieto, 2005:5).

**Mary:** I hear the 'discourse of possibility' you name resonating with Bolers' 'pedagogy of discomfort' (1999), Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (2004), Gore's *Struggle for Pedagogies* (1993), hooks' 'engaged pedagogy' (1994), Keatings' *Teaching Transformation* (2007), and Kinchhoe's version of critical pedagogy (2010). Teachers participating in this study identify many moments of engaged pedagogy where they know they are reaching and not just teaching students in DEIS schools. Moments of true engagement with students matter to these teachers. These moments hold out hope for supporting transformative change, for building students' self-belief, for helping students find a voice, for challenging inequalities alongside students, for building empathy and solidarity between students, for building student resilience, and for supporting critical thinking. Teachers in this study have identified some approaches they have found to be effective and meaningful in supporting deep student learning. For example, several teachers reflect on the significance of storying as an effective pedagogical approach to learning. They see the value of stories and storying when students identify with characters and connect emotionally with storylines, such that they can explore their own storied lives through the learning process. Most participating teachers see the value in supporting students to connect with their own feelings and life concerns as well as the academic content of lessons.

Both primary and secondary teachers testify to the importance of the affective dimensions of learning irrespective of the age or stage of their students. This affective dimension is storied as significant for pre-school children, school going infants and for teenage boys coping with challenging events in their young lives. In these cases sharing stories was the means teachers employed to connect told stories to lived stories. In Chapter 6, *Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play in Three Acts*, and also in this Chapter, Meg, Hannah, Rachel, Jessica and Caitríona recognise, that in order to facilitate learning, teachers and parents, need to be aware of how to create conditions that will support learning. They understand the need to create stillness and calm in order to focus students' attention and intention on the learning tasks ahead. They story: inviting students to lie on the floor of the classroom and be still; inviting parents to create a 'sacred space' for reading with their pre-school children at home; and inviting teachers and students to participate in a mindful lunch at school.

These teachers recognise the need to carve out a reflective space, conducive for learning. Their storied fragments testify to the positive impact training in Mindfulness, Restorative Practice, human rights practices, positive behaviour strategies, Circle Time strategies (Mosley, 1996, 1998) and approaches supported by the Incredible Years Programme (Webster-Stratton, 2016), have had in supporting them to build up classroom environments and pedagogical approaches pregnant with possibilities for 'engaged pedagogy' (hooks, 1994). Could we hear a little about some of these approaches from those who value and teach these methodologies? They appear to promote shared values and ethical behaviour by promoting mutual respect and self-respect. They include approaches to: building skills to strengthen relationships; acknowledging and respecting differences; building awareness about social justice; expressing and managing emotions, including negative emotions; developing well-being and resilience. Can we begin with the purpose and outcomes of Mindfulness in schools?

**Willem and colleagues:** *'The MiSP [Mindfulness in Schools programme] is a set of nine scripted lessons tailored to secondary schools, supported by tailored teacher training. Mindfulness involves learning to direct attention to immediate mental experience, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity...The intention is that when young people use mindfulness to work with mental states, everyday life and stressors this will cultivate well-being and promote mental health. [We ran] a non randomised controlled feasibility study investigat[ing] the acceptability of the programme for teachers and students in schools with young people aged 12-16, taught as a nine week programme...The findings provide promising evidence of the programme's acceptability and efficacy'* (Kuyken et al, 2013:126-131).

**Mary:** Hannah and Rachel's and their principal have had training in Mindfulness enabling them to in turn train their colleagues. Their school culture promotes its use. Hannah, in her fragments, reflects on the positive impact it had on the children in her class. In her secondary school Meg invites students and staff to have a mindful lunch in her classroom, once a week. Teachers in Caitriona's school have had some introductory sessions on Mindfulness. I sat as an observer on these sessions during the early fieldwork process. Sanctuary, a meditation and mindfulness centre in the heart of Dublin teaches a range of Mindfulness programmes for use in primary and secondary schools. I have had a role in supporting their work developing programmes for young people. I have also trained in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a programme developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. The awareness I have gained from practising mindfulness concurs with the benefits participating teachers report from practising Mindfulness with their students and by practising it themselves. These benefits are corroborated by the research conducted by Kuyken et al. (2013) on the effectiveness of the MiSP. Marilyn, will you introduce us to the possibilities of the Quality Circle Time Model developed by Jenny Mosley (1988,1996). Rachel, you referred to circle time in your classroom as the 'feelings check'.



**Marilyn:** *'The term Circle Time refers to a whole class meeting where everyone sits in a circle. It is a forum that is bound by strict ground rules to ensure emotional 'safety' and respectful listening. Different approaches to Circle Time are used at all levels of education. Primary schooling has, for a long time, embraced a need for personal, social education, (PSE) often employing a coherent whole-school approach...In many secondary schools, nearly all teachers are tutors and often they are required to deliver the PSE or pastoral programme...they have received little or no training in teaching PSE and have limited experiences of the basic techniques for effectively teaching it'* (Tew, 1998:1-2).

**Mary:** Circle-time was a new concept for me until, during the fieldwork period of the study I found myself in what Rachel called the 'feelings circle' in her infant classroom. I describe this experience in the findings chapter. She and other teachers refer to 'circle-time' and other SPHE supports (PSE in the UK) as really important barometers helping them to assess how the 'emotional weather', Rachel's word, is with children. Consequently, teachers can then provide extra support for particular children, alert other staff to children's needs and develop students' awareness and capacities to empathise and support each other. The intervention is simple but potentially transformative. The FRIENDS for Life programme provides another approach. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has recently conducted an evaluation of the FRIENDS for Life Programme delivered in Irish Schools. The programmes form a suite of cognitive behavioural therapy, early intervention and prevention programmes. Their goal is to build resilience and wellbeing to combat childhood anxiety. They are tailored to suit children from four years of age through to adulthood, (Ruttledge, 2014). The evaluation found that teachers are ideally suited to deliver such programmes in schools and found significant beneficial outcomes for participating children and teenagers. Who would like to help us to understand the objectives of Restorative Practice by referring to its implementation in an Irish context??

**Allyn and colleagues:** *'(Restorative Practice RP) is 'the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision-making' (Wachtel, 2005, p. 86). Restorative programmes promote dialogue between wrongdoers and harmed persons. Restorative practice (RP) is a means of dealing with conflict and offending behaviour which emphasizes dialogue, respect and empowerment. In 2010, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) developed an RP programme, with the aim of developing a 'restorative community' in Tallaght West...The training consisted of three levels: awareness-raising training, facilitation skills training and training for trainers. The RP Programme was also intended to develop RP Trainer capacity...and to support and promote participation in a learning environment which enables reflection on and sharing of the learning... (Fives et al, 2013:6)*

**Mary:** I became aware of RP, for the first time through the fieldwork for this research study. When I began working with Hannah and Rachel they were already trained as R.P. trainers. They had recently interviewed fourth and fifth class children interested in being trained to use R.P. skills in their school. One of the days I spent at their school, happened to be the first day they were rolling out the R.P. training for the children. They invited me to observe the training. On the day they asked me to participate with them in it. I was deeply impressed by their motivation to provide children with R.P. skills. They also testified to the use they had made themselves of R.P. skills in negotiating disagreements between students, between parents and teachers, and between teachers. Their goal was to provide the children themselves with the skills to negotiate disagreements and restore relationships. Training in these skills is widely available to teachers and schools. There is amazing potential for using these skills to resolve behavioural challenges not only for children but for adults in the school community and outside it. Could we now consider the influence of human rights training in schools, especially DEIS schools. Hannah testifies to how developing human rights learning through S.P.H.E. in the aftermath of her *Right Sparks* (Human Rights Education, CPD Programme for Primary Schools) training with Amnesty International brought her passion for teaching and for social justice together. She has taken a leadership role in Development Education, raising awareness about global injustice and human rights in her school since then. The school culture embodies these values. Broadening the discussion to look at how Development Education is supported within schools, Audrey and Meliosa your work reflects on the landscape in secondary schools, pointing to some of the current challenges. Would you speak to some of those?

**Audrey and Meliosa:** *Development Education occupies a marginal status within the formal curriculum in post-primary schools. The exam-driven focus of the post-primary system is a major obstacle to the meaningful inclusion and in-depth exploration of global justice themes in the classroom. The status of Development Education within schools and the responsibility for ensuring that young people are exposed to social justice issues falls largely upon the shoulders of 'willing and able' teachers who have a personal and passionate commitment to social and global justice. The discourse of development within state-sanctioned curriculum materials is not completely uniform, coherent, or consistent, either within or across texts...* (Bryan & Bracken, 2011: 14).

**Mary:** Your findings resonate with the stories Meg and Hannah tell reflecting their efforts to teach Development Education through CSPE (secondary level, Meg) and SPHE (primary level, Hannah) respectively. These are two of the 'willing and able teachers' passionate and willing to teach about social justice. However, we cannot rely on the willing and the able teachers alone to nurture critical consciousness. Students in DEIS schools, and in all schools, need to be supported develop the skills to read the world and challenge the inequalities they see and experience in it.

The role of Development Education has enormous potential through CSPE and SPHE. However, currently Development Education occupies a marginal place in the educational priorities of primary and secondary schools. If students are to learn to read the world, then they need to be educated to understand the global relationships that sustain inequality, negatively effecting day-to-day lives, including their own lives. Education policy attesting to addressing educational disadvantage must empower and resource schools and teachers to teach students critical literacy, the capacity to read the world. This is exactly what Freire meant by the concept of 'naming' the world. Naming the inhumane systems causing inequalities in the world empowers us to act to change the conditions upholding them. Critical and post-critical educators and researchers are committed to both the naming and the changing. Finally, could we discuss the concept of reflection and its implications for pedagogy? Many participating teachers are themselves reflective women but find little space for reflective practice on pedagogy in their life in schools. Nona would you help us explore this concept and its implications?

**Nona:** *'Reflection is defined as a deep consciousness engaged in how one thinks about and approaches a life work...Surely what is needed is a pedagogy by which inquiry thinking might be nurtured. Four...principles of such a pedagogy are suggested...(1) understanding the importance of knowing how one knows...;(2) conducting inquiries into one's own teaching practice and learning...;(3) Exploring the meaning of taking an inquiry stance; (4) adopting the attitudes Dewey suggest for becoming a reflective inquirer' (Lyons, 2010: vi preface, 26)*

**Mary:** Nona you direct us back to Dewey for inspiration and direction about the process of becoming reflective inquirers. John how do you define reflective thought?

**John:** [It is] *'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought...Certain subprocesses [ ] are involved in every reflective operation. These are: a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt; and (b) an act of search or investigation directed towards bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief'* (Dewey, 1933: 6-9).

**Mary:** On the basis of the evidence in the findings witnessing teachers' storied lives, secondary teachers express the desire for inquiry with colleagues but few supports are reported in the community of the school to satisfy this desire. Primary teachers, in this study, do not refer to the absence of opportunities for reflective inquiry nor do they testify to having specific opportunities for reflective inquiry. However, tacitly the whole school approaches to behaviour and the building of childrens' social and emotional intelligences embedded in all three participating primary schools, seem to provide, on the

basis of teachers storied accounts and my fieldwork observations, a very robust base for teachers open to inquiry. Learning to nurture social, emotional and behavioural skills makes teachers aware of how to nurture those skills themselves. Primary teachers' reflections on approaches such as R.P., MiSP, positive approaches to behaviour including Circle Time and the Incredible Years Programme, Human Rights training, for example, Right Sparks through Amnesty International and the Walk Tall curriculum (SPHE,) provide scaffolding to support both their teaching and their own learning. When I addressed questions to secondary teachers about approaches to behaviour management they directed me to the disciplinary policy and procedures. Otherwise they responded by telling me that managing behaviour was a matter for individual teachers. What was clear to me was that there was no net to catch these secondary teachers. They relied on their own abilities and passed on problems up the line following the disciplinary protocol. There is a stark contrast between this context and that storied by primary teachers in this study. In all three primary schools positive whole school approaches to behaviour provide a safety net for children and for teachers. They provide ethical guidance about the values and behaviours the school culture promotes. As Jessica exemplifies in one of her stories, when she is at the end of her tether with a child exhibiting challenging behaviour in her classroom she can remind herself 'come on now, you know what to do, you know what works'. She begins to rely again on the positive strategies she knows will work. In this context challenging behaviour is embedded in a whole approach to building positive behaviour benefiting relationships across the whole school. The focus is not on discipline but on positive behaviour. In the process of learning to teach positive behaviour to students, teachers are better positioned to reflect on whether their own behaviour is in fact positive.

Thank you to all the educators for participating in this conversation. You have engaged insights from teacher' storied lives, and theoreticians stories, to explore the challenges of being teachers in schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantage. This new conversation we have just engaged in, models possibilities for re-authoring our lived, told and research stories, recognising the dangers of a single story to represent any of us or the issues we care about as educators.

## **7.15 Closing our conversation**

The conversation, we have generated, has been woven from a rich tapestry of stories. These include: teachers' stories, theoreticians and researchers stories, and fragments from my story. At the heart's core of our conversations are resonances about being human. We have troubled together, and will continue to trouble the question of how to

create school contexts nurturing the full humanity of both students and teachers, in schools serving communities experiencing disadvantage.

This human being-ness of being teachers is explored in the discussion through three lenses: voice, relational engagement, and contextual setting in DEIS schools. These lenses are devices by which to explore the landscape of teachers' storied lives. The discussion attempted to weave teachers' stories, with those theoreticians tell, to help us to better understand and navigate the landscapes of teaching and learning, teachers and learners.

Our conversation amplified teachers' voices in order to bear witness to the stories they tell about the 'relational contextuality' of being teachers in DEIS schools. These stories are nuanced with tensions between: the curriculum and nurturing students; reflective practice and the pressures undermining its possibilities; distributive leadership and hierarchal leadership; schools supporting learning communities and teachers, and schools where teachers feel unsupported professionally and personally; schools supporting children to have a full voice and schools within which there are some teachers who don't approve of children asking critical questions; schools where teacher well-being is valued and schools where it is not; schools where teachers passions are supported or unsupported and harnessed or not harnessed to training and development leading to mastery of new skills and to increased confidence; schools where children are placed or not placed at the heart's core of the vision, mission and strategies for teaching and learning. That which teachers desire may not always match their actions. What schools say they do, may not match what they, in fact, do. However, teachers in this study care about their students and want to teach in school environments nurturing student learning and wellbeing, as well as their own learning and well-being. The challenge for teachers and educators, is to be willing to become part of the solution. The stakes are high for both. To fail to try is unacceptable, and irresponsible. To hope, critically reflect and act together holds the possibility of co-creating better emerging and expanding stories to live by, and by which to teach.



## **8 Chapter Eight: Listening, Learning and Leaning Towards Possible Future Re-storyings**

### **8.1 Gathering the significant narrative threads together**

The insights emerging from this narrative study are intrinsically related to the holistic gaze of the inquiry. From the beginning this study visualised participants as teachers, women and human beings. Critical and Post-Critical theorists, particularly Feminist theorists, have provided us with the intellectual tools to challenge our complex inscriptions, including gendered inscriptions. The feminist literature commits itself particularly, but not exclusively, to supporting women and girls to fully articulate their multi-layered and diverse stories in order to find their own voices. Voices in dialogue, sharing storied lives, have the potential to name the world to change it (Freire, 1972). So a single voice can bear testimony to an individual's stories. However, once we explore the concept of single voice, our own for example, we begin to understand the range of registers a single voice can articulate. This alerts us to the dangers of relying on a single story or a familiar story, to represent our lives. However, voices in dialogue involve a respondent. There is therefore another human being who can challenge or verify the stories we tell about ourselves, others, or the world as we see it. Critical problem-posing stories can empower people to name the inequalities negatively affecting their lives, and the lives of others. Critical theorists and Post-Critical theorists, have helped us to grapple with the tensions between aspirations we might have for being the best we can be as teachers in schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages and the contextual relationality of our teaching lives. All their wisdom is worthless if our hearts are not open to caring and our actions are not committed to equality.

### **8.2 The significance of teachers' stories**

Teachers' stories provided a continuum of perspectives about being teachers encompassing the: pleasurable and painful; problem posing and passive; emotional and rational; honest and troubling; personal and professional; creative and constrained; fulfilling and frustrating. These stories signify how teachers understand being teachers.

They convey to the reader that teachers' storied lives are fluid, fallible, emergent, particularistic, constructivist and deeply human. They are narrative accounts of being teachers. The stories are not totalising accounts. They are not delivered truths. They are partial and particular perspectives emerging at a specific time between 2013 and 2015, in particular contexts, namely selected DEIS primary and secondary schools in Ireland, relating to nine specific teachers, shaped by their distinctive biographies, experiences, commitments, motivations, values, beliefs, dispositions and capacities.

These stories however have serious implications for us as educators, if we are open to listening to them and consequently learning from them. Teachers' stories can teach us to think narratively about how we tell stories representing ourselves as teachers, women, and human beings. They can help us to trouble the personal, pedagogical and political implications of how we story ourselves, and others. As we story ourselves we may collude in silencing ourselves, by denying the negative effects we experience resulting from sexism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, sectarianism and other destructive hatreds. As we story others we may re-impose silences on them, colluding with their exploitation as students, teachers, women, men, and human beings. As educators we cannot pretend that our stories reflect reality. They reflect our reality. As critical educators, we are morally obliged to assume full responsibility for how our stories are inscribed with the hallmarks of our own positionality. That positionality is always partial, imperfect, subjective and transitional.

### **8.3 'Turning points' or 'epiphanies': Letting go of limiting stories**

The 'turning point' (Strauss, 1959), or the 'epiphany' (Denzin, 2001), occurs when we recognise the limitations of our own awareness, the narrowness of the perspectives from which we tell stories about ourselves, and others. Turning points are potentially learning points. They embody 'self-realisation' (Dewey, 1916), 'self-actualisation' (Maslow, 1954), or 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1972). Self-realisation is different to self-reflection. It begins with a shift in our self-awareness. This shift directs our attention outwards towards social life, and school life. The ultimate goal is not to understand ourselves better. The



goal is that by better understanding our storied lives we can begin to see the implications of our own limiting beliefs. Once we see these limitations we can make choices. We can choose to re-author our stories to reflect the fuller breadth and depth of our lives or we can choose to cling to fixed and familiar stories. It is only by re-authoring our own stories as teachers that we will know how to empower students to articulate and expand their stories. This is challenging stuff. It requires us to let go of old narratives, no longer serving us well as teachers, nor serving our students well. There is risk here, the possibility of growth, the probability of challenge, the inevitability of discomfort. There is also opportunity for expanding our awareness. However, we have to find the courage and commitment to test our taken-for granted assumptions and let them go, where we find they no longer serve the full expression of our lives. Being open to exploring the limitations of our stories as educators can potentially transform us and enable us to help build better stories to live by, with our students and our colleagues.

#### **8.4 Research objectives**

The objective of this narrative inquiry was to enable us as educators to think critically about the implications of how we story our lives and how it impacts on our capacity to serve the needs of students in schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. The inquiry troubled the tensions between our storied lives as educators and the challenges Critical and Post-Critical pedagogies continue to pose for tackling gross inequalities in education, particularly in schools serving communities experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage. Distilled into a single question this research study asks:

What implications does teacher awareness have for *praxis* and for serving the needs of students in DEIS schools?

The embedded questions relate to:

- 1) teacher self-awareness;
- 2) awareness of students;
- 3) pedagogical awareness;
- 4) awareness of the culture and the community within DEIS schools as well as the culture and community DEIS schools serve.

## 8.5 Thesis overview

In this study we created a narrative tapestry weaving together resonances between stories from a number of sources. These included selected: teachers' stories: research stories; and my stories. In the first four Chapters of this study I presented epistemological stories and a contextual scaffold for the study. In Chapter Five, 'Narrative inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum', I provided methodological stories mapping the context for the study and supporting the approach to undertaking it. In Chapter Six, 'Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play in Three Acts' the core of this thesis beats in the pulsing heartbeat of teachers' storied lives. I traced the narrative threads stitching through these fragments and examined their resonances for us as educators. In Chapter Seven, 'Creating a New Critical Conversation', I facilitated a critical conversation between educators about teaching and the responsibilities we must face in order to tackle educational disadvantage and develop transformative pedagogies. In this conversation we stitched together the narrative threads tracing through the storied lives, and research stories, presented across the study. These stories were woven into a critical conversation between us as educators testing the implications for us of how we story our own lives, and the lives of others, particularly students in DEIS schools. Finally, in this concluding Chapter I stitched together the significant narrative threads of the thesis. It reflects on how this research story might contribute to future re-storyings, expanding the current limits of our understanding about being teachers. It troubles how we, as educators, women and human beings, might better serve the needs of students in DEIS schools and in doing so fulfill our own aspirations to flourish as teachers.

In **Chapter One** 'Setting the Stage for Her Stories', I presented a rationale for troubling the fit between teachers' awareness and their capacity to serve the needs of students in DEIS schools, by tracing the narrative threads of their storied lives. By setting the stage for the inquiry, I set out: the research objectives reflected on the implications of teachers' storied lives; outlined the narrative inquiry stance of the study; focused attention on 'turning points' in our awareness; set out the core and embedded research questions; presented the research design for the study; highlighted the originality of the study and presented an overview of subsequent chapters.

In **Chapter Two** 'The DEIS Programme and the Context of DEIS Schools', I provided a programmatic overview of the goals underpinning the DEIS programme. This Chapter drew on a number of review documents of DEIS and cognate reports relevant to other programmes integrated into work under DEIS. Chapter Two provided essential background information, tracing the outline context of the framework within which DEIS schools are expected to function. It provided the reader with the background story to DEIS in order to help them to interpret teachers' stories in DEIS schools, presented later in this study, (in Chapters Six, and Seven).

In **Chapter Three** 'Classical Literature Review: Interpretive and Critical Perspectives', I created two classical pillars as a basis for the study built on Interpretive and Critical Perspectives. I used Pragmatic philosophy, communicated through the ideas of Dewey (1859-1952) and Mead (1963-1931) as a lens to focus on the social construction of the self and of knowledge. Pragmatic perspectives enabled us to critically examine the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which our understanding habitually relies. They challenged us to test the grounds on which our own current knowledge about being teachers, and about teaching, is based and also to co-construct more reliable, expanded and inclusive knowledge.

I engaged Phenomenological perspectives to help us trace the workings of human consciousness. These perspectives helped to focus our attention on interpreted meanings in terms of norms, values and beliefs. The perspectives of Husserl and Heidegger were presented in order to provide us with an understanding of how phenomenologists understand consciousness, intentionality, the subject-object dichotomy and being in the world. These perspectives helped us to understand how knowledge is derived from teachers' interpreted meanings, reflecting their norms, values and beliefs. These perspectives helped us to later inquire into the implications of these inscriptions in teacher's stories and in our own stories.

Critical or Conflict theory provided the primary lens through which I conducted this study. Classical Critical theory was presented in Chapter Three, Classical Literature: Interpretive

and Critical Perspectives. It focused on exposing the construction and effects of social structures, including ideological structures. The critical stance exposed the effects of social and ideological structures in perpetuating social inequalities. Critical theory is oriented towards social change, towards dismantling the mutually supportive architecture maintaining the privilege of elites and exploiting children, teenagers, adults, families, and communities experiencing the highest levels of multiple disadvantages. Critical perspectives provided a lens through which we could examine the relationships between how the workings of inequality in the wider society negatively effect opportunities for students in communities experiencing multiple disadvantage and in DEIS schools.

In **Chapter Four**, 'Critical and Post-Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy and Life', I built on the critical base constructed in Chapter Three. In doing so I combined Feminist, Critical Cultural, Post-Critical, Post-Modern, Post-Structural and Post-Colonial perspectives on pedagogy. These perspectives critiqued the ideological and structural inscriptions of inequality embedded in education systems, and particularly in public schools. The purpose of presenting these perspectives was to weave together a robust critical literature probing the significance of teacher awareness for their capacities and willingness to intervene to advocate for and support the learning needs of students in DEIS schools.

In **Chapter Five** 'Narrative Inquiry within the Qualitative Inquiry Spectrum', I outlined the characteristics of qualitative research providing a rationale for adopting this perspective in the current research study. In doing so I specified the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological assumptions of qualitative research approaches, after Creswell (2007:17). I adopted an advocacy and participatory paradigm guided by Feminist Emancipatory Research (FER) approaches. I identified the methodology for the study with feminist interpretive communities and their perspectives. I outlined various perspectives exploring feminist epistemologies, methodologies and methods. Finally, I presented an overview of Narrative Inquiry approaches to qualitative research and I presented a design for engaging a Narrative Inquiry to support this study.

In **Chapter Six** 'Teachers' Storied Lives: A Play, in Three Acts', I presented and distilled the learning embodied in teachers' storied fragments tracing the narrative threads representing their significant insights.

The play began with a Prologue, presenting teachers' backstories entitled 'Long ago... when we were girls'. The primary function of the prologue was to weave together some stories in which participating teachers represent themselves as girls and young women. In this way I introduced the readers to some of the main characters in the play.

The play developed across three acts.

Act One, 'Passionate interests and pathways to teaching', represented teachers' stories about their personal interests and their particular pathways into teaching. These stories demonstrated the diversity and individuality of teachers themselves and the variability of the pathways they took to teaching.

Act Two, 'Being teachers, relational insights' traced six significant narrative threads weaving through teachers' stories. These were: negotiating relationships with students; re-negotiating relationships with students; teachers' aspirations for relationships with students; learning how to better support students; transitions in teacher awareness and teacher well-being and self-care.

Act Three 'Being teachers, contextual insights' explored the grounded context in DEIS schools as the lens through which to inquire narratively about teachers' insights into their situated experiences in specific schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. Contextual perspectives were presented by secondary and primary teachers, respectively. The perspectives explored included: leadership; being teachers; the culture and community of DEIS schools and pedagogy.

Finally, the Epilogue, 'Representing our storied lives visually' presented nine artefacts, one chosen by each teacher, to represent being teachers. Each teacher selected a title to name her chosen artefact. Choosing these artefacts provided teachers with an alternative visual means by which teachers could story being teachers. Introducing the artefact was prompted by my reflections on Victoria's narrative fragments identifying herself as a visual learner. She is a visual artist herself. She reminded me of how important it is for teachers to help students find the right learning style to suit them. Reflecting on her stories made

me aware of the need to provide alternative media beside oral story-telling to support for teachers' self-expression in this narrative inquiry.

In **Chapter Seven**, 'Creating a New Critical Conversation', educators engaged in a critical dialogue weaving insights stretching across the study. These critical conversations engaged with re-storying three narrative themes: considerations of voice; relational engagements of teaching; and contextual perspectives on teaching. These conversations engaged with the personal and professional dividends and deficits educators story about the contextual relationality of being teachers and the challenges to be faced in tackling educational disadvantage.

## **8.6 Praxis: Learning from teachers' storied lives**

Educators' stories of teaching and its challenges have provided a rich interwoven tapestry of insights to help us re-story our own lives, and support our students to re-story theirs. Their stories have supported our critical conversations inquiring into teacher *praxis* and its implications for our capacity as educators to tackle educational disadvantage. We have been learning together by engaging in sharing our stories and asking critical questions. In concluding the study I present the significant lessons we have been learning below.

### **8.6.1 Learning from the Prologue: Long Ago...When We Were Girls**

Teachers' stories began, where teachers signified the beginning, drawing on their memories of having been girls, long ago. They reflected gendered experiences of being daughters, granddaughters, sisters, friends, siblings and schoolgirls. They also reflected the cultural and social contexts they remember as shaping their lives then. I called these stories presented in the Prologue 'backstories' for a number of reasons. Firstly, they provided an important background context for readers. They were intended to help make sense of some of the perspectives teachers later expressed, by providing a point of reference through these 'backstories'. Secondly, teachers' 'backstories' were significant for them because they re-connected these women themselves as girls. These 'backstories' formed a bridge across time between teachers' present and past. The stories signified

important events or moments, drawn from memory, but resonating with being teachers now. Thirdly, there is a striking synergy between the extent to which teachers drew on their own 'backstories' to communicate a sense of themselves to me and the importance teachers' attach now to learning students' 'backstories'. Most teachers testify that in learning students' 'backstories' they can empathise better with the challenges students are experiencing and as Rachel says 'cut them some slack' and consequently better support them.

Boler gives us a salutary warning about the dangers of 'passive empathy'. She warns about the 'confessional reading' of the storied lives of others running the risk of reducing their stories to a 'mirror-identification of oneself' in order to ease our discomfort (1999:177). This kind of limited self-reflection creates an endless and futile narcissistic loop. It confines us as educators within the limiting circles of our own self-interest. It prevents us from acting out of shared interest to challenge the conditions denying our students equality of opportunity in DEIS schools. Boler names 'collective witnessing' as an alternative to either 'passive empathy' or 'self-reflection' (ibid:178). She contends that 'collective witnessing is always understood in relation to others, and in relation to the personal and cultural histories and material conditions' (ibid:178). As Freire reminds us dialogue is shared conversation enabling us to name the world, but not just for the sake of the naming it (1972). The significance of how we name or story inequality is that, in the act of naming, we can bear witness to the injustices blighting students' lives. If we are willing to hear how students story the inequalities they experience then we can better understand how inequality actually damages lives. In those circumstances we are more likely to advocate, not just empathise, with students to challenge these inequalities inside, and outside, DEIS schools. This distinction draws our attention to the potential implications of the difference between teachers who empathise with their students and teachers who act in solidarity with their students.

### **8.6.2 Learning from Act One: 'Passionate Interests and Pathways to Teaching'**

In Act One, Passionate interests and pathways to teaching, we begin to get glimpses of the early storied lives of teachers. These are traced through their creative and cognitive interests and through their stories of the journeys that led them to teaching. The diversity of pathways and passions is instructive. The stories represent selected teachers' accounts of their journeys to teaching. The diversity of these stories hints at the complexity and particularity of each individual's interests, commitments, locations, values, beliefs and ultimately the choices they made. We find ourselves amongst accidental teachers; women who always wanted to be teachers; teachers who took circuitous journeys into teaching. We also find teachers driven by love of: Visual Arts; stories; Religion; Mathematics; Music; Theatre; Domestic Science; and children. These stories remind us that teachers are human beings and were young women with passionate interests of their own before they ever became teachers. We can usefully apply this awareness to thinking about what works for our students. As Julia testifies, we have to find the right story, the right 'hook' to capture the passionate interests of the students teach. Elsewhere, Victoria reminds us that student's pathways to learning may need to be as distinctive as teacher's pathways to teaching. She makes us aware that we all learn in different ways, so we have to understand the interests of our students and match their interests to the learning style and at the pace, that suits them best.

### **8.6.3 Learning from Act Two: Being Teachers, Relational insights**

Act Two, Being teachers: Relational Insights, provides robust evidence that the willingness and ability to negotiate relationships is at the heart's core of being fulfilled as teachers in DEIS schools. Teachers make it clear that the pivotal relationship for them is with their students. Much of the storied evidence of relational insights teaches us about the challenges and possibilities maintaining positive relationships with students' demands. It charts the serious challenges teachers identify in constantly needing to negotiate and re-negotiate relationships with students. It illustrates that in order meet these challenges we have to be willing to let ourselves be known to students, as women and as human beings. We also need to get to know our students as young people and as human beings. Most



teachers recognise that the dividend for investing in respectful relationships with students will pay off in our classroom teaching.

The storied evidence suggests however, that the potential gains go far beyond favourable conditions in which to teach the curriculum. Teachers' stories testify to the way in which their own lives have been enriched through students': generosity and forgiveness; capacity to improve teachers as human beings; honesty to tell it as it is and fun they create in the classroom. Teachers' stories also testify to the difficulty of negotiating relationships with students including: managing challenging behaviour; protecting students from each other and teachers protecting themselves in dangerous situations. Teachers also witness the challenges of collegiality encompassing the benefits of being supportive colleagues contrasting with the frustration the negativity of some colleague's causes for teachers and students alike.

Teachers testify to the excessive energy demands teaching makes on them creating tensions between increasingly demanding workloads and self-care and wellbeing. We also learn about leadership that builds teachers' self-belief and allows them to innovate and leadership that micro manages, eroding teachers' self-belief. We learn the significance of mentors for teachers and the effect of the loss of experienced mentors through early, and natural retirements. We learn also how some teachers are open to sharing skills and learning together and how others teachers are resistant to sharing skills and team teaching.

The affective dimensions of teaching and learning are strongly articulated in teachers' storied lives. We witness the continuum of emotions being expressed by teachers from the heart-warming to the heart breaking. These stories capture moments of exquisite emotional and spiritual connection with children and teenagers and moments of utter frustration and despair. Many participating teachers are aware that there is a correlation between the degree to which they develop their own emotional intelligence and their capacity to nurture the emotional intelligence of their students. We learn that in DEIS schools, where students are carrying the weight of multiple disadvantages, the expression

of legitimate anger and of illegitimate anger, demands high levels of discernment, self-knowledge, self-control, skill and capacity to act, by teachers responsible for managing challenging emotions and behaviours.

The storied lives of teachers reveal their humanity and vulnerability as well as their resilience. Teachers make mistakes. Most teachers admit that they get it wrong sometimes. Many teachers' stories reflect that their commitment to restoring relationships is deeper than their injured pride. They understand that the quality of the relationships between students and teachers, and between colleagues, significantly influences the possibilities for teaching and for learning in their schools. For these teachers re-negotiating relationships, particularly with students, even when the breakdown has been a student's responsibility, it vital.

At the edge of the told stories are hints of other stories of teachers unwilling to renegotiate relationships with students, with colleagues or with parents and teachers who communicate negativity to students, colleagues and parents. The impetus behind their commitments to continually renegotiate relationships is their awareness that teaching is about connection with students, not separation from them. Indeed, some teachers are aware of the synergy between their connectedness to their inner selves and their capacity to be fully present and connected to their students. A rich and deep literature drawing on Bateson, 1994; Boler, 1999; Greene, 1978; hooks, 1994, 2001; Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995; Keating, 2007; Lugones, 1987; Mead, 2002; Nhat Hanh, 1989;, Nieto 2005; Noddings, 1991; O'Brien, 2011; and Palmer, 2007; recognise the need for us to be committed to and capable of connecting with each other. Consequently, the stories we tell about being teachers, and about our students, their parents, our colleagues, principal teachers and school managers, can enhance or impede possibilities for connecting with them and therefore for working creatively together.

In leaning forward to our possible futures as educators and making some final comments closing this final chapter in the study, I am mindful of the very real challenges and possibilities relational engagements pose for teachers. Therefore, later in this chapter, I

will draw together a set of guiding questions to support us as educators to expand the horizons of the stories we might create and tell in the future about the relational engagements of being teachers.

#### **8.6.4 Learning from Act Three: Being Teachers, Contextual Insights**

Chapter 6, Act Three, focused our gaze as educators on the grounded contexts in which teachers work. These contexts are in DEIS schools, programmed and funded to provide better educational opportunities for students from communities experiencing the highest levels of recorded multiple disadvantage in Ireland. Teachers' storied their contexts in terms of three narrative threads: leadership; the culture and community of DEIS schools; and teaching in a DEIS context.

Teachers who have experienced supportive leadership recognise how it significantly nurtured their self-belief. Consequently, supportive leadership has encouraged them to take risks to innovate, be creative, experiment and discover what works for students and what works for them. Teachers identify supportive leadership as letting go of power and control, though not responsibility. From their experiences in DEIS schools teachers have been empowered by principals and managers who provide support but who do not micro-manage teachers. In being trusted, as Nicole reminded us, teachers learn to trust themselves and as their self-belief grows so too does their confidence to take leadership and to innovate. Conversely teachers who experience unresponsive or controlling leadership report becoming demotivated and discouraged. Teachers testify that principals who 'do' rather than 'say' provide them with the best role models.

Teachers' stories also reveal that they learn about leadership by leading. Many of the participating mid-career teachers have taken on new roles in their schools in recent years. These roles include; mentoring younger teachers; sharing skills with colleagues; moving into leadership role such as becoming year heads, or programme heads; taking responsibility for whole school approaches to positive behaviour; training in new strategies for teaching and learning; improving learning supports to students with special

learning needs; leading Creative Arts projects within DEIS schools through creating partnerships with supportive allies outside DEIS schools.

The contextual insights of teachers resonate with Spillane's model of distributed and sustainable leadership (2006). Culley speaks to the necessity for teachers to assert their own leadership in order to nurture leadership in their students (1995). As supportive leadership by principal teachers builds teachers' self-belief, so supportive leadership by teachers also builds students' self-belief and helps them to assert their own authority. Conversely, the knock on effect of controlling, ineffective or unresponsive leadership diminishes teachers' and students' self-belief and mutual respect. Reitzig and West's research with principal teachers exposes the predominant absence of moral and spiritual leadership in schools where teaching to the test and competency driven agendas predominate (2009). These agendas drive the priorities of these schools neglecting, suppressing and denying the moral, emotional and spiritual needs of both students and teachers. Korthagen proposes core reflection as an approach to developing leadership promoting values, cognition and emotion (2013).

Tracing insights about the culture and community within and around DEIS schools teachers' stories signify strengths and challenges ahead. Drawing on the strengths teachers report about DEIS schools we find storied evidence of commitment to: collegiality; mentoring younger teachers; sharing and strengthening teachers' skills; placing students at the centre of the school agenda; innovation; a naming policy where parents, students and teachers are on first name terms (in the case of one school); respecting and valuing children and teenagers; affectivity; an ethics of care and critical awareness.

Drawing on the challenges teachers' stories identify we see evidence of: negative attitudes and behaviours by some teachers towards some students; negativity towards colleagues exhibited by some teachers; resistance to change amongst some teachers; weak leadership especially evidenced where management fail to challenge unprofessionalism by some teachers; wearing down young teachers' creativity; the

detrimental effects of cutbacks in funding to DEIS schools increasing class size; and the depletion of learning supports to students with special learning needs. Teachers story the unwillingness or inability of some teachers to distinguish between the challenging behaviour of some students and the students themselves as vulnerable young persons in challenging situations. These teachers identify their roles as twofold: needing to support the students and needing to challenge them to take full responsibility for their behaviour.

The storied evidence points to distinct differences between the supports available to teachers in the three DEIS primary schools compared to those in the one DEIS secondary school participating in this study. Each of the participating primary schools has developed a composite whole school approach to positive behaviour, within which challenging behaviour is managed. Consequently, within these schools there is a shared understanding and a shared vision and mission to implement positive behaviour. The emphasis is on being 'caught being good' rather than being 'caught being bad'. Consequently, all members of the school community are learning to speak and act respectfully. There are clear moral behavioural signposts for teachers in these contexts providing guidelines to put them back on track when they become overwhelmed by their own emotions in the context of challenging encounters in the classroom. As Jessica reminded herself 'come on now you know what to do, you know what works here'. She was able to rely, in that instant, on the strategies she knew worked to restore positive behaviour. She was able to distinguish, because of her training in positive behaviour strategies, between the child and the child's challenging behaviour. Consequently, she was able to safely steer herself away from the eye of the storm and back to implementing positive strategies for the child and for herself.

Secondary teachers report, relying on disciplinary protocols for intervening to manage challenging behaviour. However, they are, de facto, 'disciplinary' interventions alone. They are not framed by a moral and social vision or by a commitment to a whole school approach to promoting positive behaviour between students, teachers, school managers and parents. In dialogue with the secondary teachers, I asked them a precise question about who the management of challenging behaviour relied upon and each of them answered that it relied on themselves alone. Critical educators know this is dangerous for

students, and dangerous for teachers. Because we are human and because we do 'err' we need to be able to rely on continually learning about positive behaviour in order that we reflect on and manage our own behaviour with students and with colleagues, positively. These skills need to be learned by teachers and by students.

Meg reminds us not all teachers practice 'discernment' not all teachers reflect on how they speak and behave towards students. However, in this study it was clear that the primary teachers drawing on whole school approaches to positive behaviour management were better supported to cope with challenging behaviour than their secondary colleagues. Several had also benefitted from intensive training, up skilling them in positive behaviour management strategies. It is important to note that these reflections draw on a single DEIS secondary school and therefore no assumptions can be drawn about the existence or effect of whole school approaches to positive behaviour on the realities in other DEIS, or non DEIS, secondary schools.

Looking outward from DEIS schools to the communities they serve some teachers reflect on DEIS schools as beacons of light in their communities. Julia comments on the mutual dependency of the school and community. She reflects that both students and members of the community have mutual responsibilities for sustaining both a supportive learning community within and outside the school. Research by Higgins resonates with Julia's observations. Higgins, traces the development of a model of best practice over a twenty year period (1985 to 2005) demonstrating how a DEIS primary schools can have a transformative effect on the community to which it is responsible, by becoming a learning centre supporting that community (2008).

Finally, pedagogy is the third lens through which teachers' contextual insights are filtered. Some teachers are clear and committed to keeping students at the centre of the agenda. As Nicole says, after all 'that is why we are here'. These teachers focus a great deal of attention on the quality of their relationships with students and also on finding the best learning style to suit different students. They understand that the quality of the small day-to-day human interactions between themselves and students open or close pathways to

learning. For this reason they focus on what Myatt call the 'soft stuff' (2016). They understand that sometimes 'we all need chocolate'. We are all human, therefore we need to go home on a Friday letting go of whatever disasters we have created together in the classroom in order to open negotiations for fresh learning opportunities and restored relationships on the following Monday morning. These teachers understand that teaching is about communicating. Their stories testify that the threshold to teaching and learning is through our capacity to negotiate and re-negotiate relationships with students.

However, all participating teachers experience time and energy as precious and limited commodities stretched between the stringent demands of ever-increasing prescriptions regarding official curricula and standardised tests. Most teachers participating in this study express commitment to striking an intricate balance between their responsibilities for delivering the 'official' curriculum and their personal commitments to nurturing the emotional and social needs of their students. We see that for many of the teachers their mission has evolved over time from initially 'teaching' students to now 'reaching' students, through teaching. The motivation for these teachers has shifted for teaching specific subjects and skills to building empathy between students and supporting them to articulate their voices and fully express themselves. These teachers see this as in fact the key to successful learning.

School inspections and league tables however do not value or credit the 'soft stuff'. What is valued and embodied in the official discourses of schools is driven by the interests of the economy and by education policy makers. For this reason the values embodied in the culture of the school become more important. These values can be enshrined in an ethics of care and a commitment to 'reaching' as well as to 'teaching' students. In these DEIS school contexts an environment supportive of learning and nurturing little and big human beings is palpable. Alternatively school cultures can valorise academic achievement above all other virtues to the detriment of the 'soft stuff' supporting our humanity, our interconnectedness, and our capacity to care for our students (Myatt, 2016).

### **8.6.5 Learning from the Epilogue: Teachers' Artefacts**

The Epilogue, the final scene in the play, is constructed around photographs of nine teachers' artefacts. Each photograph depicts an artefact chosen by each teacher to visually represent how they see themselves as being teachers or how they envision teaching. These artefacts provide an alternative visual story through which teachers can communicate how they see their world. Each teacher provided a title for her own artefact. The chosen artefacts and the titles teachers have given them, speak for themselves. I created an artefact of my own to conceptually map the research study and to communicate the findings to academic and non-academic audiences alike. This artefact entitled 'A Re-stor-y-ing Tree' is presented as Figure 10 with supporting legends in Figures 11 and 12.

## **8.7 Constructing critical questions to stimulate future critical conversations**

As this study draws to a close, I will frame the key insights, described above, around a number of key reflections designed to cultivate critical *praxis* leading to possible re-authoring of our storied lives as teachers, women, and human beings. I will cluster these questions thematically in relation to: self; students; pedagogy; DEIS schools; and teacher education.

### **8.7.1 Self-awareness**

Having tested and found strong evidence in teachers' storied lives to support Palmer's assumption that 'good teaching requires self-knowledge' I will frame a critical reflection loosely around this concept.



**In order to trouble self-awareness we might explore:**

The inscriptions by which we story ourselves as teachers, as women, as human beings;

How developing self-awareness might shape our evolving stories as teachers, educators and human beings;

Where we can find support as individuals and as groups of teachers to develop self-awareness;

The implications of failing to develop our self-awareness for how we story ourselves as teachers, as women, as human beings.

**8.7.2 Awareness of Students**

This narrative inquiry has demonstrated that the relationship between teachers and their students is the pivotal one for teachers and for teaching. Perceptions of students influence how we relate to them, as teachers.

**In order to trouble teacher student relationships we might explore:**

The inscriptions by which we story our students, their communities and their lives;

Our willingness/unwillingness to connect emotionally and intellectually with our students;

Distinctions between 'passive empathy' and 'collective witnessing' (Boler, 1999);

Whether a student who is struggling with learning or living would feel welcome/or unwelcome in asking us for support;

How we understand the role of the affective dimension for teaching and learning;

How we conceptualise the difference between challenging behaviour and students exhibiting challenging behaviour, and how we act as a consequence;

How we can nurture students' self-belief;

How we can identify and access relevant training to improve our relational skills.

### **8.7.3 Pedagogical Awareness:**

Teachers' storied lives and the literature supporting this study has helped us to critically engage with the challenges posed by Critical and Post-Critical pedagogies targeting educational disadvantage and progressive change in education.

#### **In order to trouble our pedagogical awareness we might explore:**

How we can improve day-to day interactions with students;

How we can distribute our time and attention to ensure better support for students with special and different learning needs;

How we can help students focus their attention in preparation for, and during, learning;

How we can support students' individual learning styles;

How we can teach the official curriculum through the lens of valuing differences;

How we can be more creative, flexible and inclusive in how we teach;

How we can learn from our colleagues to develop our pedagogical awareness and skills;

How we can mentor other colleagues and find mentors to support us;

How we can identify and develop our pedagogical strengths and put them to better use;

How we can identify our pedagogical weaknesses and find support to address them.

### **8.7.4 Awareness of the culture and community of DEIS schools**

The contextual perspectives understood through the storied accounts of teachers and theoreticians in this study identify the significance of the grounded contexts in which we teach.

**In order to trouble our understandings of the contexts in which we teach we might explore:**

How we can cultivate a learning community high on challenge but low on threat;

How we can contribute to distributing and sustaining leadership in our schools;

How school policies and practices currently support/fail to support students and how we might intervene to improve them;

How school policies currently support/fail to support teachers and how we might intervene to improve them;

How school policies and practices currently support/fail to support parents and how we might improve them;

How our school can secure better resources for our students and distribute the resources we have to better effect;

How we can build solidarity between teaching colleagues and between management and teachers;

How we can empower community stakeholders to collaborate with us on projects supporting students, the school and the wider community.

### **8.7.5 Teacher Education**

Initial teacher education and Continual Professional Development (CPD) have a key role to play in preparing and supporting teachers to work in schools serving communities experiencing multiple disadvantages.

**In order to trouble preparing and supporting teachers to work in DEIS contexts we might explore:**

The extent to which initial teacher education and CPD is implicated in challenging educational disadvantage and prioritising critical pedagogies;

The extent to which initial teacher education demonstrates commitment to developing the capacity of students to think critically;

The extent to which initial teacher education is driven by competency-based criteria at the expense of the affective and spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning;

The extent to which initial teacher education provides student teachers with sufficient learning about positive behaviour strategies in order to adequately support them to begin to teach in real classrooms;

Whether student teachers are expected to do school placement in DEIS schools during their teacher education programme;

How teacher education institutions can better advocate and support teachers, students and principals in DEIS schools;

How we could create and nurture more mindful and holistic learning communities in teacher education, better serving the needs of human beings to teach, learn and flourish;

What role CPD can play in all of the above.

## **8.8: Gathering the narrative threads: taking stock**

This study has focused on teachers' stories and their implications for *praxis in* DEIS schools. It has made us aware of the humanity and the gendered inscriptions of female teachers as women, as mothers, as siblings, as daughters and as granddaughters. It has also highlighted the complex affective and relational dimensions of being teachers. Consequently, we are more aware of the need to build our discernment and our relational skills in order to be better respond to the needs of students. Equally insights into the complexity and diversity of the relational and affective dimensions of teaching point to the need for developing self-awareness signified so clearly by Dewey, 1916, Freire, 1972,

Palmer, 1994, hooks, 1994, Nhat Hanh, 1987, Kabat-Zinn, 2005 and others, as vital for building community and challenging inequality in schools, and in society. The well-being of teachers is storied as contingent on self-awareness and a strong commitment to practicing self-care. School managers, as well as teachers themselves, have responsibilities for creating learning communities where the affective dimensions of teaching and learning are nurtured and an ethics of care is embedded in the culture of the school. A strong argument has been made in this study that the education system and the school curriculum should formally value the affective dimensions of teaching and learning and therefore the development of social and emotional intelligence should be made an explicit priority in all schools, especially DEIS schools. Contextual perspectives emerging from the study testify to the pressures the effects of poverty and marginalization have on students and families living in communities experiencing multiple disadvantages. These realities render more urgent the need to restore the funding levels withdrawn from DEIS schools during the economic recession in Ireland and ring fencing the resources to students within these schools with special learning needs. In light of the evidence of the increasing administrative burdens resulting from standardized tests, and instruments to measure school and student performance, a deep concern resonates through the study about the current absence of any time or space providing teachers with time to reflect, share knowledge and develop creative and constructive pedagogical responses to fit the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. Finally this study exposes the deeply human challenges and opportunities available to teachers in DEIS schools, if they are open to relationships with students.

## **8.9 Leaning forward to possible future re-storyings**

This is a threshold moment marking the transition between this research story and possible future re-storyings. Educators, participating in the new conversation co-created in this study carry forward with them valuable tools for engaging in future critical conversations. More than ever as a consequence of what I have learned about the powerful potential of narrative inquiry I understand that as educators, with the privileges of education behind us, we must be willing to engage in the kind of critical dialogue Freire advanced (1972) in order to honour our declared commitments to educational equality, social justice and critical pedagogies.

Otherwise:

They will not forgive us, these girls [and boys]

Sitting in serried rows

Hungry for attention

Like shelves of unread books.

(from 'Classroom Politics', Norris, 1985)

I look forward to going back into each of the four schools in the autumn. There are mind maps to be gifted back to teachers, their stories, not mine. There is also an I-owe-you I need to honour, made to the teachers and principals during the narrative inquiry, that I would come back into the schools to do a piece of relevant work, to be determined by them, feeding back some of the learning from this study. I am heartened to learn that my communication of the value of Restorative Practice in my feedback to teachers, and principals, about learning from the study has resulted in a positive outcome. A significant cohort of teachers in the participating DEIS secondary school have undertaken Restorative Practice training this summer 2016, and their hope is to adopt a whole school approach to R.P. over time. I look forward to learning how that story unfolds. In the spirit of narrative inquiry, consequently, this continues to be an emerging story about being female teachers in DEIS schools. It invites other stories about male teachers in DEIS schools and about being principals in DEIS schools, in order to expand our current understanding and conversations. This study resonates with Jalongo, Isenberg and Gerbracht's urging that:

Educators must delve beneath the routine, the surface, the business-as-usual  
If they are ever to unearth the heart of teaching and, in the process,  
nurture their souls as teachers (Jalongo & Isenberg with Gerbracht, 1995:xvi).

## **8.10 Finishing with a final narrative fragment**

In honouring the spirit of Narrative Inquiry, I will finish the research study with a story. It emerged during the fieldwork. I recorded it in my journal at the time. I give it the final space because it resonates with the possibilities being teachers can offer for connecting with students and thereby for mutual teaching and learning, if we are open to it.

### **8.10.1 The Scene:**

It is a Tuesday, in spring. Meg and I are tightly squeezed into a tiny airless office. It looks inwardly down on the school atrium, eerily quite now after the recent noisy lunch break. The mind map, I drew to represent Meg's stories, lies between us on the small table. I am in mid-sentence, re-telling Meg's story back to her. The colourful lines capturing my representation of her insights on self, students, pedagogy and school help me to re-story her stories. There is a knock at the door. I fall silent.

### **8.10.2 Narrative Fragment: 'I Really Miss You'**

**Meg says:** 'Come on in'.

(A teacher pops her head around the door, all apologises for interrupting us. She asks if a student can come in to get his folder from amongst others, packed tightly on shelves behind me).

**Meg says:** 'Hello Adam, this is Mary. I have been telling her about being a teacher in this school'.

(We say hello and shake hands. Adam fumbles for his folder, then finds it. He goes for the door and is halfway out).

**Meg says:** 'Adam'?

(He turns back, now halfway into the room again).

**Adam says:** 'Yes, Miss'?

(Meg smiles and looks him straight in the eye).

**Meg says:** 'Do you know what Adam, I miss you this year, I really do miss you'.

(He moves his slight tall body fully back into the room and looks her straight in the eye).

**Adam says:** 'I really miss you too, Miss'.

(He closes the door gently).

Meg and I say nothing. We have no words for this. Emotion hangs in the room, enveloping us both.

### **8.10.3 Final Reflection: On being teachers in DEIS schools**

Later, when I wrote this story down in my research journal, this is how I reflected on it:

Moments like this one are magic. They are etched on the hearts of teachers. They allow our hearts to fill. They sustain us for harsher days when the well of the self is nearly running on empty. They give us more courage to teach. I have been privileged, in my role as researcher in this narrative inquiry, to experience, witness and re-story moments such as this one. They remind me, and can remind us as educators, of the possibilities teaching can offer us. If we are willing, being teachers in DEIS schools can create opportunities to:

‘Catch the heart off guard and blow it open’

(from ‘Postscript’, Heaney, 1996).



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## **Appendix A Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing (DEIS) Measures**

Considering all the educational inclusion measures that have been put in place since the late 1980s, a number of broad strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

### **Strengths:**

- Strong sustained Government investment, including class size reductions at primary level and a wide range of other human and financial supports
- Substantial expertise developed through experience with existing measures
- Strong commitment to school principals, teaching staff and other educational professionals, programme co-ordinating personnel, agency staff, community interests and others involved in working for, and promoting, educational inclusion
- Successful home/school/community linkages and greater parental involvement in school life
- Learner-centred strategies to address early school leaving based on best practice identified through evaluation
- Enhanced co-operation between primary and second-level schools working in clusters
- Adoption of development planning in both primary and second-level schools through the School Development Planning initiatives
- Strong support from a wide range of partners in the public, private community and voluntary sectors
- Expert research and policy support provided by the Educational Disadvantage Committee, the Education Research Centre (ERC) and others.

### **Weaknesses:**

- The lack of a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage in schools
- Limited early childhood education supports
- Insufficient focus on target-setting, measurement of progress and outcomes
- Insufficient steering and evaluation of some measures
- Insufficient co-ordination across schemes and cross-sectorally
- Limited attention to education inclusion issues in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

In overall terms, considerable progress has been made through the implementation of a wide range of measures to address educational disadvantage. The action plan will seek to build on the existing strengths, while at the same time addressing the identified weaknesses, which have served to reduce the overall effectiveness of the state's investment in this area.

(Department of Education and Science, DEIS, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, 22-23).



## Appendix B Evaluations Conducted on the DEIS Programme

Table 3.1 Evaluations Conducted on the DEIS Programme

<b>Evaluation at Primary Level</b>
Analysis of English Reading and Mathematics Achievements in Schools in the Rural Dimension of the School Support Programme (ERC,2009)
Effective Literacy and Numeracy Processes in DEIS Schools (DES,2009)
An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools (DES, 2011)
A Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS (ERC, 2011)
The Impact of DEIS on Class Size in Primary Schools (ERC,2012)
The Evaluation of the School Support Programme under DEIS: Changes in Pupil Achievement in Urban Primary Schools between 2007 and 2013 (ERC, 2013)
The Achievements and Characteristics of Pupils Attending Rural Schools Participating in DEIS (ERC,2013)
Looking at Action Planning for Improvements in DEIS Primary Schools (DES,2015)
<b>Evaluations at Post Primary Level</b>
An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post Primary Schools (DES,2011)
A Report on the Evaluation of DEIS at Second Level (ERC, 2014)
Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Post-Primary Schools (DES, 2015)
<b>Evaluation of the DEIS Dormant Accounts Programme</b>
Report of the Dormant Accounts Funded Scheme to Enable DEIS Schools in Limerick City to Maximise Community Use of Premises and Facilities (OSCAILT,2013)
<b>Evaluation of DEIS Early Start Programme</b>
Early Start Pre-School Programme: Final Evaluation Report (ERC,1998)
Further Evaluation of Early Start, Progress Report (ERC,2002)
Early Start Evaluation: Report on Observation Visits to Schools (ERC,2003)
Focused Policy Assessment – Early Start Programme, Early Years Education Policy Unit (DES,2015)

Smyth, E., McCoy, S. and Kingston G. (2015) *Learning from the Evaluations of DEIS*, p.24, ESRI: Dublin.

## Appendix C Overview of measures to be in place on full implementation of the School Support Programme

### Supports to urban/town primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP

- **For the 150 primary schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantage:**

Access to early education for children, aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend these primary schools

Maximum class sizes of 20:1 in all junior classes ( junior infants through 2<sup>nd</sup> class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (3<sup>rd</sup> class through to 6<sup>th</sup> class)

- **For all 300 urban/town primary schools participating in SSP:**

Allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than app lot primary schools generally

Additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage

Financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes

Access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level

Access to literacy/numeracy support serviced and to literacy/numeracy programmes as follows: Reading Recovery, First Steps, Maths Recovery, *Ready, Steady, Go Maths* and homework clubs/summer camps assisting literacy and numeracy development

Access to Home/School/Community Liaison services ( including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as reading, paired maths, *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun*)

Access to a range of supports ( both academic and non-academic, and including after-school and holiday-time supports) for young people, with the best practices identified through an evaluation of the School Completion Programme being incorporated into cluster-level action plans

Access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level



Access to planning supports#

Access to a range of professional development supports

Eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

**Note: The following class size reductions provided to urban/town primary schools under previous schemes will continue in operation in the schools concerned:**

*Breaking the Cycle:* 32 schools benefit from the maximum class sizes of 15:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes

*Giving Children an Even Break:* 211 schools benefit from maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes

#### **Supports to rural primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP**

- Access to teacher/co-ordinator serving a cluster of schools, and whose functions will include the development of home, school and community linkages, supporting implementation of literacy and numeracy measures, planning supports etc.
- Financial support as an alternative to teacher/co-ordinator support where school cannot be clustered
- Additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- Financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
- Access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level
- Access to after-school and holiday-time supports
- Access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level
- Access to a range of professional development supports

- Eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

**Note:** The first two supports listed above will be subject to an evaluation exercise to determine whether the particular model of support involved is the most appropriate in the long term

### **Supports to second—level schools and school clusters/communities in SSP**

- **For second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage**

Enhanced guidance counselling provision

Provision for school library and librarian supports (will be extended to the 50 SSP schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage over five years –extension to further SSP schools will be considered subsequently)

- **For all 150 second-level schools participating in SSP**

Access to Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) (and literacy/numeracy supports developed by building on existing measures under the JCSP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and associated staffing and funding supports

Additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage

Financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operations of book loan/rental schemes

Access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level

Access to Home/School/Community Liaison services ( including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun*)

Access to a range of supports (both academic and non-academic, and including after school and holiday-time supports) for young people, with best practice identified through an evaluation of the School Completion Programme being incorporated into cluster-level action plans

Access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level

Access to planning supports

Access to a range of professional development supports

Eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

Department of Education and Science, (2005) DEIS, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, Department of Education and Skills: Dublin

## **Appendix D Overview of Phenomenology**

### **1. The Philosophical perspectives of Phenomenology**

Stewart and Mickunas (1990) identify four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology, which may be useful by way of introduction: a return to the search for wisdom, an attempt to do so without presuppositions, focusing the search on the intentionality of consciousness and refusing to accept the subject-object dichotomy.

The focus of phenomenological inquiry is reliable knowledge or wisdom. It attempts to examine the essential structures of human consciousness underpinning experiences in the world. The legacy of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* and Kant's search for a priori principles are evident in the development of Phenomenology. Husserl returns philosophy to its original goal, the search for wisdom, a quest for essential features of knowledge, through an exploration of the processes that produce consciousness. Husserl is seeking to understand the essential properties that underpin the processes of consciousness. A summary of the fundamental elements of the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), regarded as the founder of Phenomenology, and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), his assistant who later replaced him as Head of Department at Freiburg, will be outlined below to signal the main hallmarks of the early Phenomenology movement. The purpose of reviewing these elements is to examine how they resonate with the research question and where they in turn lead the research journey.

### **2. Science without Presupposition**

Husserl advocated phenomenology as a science without presupposition and as a consequence '*the fundamental science of all sciences*' (Moran and Mooney, 2002, Introduction: 2). By insisting on this he hoped that phenomenology could avoid taking on board the assumptions, taken as givens, in both modern science and philosophy. While critics of phenomenology rightly challenge the possibility of suspending presupposition entirely, one of the strengths of phenomenology is the challenge it poses to taken for granted assumptions we carry into philosophical and scientific inquiry as though they were uncontested facts. These assumptions allegedly taint our science and our philosophy, according to phenomenologists. Contemporary understandings of phenomenology will be examined in chapter two of the Literature review, through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), amongst others. In the meantime, Husserl's understanding of the

rationale for and method by which presupposition can be suspended is presented here.

### **3. Philosophy of Edmund Husserl**

Husserl sought to understand the fundamental processes of consciousness, the processes through which all phenomena are filtered by the mind. He understood that in order to access the essence of consciousness the taken for granted assumptions we develop about the world would have to be suspended in some way. Husserl describes this approach as an effort at achieving 'the radical abstraction of the individual' from their experiences in the world (Husserl cited in Turner, 1991:385). The purpose of this abstracting is to rid the mind of the detritus of accumulated assumptions, as these allegedly obscure or distort our capacity to examine pure consciousness, which is the task of phenomenology. This attempt of suspending presupposition about the natural world is known as bracketing, a term coined by Husserl. Bracketing involves the suspension of any thesis, as a temporary and intentional device intended to clear the conscious space to facilitate the path way of the mind to grasping what is essential about being. Husserl says that when we implement this strategy we set a familiar thesis 'out of action', we 'disconnect it', 'bracket it' (Husserl, 1969:108). This bracketing explicitly excludes from the process of philosophical inquiry any existential presuppositions about that which appears. What remains, according to phenomenologists, are the phenomenal data with the potential to deliver essential knowledge about the processes of intentional consciousness. The remainder is a phenomenological 'reduction', a distillation, in which the 'phenomenal residue becomes more and more present to consciousness' (Lauer in Husserl 1965:27).

Turner (1991) explicitly distinguishes Husserl's goal from 'sympathetic introspection' as envisaged by Max Weber's *verstehen* (ibid:385). Husserl's goal is to develop an abstract theory of consciousness that uncovers the processes through which consciousness of phenomena is achieved. This goal must be distinguished also from the task of cataloguing people's understandings of situations or events in the natural world, which merely describes the contents of the phenomenal world and is phenomenism as distinct from phenomenology. Husserl's goal is not the identification of the content of phenomena but the processes by which we develop consciousness of phenomena.

### **3.1 Consciousness**

Husserl presents phenomenology as a means of investigating ‘whatever appears as such’ including all thoughts and meanings relating to the ‘how’ (Wie) of its manifestation’ (Husserl in Moran and Mooney, 2002:1). Husserl argued that humans develop knowledge about the world through direct experience and all experience is filtered by human consciousness. The task of phenomenological inquiry is therefore to understand how consciousness operates and contributes to the formation of reliable knowledge about the world. Phenomena derived through experience, are seen, from this perspective, as having no separate existence apart from our consciousness of them. His interest was in the means by which we make sense of them and derive scientific knowledge on the basis of our intentional consciousness of them. Consciousness is therefore the lens, providing a specific focus through which sense can be made of experienced phenomena. Turner describes Husserl’s stance as identifying that ‘the existence of other people, values, norms and physical objects is always mediated through the senses and can be known only through mental consciousness’ (1991:384). Reality cannot therefore be experienced directly, according to this view, it is always mediated by consciousness. Husserl defines phenomenology as ‘a study of consciousness, but it is not a psychology’ because it does not perceive consciousness as a ‘physical something’ (Husserl, 1965:10). The problem according to Husserl is the mistake of treating consciousness and ideas as naturalised, thus psychologising consciousness. Husserl identifies the weakness in this approach as the inability to distinguish between ‘being and appearance’ (ibid:11). This distinction is achievable by means of phenomenological science, seen from this perspective, as capable of grasping essential intuitions. Husserl argues that ‘essences belonging to the ideal sphere can be grasped as immediately in intuition as physical reality can be in perception’ (ibid:12). It is to the quest for these essential intuitions that phenomenology is directed. Phenomenologists see all experiences as having an internal structure’ which can be successfully investigated and understood ‘from the inside’ (Pivcevic, 1970:19).

### **3.2 Transcendental subjectivity**

Husserl named transcendental subjectivity as the core of his phenomenological science, defined as ‘the a priori structure and content of object-constituting subjectivity’ (Moran & Mooney, 2002:3). For Husserl it was not the ‘substantive content of consciousness’ that was the focus of phenomenological inquiry but rather ‘the abstract processes of consciousness’ (Turner, 1991:385). Husserl identified these

abstract processes as essential intuitions, essences relating to being as distinct from the appearances of phenomena. Husserl describes his vision for a theory of cognition as one relating to 'that being which corresponds to consciousness (ideal being) rather than with a consciousness that would correspond to (existential) being' (Husserl, 1965:10). In *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man* Husserl identifies the crisis, as he saw it, as the absence of 'a science of the spirit' (Husserl 1965: 16). He distinguishes such a science, whose task is to 'grasp the spirit that characterises and animates western civilisation' from the contemporary science whose 'object is nature' (Husserl 1965:17). For Husserl the object of science is the 'enviroming world (Umwelt) of the spiritual subject' (ibid:16). Existing Sciences based on the phenomenal world can only deliver opinions based on perceptions or appearances of phenomena. Husserl asserts that man is in search of a science that can offer theories or ideas of 'an infinite world that transcends his particular umwelt' or environment (ibid:18). Phenomenology therefore sets out to scientifically investigate the intentionality of the spiritual subject.

### **3.3 Subject-object dichotomy**

Lauer cites Kant's work as having convinced Husserl that 'objectivity could never be the measure of subjectivity' (ibid:21). Objective knowledge about the world was to be validated, according to Kant, to the extent that is correlated with the truth of the thinking subject. Husserl, however, rejected what he identified as the dualism underpinning Kant's theory. Husserl argued that the essential nature of things is directly revealed in consciousness, Therefore, distinctions between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge collapse. A science arguably capable of understanding the processes of consciousness and of developing rational knowledge on that basis, must bypass the dualism between noumenon and phenomenon associated with Kant. Lauer credits Franz Von Brentano's (1838-1917) 'insight into the essentially intentional character of every act of consciousness' facilitates Husserl in getting past the subject-object dichotomy (ibid:22). This insight suggests that the processes of consciousness have intrinsic or essential characteristics that can be grasped by intuition and are capable of yielding rational universal knowledge. Moran and Mooney (2002:61) contend that it was Husserl's recognition of intentionality as the key to investigating consciousness, derived from Brentano, which enable him to develop his phenomenological thesis.

## **4. Introduction to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger**

Moran and Mooney represent Heidegger's conception of phenomenology, outlined in *Being and Time*, as 'the science of the manifest' (2002:248). This science is directed at understanding how phenomena appear in any and all of its guises and in probing the linguistic meanings we attach to what makes itself manifest to our intentional consciousness. This suggests that what becomes manifest relies on appearance, in all its aspects, as providing reliable knowledge about being in itself. Thus there is no dichotomy between being and the appearance of phenomena in Heidegger's philosophy. Heidegger acknowledges three fundamental discoveries in Husserl's phenomenology, 'intentionality, categorical intuition and the original senses of the priori' (ibid:247).

### **4.1 Intentionality**

Heidegger identified the essence of consciousness in intentionality, a legacy of the scholarship of Brentano, and later Husserl. Intentionality applies to the focus or direction of the mind towards an object in the world and the processes by which a 'synthesis of identification' is involved in formulating knowledge and in arriving at 'the experience of truth' (ibid:247). The essence of consciousness or 'comportment' is the capacity for intentionality 'the very being of comportment is a directing-itself toward' (ibid:247). Intentionality is therefore the key with the potential to render visible essential truths of being in the world. The instructions for using the key of intentionality to make the hidden essences manifest, come through the guidance of phenomenological science.

### **4.2 Categorical intuition**

Heidegger defines intuition, in the phenomenal sense of the word, as 'simply apprehending the bodily given as it shows itself' (ibid:273). Categorical intuition points to the ability to simply intuit categories or 'the constituents in entities which are designated as categories' (ibid: 273). The task of phenomenological inquiry is to demonstrate categorical intuition by revealing what is intuited and how the process unfolds. A prerequisite for demonstrating categorical intuition is considering the relationship between intuition and expression (ibid: 273). Heidegger contends that there is a correlation between them such that 'the intended identifies in the intuited' in an 'act of identification' or recognition (ibid:274). This insight provides us with evidence of the real. Such evidence is conceptualised by Heidegger as arising from 'the



insight into the necessity of an individual state of affairs “being so” [Sosien] based upon the essential grounds of the posited individual’ (ibid:276).

### **4.3 Transcendental subjectivity**

Though Heidegger began by accepting Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity as an approach to phenomenological inquiry he went on to abandon both the transcendental and the subjective as means to access the essential nature of phenomena. This choice reflected his insistence on the importance of going beyond subjectivity in order to investigate the essence of being. It also reflected his increasing resistance to the language of metaphysics. He accused Husserl as having succumbed to that language. As a consequence Heidegger increasingly articulated his insights through poetry and meditative approaches. In doing so his phenomenological journey shifted from an ontological inquiry into the nature of being, which is where it began for him, to a ‘quasi mytho-poetic reflection’ on the nature of the human world (ibid: 246). The study of the language humans use, to express their sense of the world, became the lens for his phenomenological explorations. He is quoted, for example, as saying that ‘language is the house of Being, in its home man dwells’ (ibid:246).

### **4.4 Philosophy as world-view and philosophy as science**

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger outlines the distinction between philosophy conceived of as world-view and philosophy conceived of as science. Heidegger traces the origins of the meaning of ‘Weltanschauung’ or ‘world view’ from its appearance in Kant’s work as ‘world intuition’, making sense of the natural world as observed (Heidegger, 1988: 4). Heidegger tracks a newer meaning acquired through the work of Schelling, in particular, who attributes two productive aspects to intelligence. The first is the ‘unconsciously productive’ aspect of intelligence ascribing to world-view or Weltanschauung. The second is the ‘consciously productive’ aspect of intelligence creating the ‘ideal world’ (Ibid: 5). Heidegger traces the legacy of different conceptions of world-view, from the moral through to the poetic and to the religious and Christian, and from Hegel through to Bismarck. He defines the term world-view, in the light of these multiple interpretations, as ‘not only a conception of the contexture of natural things but at the same time an interpretation of the sense and purpose of the human Dasein and hence of history’ (ibid: 5). By tracing the evolution of the concept of worldview so explicitly Heidegger exposes how a view of life is intrinsic to a world-view and derives from ‘an all-inclusive reflection on the world and the human Dasein’ (ibid:5). He indicates two available approaches by which we might

navigate a course to develop a world-view, including a view of life. The first route is the consciously productive route of utilising our intelligence, the second by the unconsciously productive route of adhering to a prevalent world-view already available to us in our historical and cultural context.

Heidegger focuses attention on the contextual nature of prevalent world-views determined by the environment in which people live a life influenced by factors such as 'people, race, class, developmental stage of culture' (ibid:6). Heidegger draws on Jaspers definition citing that 'when we speak of world-views we mean Ideas, what is ultimate and total in man, both subjectively, as life experience and power and character, and objectively as a world having objective shape' (ibid:6). Thus world-views emerge in a temporal as well as an environmental context and include the perspective of subjectivity as well as objectivity, whether those perspectives are reliable or not. Arguably the reliability of the sources of knowledge ought to be capable of testing by means of a philosophical science. However, Heidegger focuses our attention on the limitations, which according to his perspective, have been erroneously imposed on the parameters of philosophical science as defined by Kant. The very problem is, according to Heidegger, that 'Kant recognizes only philosophy as science' (ibid:9). This definition excludes world-views or the reflection on life lived in the natural world as integral to the development of the only science possible according to Kant, the science of philosophy. Heidegger contends that 'philosophy can and must define what in general constitutes the structure of a world-view' (ibid:10). This is not an argument for the definition of particular world-views related to particular beings in the world but to grappling with the understanding of Being in the world. Heidegger explains the motivation for making philosophy serve this end as the problem that 'if we did not understand what existence and existentiality signify then we would not be able to exist as Dasein' (ibid:10).

#### **4.5 Dasein as being in the world**

Heidegger's inquiry into Being is an ontological quest, probing at the essence or true reality of Being itself through the filter of the potential of particular beings to reflect on their being in the world. Heidegger refers to this focus as an effort to make 'the inquirer' or subjective being an entity 'transparent in his own being' (Heidegger cited in Biemel, 1976:29). Dasein is defined by Heidegger as 'this entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being' (ibid:29-30). Biemel points to the significance of the fact that Heidegger's begins probing the essence of Being by analysing the being or entity of the inquirer or Dasein. This

starting point, according to Biemel, is intended to offer a means by which to make sense of the basic structures which constitute 'the mode of being of the inquirer' and which Heidegger denotes as 'existentialia' (Ibid: 30). This mode of being is attributed to the capacity in human beings to 'understand oneself in regard to the possibilities of one's being' (ibid:30). This potential for existentiality is what Heidegger denotes as the basic structure of human beings unique ability to have a relationship with themselves, to render themselves transparent to themselves. Dasein accounts for the possibility of authenticity or inauthenticity since it 'always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of the possibility of itself: to be itself or not be itself' (Heidegger in Biemel, 1977:35). Authenticity is the option where a specific Dasein decides to opt for the possibility of itself by embracing the possibilities of its being. Inauthenticity is the converse where Dasein does not actively enquire into or engage with the possibilities of its own being but instead opts for what is given or preset. Whichever of these two modes of being is adopted, the character of Dasein is 'mineness' (Heidegger in Biemel, ibid: 36). This means that Dasein is specific to the individual being realising itself as being, in whichever mode it chooses. This distinguishes the 'my-ownness' of Dasein from any generalisations about being in general.

#### **4.6 Temporality and being**

The ease with which to declare that 'it is we ourselves who exist as Dasein' belies the difficulty of revealing the entity constituting Dasein (Heidegger in Biemel, ibid:31). Rendering the task of revealing harder is the fact that analysing Dasein is not an end in itself but a means to inquire into the nature or essence of Being. Heidegger argues that temporality is the key to unlock the being of Dasein. Following this line of argument the history of ontology as well as the history of the world has shaped the manner in which Dasein understands itself. Heidegger advocates the 'destruction of the history of ontology' (Heidegger in Biemel, ibid:31), in order to render transparent the concepts we operate with and in order to judge their limitations in our current use of them. Whereas Heidegger accused Husserl of succumbing to the language and legacy of metaphysics, he himself uses the historical context of ontology as a means to scrutinise the legitimacy of the methodology of philosophy. His Phenomenology 'does not characterise the what of the objects of philosophical research as subject matter, but rather the how of that research' (Heidegger in Biemel, ibid:33). Consequently for Heidegger it is '*only as phenomenology*' that 'ontology' in fact becomes a possibility (Heidegger in Biemel, ibid: 33). Phenomenology therefore provides a means to

facilitate inquiry into the existential reality of being in order to render it transparent and in the process intuit the essence of Being.

#### **4.7 Awakening fundamental attunement**

Because the focus of our research question is on the process of the development of teacher consciousness and its implications for practice it is useful to explore the extent to which Heidegger perceives the process of 'awakening a fundamental attunement' (Heidegger, 1995:59) as consistent with conceptions of becoming conscious. Selected reflections on Heidegger's concept of awakening attunement to consciousness, cited below, are sourced from the translation of his publication *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, World, Finitude, Solitude*, (1995). Awakening suggests a potential for attunement needing to be aroused or prompted into activity in some way. Is fundamental attunement therefore a latent possibility, always present for possible activation or awakening? Heidegger suggests that it is in a sense present but also absent. This is so because whatever is not awake, is absent in a particular manner, but it is also present in a particular manner. It is available to us, it therefore is present, but it may be absent also, in the sense that we are not awake to its presence. Heidegger argues that as a consequence the 'being-there and not-being-there of attunement cannot be grasped via the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness' (Heidegger, 1995:60). He explains that being unawake does not imply being unconscious of something. Conversely wakefulness does not necessarily guarantee consciousness of something. Wakefulness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient ground for consciousness. Heidegger sees the awakening of an attunement as distinct from a shift in state from unconsciousness to consciousness. Heidegger describes the process of the awakening of fundamental attunement as 'to let it become awake and as such precisely to let it be' (Heidegger, 1995:61). This distinction is important because it brings us back to the crux of the matter which is that being-there, Dasein, and not-being-there, Wegsein, are 'possible only if and so long as man is' (Heidegger, 1995:64). It is therefore the existential being of man that provides the possibility of awakening to a fundamental attunement with Being.

#### **4.8 Essence of being**

The ideas outlined below on the essence of being are drawn from Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959). Heidegger addresses the question of the essence of being in a detailed analysis differentiating 'being' in terms of its 'word form, word meaning and thing' (Heidegger, 1959:87). He clarifies that while it is necessary

prerequisite that we carefully attend to the word form and word meaning of being we cannot approach the essence of being by doing so. He cites that though we must take language as a starting point for inquiry into the essence of being, or any other phenomenon, 'the question of being is not a matter of grammar and etymology' (Heidegger, 1959:87). How are we to surpass signification and get to the sign, the thing constituting being? He answers this by stating that 'no thing corresponds to the word and the meaning 'being' (Heidegger, 1959:88). This does not imply that the essence of being is confined to the extent to which we can deconstruct the form and meaning of the word but being is also fundamentally dependent on the word (ibid: 88). Heidegger explores this connection between the question of being and the question of the word with the purpose of showing that 'our understanding of being has a determinateness of its own, ordained by being itself' (ibid:89). He concludes that 'in the 'is' being discloses itself to us in a diversity of ways' (ibid:90). This diversity he argues does not arise from the sign or thing the "is" of being, but from the diversity of the statements expressing or signifying being. The consequence is that 'because the 'is' *remains* 'intrinsically indeterminate' and therefore like an empty vessel ready to be filled, it has the potential to 'fulfill and determine itself' in the being-there of particular circumstances (ibid:91).

Heidegger contends that our understanding of being is enhanced by the fact that '*a single determinate trait*' runs through 'all the modes of 'is' (ibid: 91-92). He identifies this in his observation that 'the limitation of meaning of 'being' remains within the sphere of actuality and presence' (ibid:92). There is no need to look elsewhere, to transcend the actual and the present in order to intuit from the diverse modes of 's' the essence of being. He expresses that 'to be' <sein> is for us the infinite of 'is' (ibid:92). Heidegger sees that being must therefore be approached through inquiry into the history of being-there or existence in the world in which context the meaning of being has evolved.

## **Appendix E Marxist Theory and Selected Revisions**

### **1. Critical social theory of Karl Marx**

The work of Karl Marx provided the early scaffolding for the development of the critical or conflict perspective focusing on social class and its implications for individuals and for society. In order to understand the strong materialist analysis underpinning Marx's critical stance it is useful to begin with identifying what he reacted against. His trenchant materialism makes sense for us in the light of the fact that Marx espoused Hegelianism as a young man and went on to vehemently reject Hegelians as 'hopeless idealists', in his joint work with Engels, *The German Ideology* (Turner, 1991:84). Marx totally rejected the notion that the world is reflective of our consciousness of it or that essences exist which reflect truths about the world. Marx saw this focus on ideas 'as nothing more than a conservative ideology that supports people's oppression by the material forces of their existence' (Turner, 1991:184). Marx saw reliance on the reality of ideas as a smokescreen masking the injustice of material inequalities and their consequences for people's lived experiences.

#### **1.2 The Economic Base**

For Marx the essence of life is not in ideas but in the process of production since 'life involves before anything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other material things' (Marx cited in Turner, 1991:185). Marx saw that in the process of production 'class divisions only arise when a surplus is generated, such that it becomes possible for a class of non producers to live off the productive activity of others' (Giddens and Held, 1982:4). These conditions arose with the development of industrial capitalism, according to Marx. This surplus value of workers labour appropriated by capitalists is the source of profit, 'the key element in a capitalist economy, and the driving force of capitalist enterprise' (ibid:5). Marx did not identify class as an organic or inherent characteristic of all societies but as a particular feature of modern industrial societies. Marx made the assumption that the stratified way in which economic production is organised in modern societies determines the manner in which all elements of society are organised. Turner reflects that Marx sees 'the class structure and institutional arrangements, as well as cultural values, beliefs, religious dogmas and other ideas systems' as reflecting the structure of economic production (1991:186).

### **1.3 Alienation**

What consequences follow on from Marx's theory of the surplus value of labour and its appropriation? The surplus value created by industrial production creates a division of labour. This separates most men from the products and thus the benefits of their labour. It appropriates the products and benefits for those advantaged by the division of labour. Marx describes this division of labour as leading to alienation for those disadvantaged by the conditions of inequality underpinning this stratification. Marx defines the alienation of labour in a number of specific ways. The first way directs us to the relationship of the worker to the 'product of labour' (Giddens and Held, 1982:15). In this context what the worker produces is a means to serve the needs of others, rather than his own, consequently the product of his labours is something alien to the worker himself. The second understanding of alienation is the relationship of the worker to the 'act of production within labour' (ibid:15). This focus points to the alienation implicit in the workers relationship to the work he performs by virtue of the division of labour in the industrial workplace. Alienation relates therefore to both the products of labour and the relationships that structure labour. The first alienates man from the product the second from himself. The third context in which Marx understood alienation to affect man is by negating his sense of himself 'as the present living species, as a universal and consequently a free being' (ibid:16). The consequences of this form of alienation allegedly turn man away from interest in the human race and universal existence and lead him towards self-interest. This sense of alienation from communal or shared existence increases isolation and disempowers the individual. The fourth and final understanding of alienation is a legacy of the third, forced self-interest leads to a weakening of the bonds between men. Consequently 'each man is alienated from others, and each of the others is alienated from human life' (ibid:17).

### **1.4 Consciousness**

Given the pervasiveness of alienation as a concept in Marx's perspective on industrial society, is there a way to counteract alienation and create constructive change? Marx sees consciousness as an instrument by which man can reflect on his context and then choose how to act. It is useful to trace the context within which Marx defines consciousness in order to understand both his use of the term and his evaluation of its potential. The following quotation from Marx and Engels defines and distinguishes their understanding of consciousness, 'Hegel makes the man of self-consciousness instead of making self-consciousness the self-consciousness of man' (Marx and Engels

cited in Ritzer, 2000:157). This stance on consciousness fixes man as a materially grounded, embodied, real person imbued with a consciousness of himself and his context. Consciousness from Marx's grounded perspective therefore provides a potential for critiquing and challenging the circumstances of material existence and an impetus for social and personal change.

Marx saw the capacity in humans for the development and use of language, and for engaging their consciousness to reflect on and analyse their material and ideological contexts as the means to change those contexts (Turner, 1991:185). Human consciousness, according to Marx, allows humans to pause and make choices about whether and how to act in a given situation. Marx views consciousness as a 'social product' capable of expansion through 'people's activities, social relationships, and the production of material life...' (Ritzer, 2000:158). Marx recognises the distinct ability in humans to 'control activities through consciousness' as unique and potentially transformative (ibid:158). This recognition by Marx has been defined since by McMurty, as creative intelligence (1978).

### **1.5 Conflict and social change**

Marx identified conflict as an inevitable consequence resulting from the inequality and domination inherent in the capitalist economic and social structure. This implicit conflict sows in capitalism, according to Marx, the seeds of its own downfall. Marx predicts that those who become conscious of the circumstances that disempower and exploit them will identify and communicate with others similarly conscious, will inevitably generate class conflict, and ultimately overthrow capitalism and replace it with a non-stratified communist system. Marx considers conflict as endemic in a stratified economic and social system because the interests of the bourgeoisie, the capitalists, and the proletariat, the workers, are economically and socially oppositional. Marx defines the proletariat as 'a class of labourers' who are themselves 'a commodity' whose labour is bought and sold according to the whim of the market and competition, and the interests of those who control it (Marx cited in Giddens and Held, 1982:23). Conflict theorists tend to accept Marx's contention that 'conflict most frequently occurs over the distribution of scarce resources, most notably power and material wealth' (Turner, 1991:186). Conflict theorists, including Marx, also agree that conflict is the impetus that creates social change in industrial societies, which in turn holds the possibility for social progress.



## **1.6 Ideology of class domination**

Marx and Engels, in the *The German Ideology*, explicitly state that 'the ideas of the ruling class in every epoch are the ruling ideas' (cited in Giddens and Held, 1982:26). Therefore the ideas determining the intellectual basis of a society, are a reflection of and, promote the interests of those who control the material basis of the society. Marx argues that these interests are implicit because each new ruling class 'represents its interests as the common interest of all the members of society' representing theirs as 'the only rational, universally valid ones' (ibid:27). This points to the function of social agencies including schools in propagating ideas promoting the vested interests of the current ruling group.

## **1.7 Critical social theory of Simmel**

Simmel (1858-1918) following in the critical tradition of Marx, accepted that conflict is an inherent and an inevitable feature of society. Breaking with the tradition of Marx, Simmel 'did not view social structure as a domination and subjugation' (Turner, 1991:189). Influenced by his 'organismic' view of society, Simmel sought to understand 'the consequences of conflict for social continuity rather than for change' (ibid:190). Simmel did not view society in material terms. He stated that 'Society is merely the name for a number of individuals connected by 'interaction' (Ritzer, 2000:272). Interaction, the disruption of interaction through conflict and the restoration of social balance were his interests. He viewed conflict as an innate feature of human beings the purpose of which is to resolve dualisms, restore social balance and support social cohesion. Consequently though Simmel acknowledges 'hostile impulses' in human beings, resulting at times in hostile actions, the ultimate outcome of conflict is that it 'promotes solidarity and unification' (ibid: 190). In fact without conflict, according to this perspective, societies would become stagnant and incapable of generating levels of social change that ultimately restore balance and support social cohesion.

Simmel's contribution to the debate on conflict opened up the possibility of interpreting 'conflict as a variable phenomenon' (Turner, 1991:191). Consequently whereas Marx saw conflict as culminating in violence, revolution and structural social change, Simmel saw conflict resulting in less violent outcomes but effecting social cohesion in the end. Though Simmel accepted that the labour market does commodify workers to some extent and produce some degree of alienation, he also saw that the labour market presents new opportunities for workers. He highlighted possibilities

for new social relationships, for freedom of movement, for freedom of expression from the constraint of traditional societies. The complex mix of potential exploitation and potential liberty render Simmel's views of industrial society more complex, less historically determined, and more benign, than those of Marx.

### **1.8 Critical social theory of Weber**

In Weber's (1864-1920) sociology class and class conflict occupy less attention than in Marxist Theory. Weber identifies conflicts between 'status groups' on the basis of national or ethnic or other variables as equally significant to the conflicts caused by class structure (Giddens and Held, 1982:9). In *Selections from Economy and Society* presented in Giddens and Held (Ibid:60-86), Weber outlines the manner in which class situation is determined by market situation. He distinguishes class situation in relation to the market in terms of the quantity and quality of goods owned such as land, property, natural resources etc. He further distinguishes those who have control over the marketing of their own labour and those who also have control over the labour of others. He factors in the distance of owners of means from markets and their variable access to turning their goods into money. Weber recognises class but distinguishes it from a group. He states that 'to treat 'class' conceptually as being equivalent to a group leads to distortion' (ibid:63). Weber recognises however that social action generates class situations by virtue of 'action among members of different social classes' rather than action by members of the same social class (ibid:63).

Weber defines those 'whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market' as status groups (ibid:62). Status refers to the positive or negative esteem conferred or denied to men by various aspects of life, and not confined to economic determinism, as is the designation of class. Weber recognises that frequently property and wealth very often do confer status in other aspects of social life. However, status or honour can derive from other sources such as achievement, service to a cause, shared beliefs, shared national or ethnic identity etc. Weber contends that status is usually based on a 'style of life, formal education and hereditary or occupational prestige' (ibid:72). Consequently people with or without property may share the same status group, partake of a shared life style and claim access to the same education. People outside the status group may in turn be prohibited from sharing the style of life, denied access the formal education, and may be denigrated in terms of their hereditary or occupational status.

The concept of status groups advanced by Weber reveals layers of stratification within industrial social life not accounted for by the concept of class alone. The concept of status exposes the fact that while inclusion in a privileged status group confers positive status on the members, exclusion has the opposite and negative social effect. Exclusion confers negative status, creating pariahs rather than privileged groups. Weber outlines the positive and negative attribution of social status using the example of ethnic segregation and the development of the caste system. Weber observed that status groups tend towards social closure and develop into 'closed castes' often enforcing closure by laws, customs and religious beliefs or practices (ibid:66). Closed castes, whether by virtue of their privilege or pariah status tend to be endogamous, develop their own customs and beliefs and consider their own honour as paramount. The beliefs, values and actions of status groups or castes may therefore be countercultural or consistent with their economic interests. The realisation of this possibility adds to the complexity of our understanding of stratification in the intersection of class and status, as identified by Weber.

The identification of party by Weber distinguishes differential power between groups or parties in society. The action of parties is always motivated by the desire to accumulate social power and influence. Weber expresses party as 'a group of individuals who work together because they have common backgrounds, aims or interests' (Giddens, 1992:213). He attributes party equally to a social club as to a state, within which different parties struggle for power and control of club or nation state (ibid:68). Consequently class, status and party interests may converge or diverge. Weber's elaboration of the concepts of status groups and parties increases our understanding of the complexity of the intersection of interests motivated by economics as in class, social order as in status groups and power as in parties. Therefore the potential for shared interests and social cooperation becomes more challenging in Western industrial societies exhibiting increasing complexity and diversity of interests.

Weber refuted Marx's optimism that capitalism would create the conditions necessary to generate revolutionary social change. Instead Weber saw rationalization as the factor that would determine the ongoing development of Western industrial societies. Weber engages in a detailed historical analysis of the development of Western capitalism and identifies that 'this institution alone produced a rational organisation of labour, which nowhere previously existed' (Giddens and Held, 1982:85). Turner describes Weber's rationalization as the lynchpin of his thesis about the direction of

capitalist development as 'the increasing penetration of means/ends rationality into ever more spheres of life and the consequent destruction of traditions' (Turner, 1991:200). In the ongoing development of the free market and the machinery of the nation states and economic systems Weber observed and predicted the breakdown of kinship and traditional moral ties. Weber saw positive opportunities in rationality as the criterion for progress such as the ability of people to shed the oppressive weight of traditional customs such as religious dogmatism, restrictive community and segregated class and other traditional forms of oppression. Weber identified new forms of oppression as replacing these, under the banner of rationality, producing an 'iron cage' of restraints on human beings (ibid:201). Weber identified the increasing tentacles of the market, and corporate and government bureaucracies as strangling the freedom of individuals in Western capitalist societies. He states that 'where administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is practically indestructible' (Seidman, 1998:81). Turner identifies Weber's influence as forcing modern positivists to revisit some of Marx's proposals. He also sees Weber's influence as forcing critical theorists to reconceptualise Marx's 'emancipatory dream' in the light of Weber's rationalization thesis (Turner, 1991:201-202).

The presentation of the ideas of Marx, Simmel and Weber create a backdrop for critical or conflict theory allowing us to proceed to look at a few of the significant directions in which modern conflict theory evolved including the work of Gramsci.

### **1.9 Cultural Marxist theory of Gramsci**

Gramsci (1891-1937) placed far more emphasis on the superstructure of capitalist society, than did Marx, and he is associated with the concept of hegemony, which refers to how the dominant classes utilise ideology to win consent from subordinate groups' (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:15). The work of Gramsci extends the understanding of oppression beyond economic class relations and repression, as seen by Marx, to the manufacturing of consent through ideology with the state representing the interests of the dominant group or groups. These interests are not seen as wholly negative, the state is both seen as a repressive and an educative force (ibid, 1993:15). The concept of hegemony is of particular importance when looking at the cultural reproduction of inequality through schools. Schools are identified as one of the key agencies of socialisation through which culture may be both reproduced and contested.

### **1.10 Structural Marxist theory of Louis Althusser**

Althusser (1918-1990) moves the Marxist perspective in the direction of examining the superstructure of capitalism in terms of 'state apparatuses... including ideological state apparatuses (such as schools)', which, in his view, legitimises the capitalist system of production and inequality and manufacture consensus (Harvey and MacDonald, 1993:16). Ideology therefore has a very significant role to play in the reproduction of inequality. Althusser's work is identified as Structural Marxism. A useful analogy for explaining structural Marxism portrays the world as a puppet theatre (Craib, 1992:149-176). The analogy suggests human beings are puppets whose strings are manipulated by the social structure. The suggestion is that though we often believe our actions are self motivated and directed, when we begin to examine the reach of state apparatuses into our personal lives and effecting our decisions we see the extent to which constraints have been placed on our freedoms in capitalist societies. Craib considers the 'death of the subject' to be the central concern of structural Marxism (ibid:150). His evaluation of that theory suggests it is more successful in its articulation of the impact of social structures but much less so when it comes to accounting for social action (ibid: 150-151). From the perspective of this study it is important to note that structural Marxism is one of the first of the modern social theories which implicitly links the 'cognitive aspects concerned with knowing the world' with the political aspects of knowing the world and with the prospects for social change (ibid: 150).

# **Appendix F The Frankfurt School Theorists**

## **1. Background to the Frankfurt School Theorists**

Understanding the work of Habermas requires an introduction to the ideas developed by the Frankfurt school theorists. We will outline this work briefly with reference to the work of Gyorgy Lukacs (1885-1971), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979). This will be followed by an overview of Habermas' ideas that directly reflect on our research task, drawn from primary and secondary sources. Lukacs's work further developed some of the theses derived from Engels and Marx (Craib, 1992:203-228). Knowledge, according to Lukacs, is shaped by our historicity. The link between the history of the development of society and our knowledge of our world is praxis (ibid:205). Praxis includes meanings but also 'our practical physical relationship to nature', thus to labour (ibid:205). So praxis as a concept synthesises action and reflection such that both agency and structure can come under the lens of critical inquiry.

### **1.1 Reification**

The focus of Lukacs interest was on the relationships between the 'economic, ideological and political' aspects of society (ibid: 206). The combined impact of these structures resulted, in his view, in reification. This concept refers to the commodification of human qualities under capitalism. Reification is defined as 'the way in which human qualities come to be regarded as things and take on a mysterious non-human value of their own' (ibid:207). Lukacs sees the market, an example of a non-human thing, which determines not only the exchange value of commodities, including labour, but also inherently and covertly dominates social and political relationships. Lukacs was particularly interested in how reification or 'thingification' affected theory and knowledge (ibid:207). Lukacs argues that reification presents the social world itself as a commodity; it appears as a world of objects, disassociated from human subjects and their actions upon it. This perception identifies reification as shaping knowledge of the social world, distorting the reality of that world, and making human action for change seem impossible. From this perspective the theory of man as a puppet on the stage of capitalist society becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Social life and social relationships are represented as static and immutable, under advanced capitalism, though in fact they are fluid and evolving. This perspective also promotes a model of the social sciences premised on the natural sciences, seeking universal

laws of society, as well as of nature (ibid:208). Totality is the perception of human life and society as a coherent whole. Yet in seeking universal solutions, the realm of theory and knowledge fragment social life further by developing scientific specialisms to account for different parts of it, sociology, psychology, economics, history etc. (ibid: 208). Thus science reifies social life into fragmented knowledge blocks masking the reality that the social world is an interdependent whole in a constant process of change. Lukacs identifies the same fragmentation in social organisations responsible for welfare, health, education, the law etc., with similar disempowering consequences for human agency and for the prospects of coherent social change.

Though Lukacs, like Engels and Marx, continued to believe that humans are potentially active agents creating society, he recognised that capitalist society suppresses human agency. He, like Marx and Engels, envisaged a future socialist society, supportive of the creative agency of individuals and sharing the benefits of labour collectively. The dire social and political realities the 1920's and 1930's saw the rise of Stalin, later the rise of Hitler and the forced exile of many members of the Frankfurt school (ibid:209). In the light of these events and their reflection on the prospects for socialist change, the perspective of the Frankfurt school was extremely pessimistic.

## **1.2 Instrumental reason**

Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, members of the Frankfurt School, identified instrumental reasoning as dominating man's perception of the world, and killing off his prospects for action to end domination. The instrumental aspect is twofold, it refers to a way of observing the world and a way of observing knowledge. Instrumentality is a means to ends rationale. It views both the world and knowledge of the world as objects or tools which can be utilised to achieve certain goals. Frankfurt School theorists identify varieties of instrumental reason under the label of 'positivism' (ibid:213). They vehemently oppose the idea of a positive definitive science of society with potential for instrumental use. Adorno and Horkheimer trace the roots of instrumental reason to Judaism. They see these roots translated into 'instrumentalisation' of nature during the enlightenment period. For Adorno and Horkheimer instrumental reasoning predates but shapes capitalism. Frankfurt school theorists were highly critical of Marx's acceptance of the instrumentality of both the natural sciences and of society. They exposed these as positivistic features of his theories. This in turn drew the ire of both Marxists and Positivists on Frankfurt School Theory and Theorists.

### **1.3 Culture**

The significant focus of the Frankfurt School theorists on culture reflects their view that, under advanced capitalism, it was the 'integration of individuals' that was the major challenge for society (ibid:216). At this stage in the development of capitalist society they observed that some of the major tensions between the economic base and the structural base had been ironed out. Culture refers to the norms and values of a society, shaping people's view of their world and resulting in social integration or fragmentation. Their views are articulated in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964) and in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972). They trace the increased silencing of the independent creative voice expressing creativity and critique through art, literature and music from early to advanced capitalism. They identify culture as commodified, a product of the culture industry rather than an expression of creativity or dissent. Consequently the hope that culture might express the subjugation people experience and support their bid for freedom becomes a remote possibility in a one-dimensional culture.

Frankfurt School theorists observe that advanced capitalism distorts the true needs of people in terms of health, education, creative self-expression etc. and turn them into individualised quests for healthy life style, individual educational progression and creative self-expression. Therefore health, education and creativity become commodities for individual consumption. Collective visions for health, education and creativity are thus lost. Collective action to change the priorities embodied in the delivery of health, education and cultural services is consequently short-circuited. In fact fragmentation and isolation of individuals, rather than integration, is the result of a one-dimensional culture. Under the guise of liberty in the choice of health, educational and creative commodities available, is masked the shrinking of real choice and the true satisfaction of human needs.

### **1.4 Domination**

Frankfurt school theorists made the study of domination the lynchpin of their investigations. They drew attention to the way in which early capitalist society forced the internalisation of the levels of repression necessary to exert control over people. Marcuse draws on Freud's theory of repressed sexuality to explain how the energies restrained by sexual repression may be redirected towards socially useful ends. Marcuse called this redirection of repressed desire 'repressive de-sublimation' (ibid:221). Frankfurt theorists see later forms of domination as less repressive but as



creating a 'surplus repression' (ibid: 220). This type of repression begins to disassociate the drive for pleasure from any constructive use value for society. This involves a 'de-instrumentalising' of the world where the pleasure principle competes with the utility principle. This tension between instrumentality and de-instrumentality is seen as a tension with potential to exert social change. However critical theorists, in this tradition, see the tension as manipulated by the social system which though it allows desire to become conscious and to be expressed, whether for sex or education or a particular life-style, it redirects the desire towards ends that are useful to the existing social system. Marcuse sees this manipulation as stripping away private personality, absorbing it into the public sphere, and undermining the independent judgement of the individual (ibid:221). This arguably leads to the weakening of the individual character structure rendering people more vulnerable to manipulation. The Frankfurt School Theorists, observing the atrocities of Stalin and Hitler, identified them as grossly manipulating the repressed desire for power in people whose character structure had been eroded by advanced capitalism and were thus rendered vulnerable to exploitation by persuasive political personalities embodying the lust for power.

# **Appendix G Critical Theory, Habermas**

## **1. Introduction**

Habermas elaborates critical theory as synthesising productive knowledge and reflective knowledge. Critical theory thereby generates social theory capable of holding the tension between social structure and social agency. Habermas presents Hegel's Critique of Kant as presenting the vista of either the 'radicalization or abolition of the theory of knowledge' (Habermas, 2007:1-7). He in turn represents Marx's critique of Hegel as 'synthesis through social labour' (ibid:25-42). Habermas then presents the idea of the theory of knowledge as social theory incorporating social structure and social agency (ibid:42-63). He perceives the development of theories of knowledge as prompted by a systematic pattern prompted by general human interests. Habermas defines interest as 'the basic orientations rooted in specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species, namely work and interaction' (ibid: 196). He identifies three general human interests, namely technical, practical cognitive and emancipatory interest. These in turn produce three general forms of knowledge necessary for social reproduction, in his view.

## **2. Technical interest**

The first interest identified is the "technical' human interest' (Seidman, 1998:188). Its goal is to gain control over the natural and social world. This interest produces the technical knowledge underpinning the empirical sciences. This technical knowledge attempts to develop general laws governing the sciences and providing human beings with consequent control over nature, the social world and social behaviour. Habermas exposes what he sees as an intrinsic link between 'the positivistic self-understanding of the sciences and traditional ontology' (Habermas, 2007:302). Both understandings subject nature and the social world to scrutiny. However they avoid putting the history of ideas to scrutiny and so become hostages to the uncritical assumptions of their own inquiries in two ways. According to Habermas they mistakenly adopt the 'methodological meaning of the theoretical attitude' and they accept the 'ontological assumption of a structure of the world independent of the knower' (ibid:304). Habermas identifies both the empirical-analytic sciences and the historical-hermeneutic sciences as reflecting 'scientistic consciousness' by uncritically buying into the historicism underpinning both (ibid:302-304).

### **3. Practical cognitive interest**

The second interest identified by Habermas is the 'practical' cognitive interest prompted by the need to 'cooperate, communicate and share a common world' (Seidman: 1998:188). Language and communication are the focus for investigating social interaction. Practical cognitive interest gives rise to the 'historical, interpretive and cultural sciences' (ibid:188). These hermeneutic sciences are the sciences of interpretation. They attempt to construct knowledge based on the meaning attached to social action and interaction. As a consequence history culture and human interaction are investigated to make sense of the social ideals, values and shared meanings making shared understanding and collective social action possible. Yet their stance is contradictory since they espouse scientific methods relating to objective facts, while attempting to interrogate the sphere of values and meanings, which cannot be separated from human subjectivity and human interaction. Values are 'the nominalistic by-products of a century's long critique of the emphatic concept of Being' (Habermas, 2007:303-304). The historical, interpretive and cultural sciences fail to critique the legacy of values relating to Being which they assume rather than test, from the perspective of Habermas.

### **4. Emancipatory interest**

Habermas identifies a third 'emancipatory' interest, which underpins the previous two interests also (Seidman, 1998:188). It is this emancipatory interest, according to Habermas, that produces the knowledge of the critical sciences such as Marxism and psychoanalysis. The impetus of the knowledge produced by these sciences is to expose obstacles to human liberty and autonomy. This exposure may reveal external constraints in the social system, as represented in Marxist theory, or internal constraints in the personal system, as represented in psychology and psychoanalysis (ibid:189). Habermas was strongly critiqued for his theory of Knowledge and Human Interests especially his claim that emancipatory interest is a general feature of the human condition. In response to these criticisms Habermas retained his defence of a 'universal drive' in human beings towards 'autonomy' (ibid:189). However he turned his inquiry towards the language use and communication for evidence of it.

### **5. Theory of communicative action**

In developing a theory of communicative action Habermas makes linguistic theory the corner stone of his critical theory. The outline of that theory is represented below through excerpts taken from Thomas McCarthy's introduction to *The Theory of*

*Communicative Action* (Vol. 1:2004). Habermas' s stated goal in developing this critical theory was to 'make possible a conceptualization of the social-life context that is tailored to the paradoxes of modernity' (ibid: xiii). Habermas outlines three concerns to be addressed in the theory of communicative action. The first is 'to develop a rationality that is no longer tied to and limited by, the subjectivistic and individualistic premises of modern philosophy and social theory' (ibid:viii). Habermas is determined to 'break free from the philosophy of consciousness' because he sees it as maintaining the subject-object dichotomy between conscious human beings and their actions. This philosophy of consciousness has its roots in Descartes thesis of the 'solitary thinker-solus ipse' (ibid:ix). This thesis came under increasing challenge with the works of Hegel who uncovered the 'historical and social structures of consciousness' (ibid:ix). Marx continued the assault on the philosophy of consciousness by reversing the argument holding that 'mind is not the ground of nature but nature that of mind' (ibid:ix-x). American pragmatism continued the critique with a functionalist perspective on reason, fusing intelligence with self-preservation and problem solving. Nietzsche and Freud uncovered the 'unconscious at the heart of consciousness' (ibid:x). The trajectory of developing scholarship increasingly sees consciousness as embodied and grounded in history, culture, social context, and the psychology of the mind itself, no longer the province of the solitary thinker. Habermas consequently shifts his focus away from the philosophy of consciousness and towards linguistic philosophy to develop a theory which fuses subjectivity and objectivity in a unifying whole.

The second concern of Habermas is in developing a theory of communicative action is 'to construct a two-level concept of society that integrates the life-world and system paradigms' (ibid:viii). The life-world refers to the realm of human interaction, to the realm of values, meanings, communication of values and meanings and social cooperation. System paradigms refer to the structures of social life in terms of work, education, health, governance etc. His third concern was the elaboration of a critical theory for modernity capable of fully addressing the shortcomings of modern society, but proceeds in a constructive manner to redirect rather than abandons the enlightenment project (ibid: viii).

### **5.1 Purposive rational action and communicative action**

Habermas identifies two forms of action, 'purposive-rational action' (Ritzer, 2000:284) meaning labour or work and 'communicative action' meaning interaction (Craib, 1992:235). Habermas is attempting to redress the neglect of social interaction, he identifies with Marx's theory, by developing a totalising theory unifying structure

and agency by allowing for both forms of action. Habermas sees theory as both a product of human action and in the service of human action. For Habermas critical theory, expressed by language and available for shared use and development through communication, still holds the hope for the liberation of human agency and the progression of social change.

Habermas critiques the work of Marx as having focused so much on labour and instrumental action that it missed the significance of social or symbolic interaction as a fundamental aspect shaping social existence. Habermas draws on Freud's theory that the existence of social institutions is not just for economic reasons but functions to repress innate desires. Suppression of these desires is deemed necessary to make social cooperation between human beings possible. Freud identifies the distortion these institutions impose on human interaction and the obstacles they pose for social integration. However, Freud traces individual development as an evolving process, despite the constraints imposed by social institutions. He sees it developing towards 'increasing independence and autonomy, increasing capacity for moral judgement and the increasing universality of moral and legal systems' (ibid:237). Habermas uses Freud's theory of individual development in support of his own investigations into the evolution of modern societies. He argues that human action produces social structures but that action is in turn prompted by the norms, values and beliefs of the actors. Because rational collective action has to be achieved for social structures to develop, norms and values must be agreed upon so that social cooperation succeeds. For Habermas understanding how norms and values are developed and communicated is the key to understanding the impetus towards, and impediments to, social action and thus the potential for social change.

## **5.2 Language-in-use or speech**

Language is the vehicle for the communication of norms, values and ideals. Habermas is interested in language in-use, in other words language as speech. Speech is the medium communicating our meanings and understandings to each other. It therefore shapes the communicative aspect of social action. Habermas recognises that speech acts are always stating claims 'regarding the truth or what we say in relation to the objective world' (ibid:xii). How then can speech acts be adjudicated with regard to the validity of its claims? Habermas argues that reaching understanding is conditional on 'the possibility of using reasons or grounds to gain intersubjective recognition for validity claims' (ibid:xii). Argumentation is the mechanism arbitrating validity claims, allowing for revision and learning. Validity claims exposed to reflection by critical

scrutiny and satisfying that scrutiny may be 'transmitted and developed within a cultural tradition and embodied in specific cultural institutions' (ibid:xiii).

### **5.3 Rationality**

Habermas examines four concepts of social action testing the validity of their claims regarding rationality. These four concepts relating to social action are teleology, normative regulation, dramaturgy and communicative action (ibid:xv). The fourth of these, communicative action is the only one that he can support as holding up to the critique of rationality. It is the only one that utilises 'language as a medium for reaching understanding in the common definitions of a situation' (ibid:xv). Habermas identifies a necessary ordering of reality inherent in the attempt to define a given situation. However the key to successful communication is the ability to interpret another's definition of the situation, absorb it into our own definition, and emerge with altered definitions, which accommodates at least, or reconcile at best, the divergence in definitions. No person can make claim to a monopoly on the truth. However engaging in critical social theory aimed at interpreting the validity claims of competing definitions of social situations can arguably lead us to communicate collective rational judgements and engage in collective strategic action.

Seidman presents the work of Habermas under the title of 'The reassertion of a Moral Vision of the Human Sciences' (1998:171-213). Seidman identifies Habermas as arguing that institutional change is impossible 'without an alteration in the character of our moral knowledge', or our ideas about 'social norms, justice, identities and community' (ibid: 194). Understanding the material basis of society and its reproduction is necessary but not sufficient to understanding society. Habermas identifies as equally important the necessity to understand 'the idealist processes concerned with the formation of identity and social solidarities' (ibid:194). Habermas draws on the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg as evidence of the trajectory of moral development. He sees moral and social development as capable of being understood by a rational examination of the material and ideological bases of social life, through the application of critical theory. It is this combination of moral and social understanding, communicated through language, that makes altered shared perception and shared action possible, according to this perspective. Habermas holds onto hope for social transformation despite admitting the paradox that modern society offers both the best conditions, so far in history, for the development of personal autonomy, moral development and social development, as well as the most hostile. He identifies the development of moral reasoning and critical reflection on

material and social life as holding hope for collective understanding and therefore social cohesion and progressive social change. However, he recognises in bureaucracy, the pervasive influence of instrumental rationality, and the promotion of narrow self-interest at the level of the individual and profit at the level of the market, obstacles subverting collective consciousness and hampering social progress.

Schools are subsystems in the bureaucracy of the state. Drawing on Habermas model of action we can identify schools as sites of both strategic action and communicative action. Schools undertake a strategic function to educate in the skills and abilities fitting people for productive labour in the economic system. The strategic function of schools is of course shaped by the values, norms and ideals predominating in a particular culture, and perhaps even in a particular school. The communicative function, the interpretation and interchange of values and understandings between teachers, and between teachers and students and other members of the school community also shape the moral and social culture of the school and community. Habermas suggests we need to engage critical theory as a tool to examine the material and ideological conditions of social structures, in the case of this research the material conditions shaping primary schools, and the ideological conditions shaping or being shaped by the agency of teachers in primary schools. Habermas warns about the constraints imposed by bureaucracy and scientific-technical rationality on social systems, for example schools. We would expect a critical research investigation to expose those constraints. Habermas asserts confidence in moral reasoning and critical reflection as providing possibilities to counteract the culture of technical rationality predominating in modern societies. We would expect to find evidence of the influence of moral reasoning and critical reflection in the life-world of the school and the agency of teachers and others. Our research project aims to question teachers in particular about their interpretations of the balance between opportunities for and obstacles to change in the structures and organisation of primary schooling and the agency of teachers. The critical theory developed by Habermas would point to teachers language use, as a lens through which to interrogate their definitions of their teaching situations, their shared and divergent interpretations of the potential for collective agency and their interpretations of whether progressive structural or ideological educational change is a social possibility or a futile fantasy.

## **6. Critiques of the Critical theory of Habermas.**

Craib credits Habermas with coming closer in his development of critical theory than any of the other modern social theorists in managing the balance between action and

structure (1992:231-257). He draws on two criticisms of Habermas identified in the critical literature. The first criticism relates to the fact that Habermas does not establish the 'priority of communicative action over strategic action' (Ibid:243). Craib disagrees that this was ever a goal of Habermas. He views Habermas as achieving what he set out to do in this regard, to establish the significance of social or symbolic interaction based on language use, as an alternative lens to labour, in making sense of the social world. The second criticism considered by Craib is the uncertainty of the emancipatory thesis in the work of Habermas. Craib accepts that identifying the emancipatory drive as the basis of communicative action is undermined by its association with the life-world, as distinct from the system-world (ibid:243).



## Appendix H Informed consent



COLÁISTE MUIRE GAN SMÁL  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

### Teachers' Stories

Research Title:

*Being Teachers, Being Women:*

*Distilling Learning from Stories of Self, Students, and School.*

#### Informed Consent Form

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about and the purposes for which the results will be used.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I know that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide reasons, and without consequence.
- I know that information I provide will be held securely, and confidentially, under the conditions specified in the participant information sheet.
- I have read this form completely, I am 18 years of age or older, and I agree to participate in the study.

**Signed:**

**Date:**

## Appendix I Participant information sheet



COLÁISTE MUIRE GAN SMÁL  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

### Teachers' Stories.

#### Research Title:

Being Teachers, Being Women: Distilling Learning From Transitions in Our Stories of Self, Students, and School.

#### Participant Information Sheet

The proposed study is interested in learning from teachers' stories about students, school and teachers themselves. It is therefore a narrative inquiry. The purpose of the study is to use teachers' stories as a means to develop better understanding of teachers' values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and ways of making sense of teaching, and of being teachers.

Current research suggests that what we currently know about how teachers think is more assumed than researched. This study addresses that gap in knowledge and challenges the acknowledged undervaluing of teacher knowledge derived from their reflective practice, in debates about teaching and educational inclusion.

This study is seeking to engage with a small number of female teachers (8-10) currently working in, or with experience of having worked in, DEIS schools (for not less than 10 years). I have been a teacher for thirty years, the first ten years teaching in primary schools in communities experiencing disadvantage in both Limerick city, and in Dublin. I am conducting this study as part of doctoral research. Professor Jim Deegan, Head of Graduate School at Mary Immaculate College Limerick, is supervising my work.

If you choose to participate in the study you will be asked to **share some stories that have significance for you as an experienced teacher**, relating to your ongoing reflections on: being a teacher; understanding students; and teaching/learning in your school context.

You will be asked to **share your stories in two ways**. Both ways require **ONLY that you tell stories**. The first way is to share your stories in a one-to-one conversation with me for one hour, on three separate occasions, over a period of twelve months

during the school year, between **September 2013 and December 2013** at a location of your choosing. That amounts to **three hours** in total.

The second way is to participate in a small group of fellow teachers, working with me, to develop collective stories. It is anticipated this work will be achieved over three, two hour, contact sessions between **January and April 2014**. This part of the study will require **six hours** in total. The overall contact time required to participate in the study, will be **NINE HOURS** over a period of one year.

All sessions will be recorded and I will later transcribe them. I will give you sight of the transcripts. Dates and locations for individual and group sessions will be negotiated. Your participation in the study is **voluntary**. You may withdraw from the study at any time, without providing a reason, and without consequence.

The benefits of participating in the study lie in it providing you with an opportunity to give voice to your own story. I will value your story and draw on the insights you offer to inform the research study. Those insights will also be communicated to a wider audience through the research study. No risks greater than those involved in conversation building attach to participating in the study.

All data collected during the research study will be handled with **confidentiality**. Participants will be given an alias to protect their identity, and all documents will be stored and reported under that alias. The development of collective stories will also serve to protect the identity of participating teachers. All paper data and transcriptions representing teachers' accounts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet, in my office. All electronic data records will be password protected and/or encrypted as appropriate. I will store transcripts for a period of at least five years after the study is completed. The **only persons** with access to the data will be me, my supervisor, and the external examiner on request.

The knowledge derived from the study will be developed into a research report and submitted as part of my doctoral thesis. I will disseminate the findings of the study to academic and educational audiences through publications and delivered papers. Any information disseminated about the research will acknowledge the contribution of participating teachers in DEIS schools, and the approval of the ethics committee of MIC, (MIREC). All dissemination activities will advocate for valuing teachers and the knowledge they develop in practice, and argue for using teachers' insights to better understand the challenges of teaching and social inclusion.

I am passionate about teaching, and about learning from teachers. I would really appreciate an opportunity to listen and learn from you about the realities and challenges of working as a teacher in a DEIS school, at this time in Ireland.

If you are interested in participating in this research, or in learning more about it, please contact me, **Mary Kelly**, at **marybakelly@gmail.com**

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:**

**MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road.**

**Tel: 061-204515; email: mirec@mic.ul.ie**

***Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.***

## Appendix J: Letter to Principal



COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

15<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

Dear Principal,

My name is Mary Kelly. I have been a teacher for over thirty years, ten of which I spent teaching in primary schools in disadvantaged communities, in Limerick, and in Dublin. I am currently undertaking research investigating the knowledge developed by teachers in DEIS schools, communicated through their **stories of self, students and school**. The study, with and about teachers, will contribute to my doctoral thesis and to communicating the knowledge of teachers, reflecting on their practice, to relevant educational audiences. I have developed the research study at MIC, supervised by Professor Jim Deegan. It has ethical clearance from the MIC research ethics committee (MIREC).

The research project is designed as a **reflective study about teacher's knowledge**, derived from the stories of experienced female teachers in DEIS schools (not less than 10 years in practice). The study adopts the view that teachers develop over time a store of knowledge, based on their reflections on their own practice, providing a rich, relatively untapped, and currently under valued source, from which we can gain better understanding about the challenges of contemporary teaching in specific schools, and about the challenges of educational inclusion. The focus of this study is on **learning from stories reflecting transitions in how teachers understand themselves, their students and pedagogy**, based on their experiences inside and outside classrooms, over many years of professional practice.

The work with teachers, listening to and recording their stories, is scheduled to start in **April 2013** and finish in **March 2014**. It will involve **three hours** of contact with me, between April and June 2013, and a further **six hours** between September 2013 and March 2014. That amounts to a **total of nine hours of teacher's time, over a year**.

I am seeking to work with a **small number of teachers (8-10) currently teaching, or with considerable experience of teaching, in DEIS schools**. I want to hear, understand, and record stories, they consider significant, about their evolving identity as teachers, their evolving understanding of children, and their experiences and ongoing reflections on teaching in DEIS schools. The understandings embodied in their stories will shape, and be communicated through the research report. They will also be used to contribute to debates about teacher knowledge, and the challenges of teaching in contemporary schools serving communities experiencing disadvantage.

I enclose for your attention **two documents**. The first is an **information sheet** giving a detailed picture of what the research is about, how it will be conducted, how the information will be used and disseminated, what time and commitment teachers will have to make if they choose to participate, risks and benefits, etc. The second document is a **consent form**, to be signed by any teacher wishing to participate.

I would deeply appreciate if you would signal this forthcoming research project to your staff, and circulate the two documents attached to them. I will contact you before Easter to ensure that you have received the mailing, and after Easter to get feedback.

Mindful of the busy demands of school responsibilities, I thank you for your attention. My contact details are provided below. I welcome any, and all, inquiries about the research.

Kind regards,

---

Mary Kelly.

## **Appendix K Narrative Fragment: A Cemetery Tradition**

We walk to the cemetery in Tullamore in the sunshine. I am fourteen and walking with my father, Bob. My grandparents both died last year, eight months apart. My grandfather died first, later my grandmother. They say my grandmother died of a broken heart. I can understand that because my grandfather seemed to me to be a sweet, kind man, especially kind to my grandmother. We are going to visit their grave. This visiting is a time-honoured tradition in both my parent's families. We do that together, my father and I. We pay our respects. He is quiet. I think to myself great, duty done, let's get out of here. It is a very sunny day after all and I am fourteen.

My father leads the way along an unfamiliar path to another grave. I think, where are we going now? He takes off his hat and bows his head and says a silent prayer. Eventually ask, curious as always about tracing family lines of descent 'it this your uncle's grave?' 'No' he says, 'this is my teacher's grave, a wonderful man. He taught me everything from trigonometry to Shakespeare and everything in between'. We walk home together and he speaks about his school days and this teacher as exciting and inspirational. The walk seems long to me but it is sunny. I have the undivided attention of my father telling me stories about his past and his fondly remembered teacher, so I am happy to listen.

### **Tracing the narrative threads of: A Cemetery Tradition**

My father loved mathematics and excelled at it. He was a prolific reader of literature. He was enthusiastic about every known subject and he credited his primary school teacher with fanning the flames of learning for him. My father was the son of a blacksmith, the son of generations of blacksmiths. He was the eldest child in his family. A slightly extended primary schooling was all that was open to him. For the rest of his education he was entirely self-taught to the point of preparing himself for civil service entrance examinations. He succeeded in these entrance examinations and had a career in the civil service subsequently. He himself also continued to build on the Irish language he had learned at primary school and became really proficient. His passion for learning was unmistakable and infectious for me as a child. It led me to share that passion, especially for the Irish language, for music, for history, philosophy and for reading, like him, everything I could lay my hands on.

This story is significant for me because it is one of a number of very positive impressions I formed early on that teaching and learning are exciting. My father generated excitement about learning, irrespective of the subject matter. He would have made a great teacher. He was a great teacher to me. However this fragment also captures his fond and grateful remembrance of his teacher. This reflection on his recollection of his teacher has triggered my memories of teachers who were significant in my life. It has called up for me memories of positive experiences of my own with teachers: one who taught me for two years in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class; one who was a frequently visiting relative; and one who was an elderly neighbour and retired teacher. Looking back I now see that these teacher mentors and my father's remembering of his teacher with such affection and respect, influenced my early view of teachers and teaching. Consequently whenever someone asked me, as a child and teenager 'what will you be when you grow up', I answered with conviction 'I am going to be a teacher'. That was my vision, that was my dream.

I have been a teacher and educator for over thirty five years now. If you asked me today how would I describe myself I would say 'I am a teacher, I am doing what I love, continuing to learn myself and enjoying helping others to learn'? It was inquiring into teacher's storied lives in this narrative inquiry that resurrected this story from my memory and made me aware for the first time of its significance in my biography as a teacher.



## **Appendix I Narrative Fragment: I bags spuds for me father**

I am a young primary teacher, not long qualified myself. Student teachers have come to do their Easter teaching practice in my classroom. This gives me time and choices I don't usually have. The weather is kind. I choose to spend extra time with some students who need and deserve more attention than I can normally give them. Tim is one of those students. He is blond haired, sometimes. At other times he has a skinhead haircut. He is as wild as a March hare in many ways. I see and admire the beauty of that in him as well as the challenge for myself as a young teacher to manage his behaviour. He is seven years old at this time.

Here we are together in the corridor outside the classroom, Tim and I. We have lined up a row of flowerpots and trays on the windowsill. It's a long wide wooden sill mirroring the full length of the classroom. It looks out on the concrete schoolyard below. It is a bleak, Spartan yard but even it looks welcoming today, its harshness softened by the sunshine. I am glad, as I suspect Tim may be, to be freed from the classroom. We are about to plant bulbs. There is a trowel, a bag of compost, some small pots and a bag of bulbs. We are chatting and deciding where to start. I half fill a pot with compost. Tim picks out some bulbs and places them. He takes the trowel and fills earth around the bulbs leaving the tips peeping. It's my turn to press the earth down with my fingers just to make sure the bulbs are snug. Tim's hand shoots out and grabs my arm. He says 'Jesus, miss don't do that, you'll wreck your hands, I bags spuds for me father, I'll do that'.

### **Tracing the narrative threads of 'I bags spuds for me father'**

I keenly remember, and hold dear today, the kindness of the child's gesture towards me, captured in this narrative fragment. I have remembered it many times over the years. It blew me away emotionally at the time because it was such an exquisitely chivalrous gesture from a child experiencing a lot of challenges in his own young life at the time. When I re-member it now, writing it down as I am for the first time, it makes me reflect on what I have gained as a teacher from the generosity of children. I especially remember this moment, with this child. It makes me feel both humbled and honoured to have been his teacher.

When I began working as a primary teacher I was absolutely passionate about teaching in a school in community experiencing multiple disadvantages. I thought I

had something wonderful to offer the children. Maybe I did. However, as I developed some fledgling experience as a primary teacher I began to discover that I had a great deal to learn from the children, and from their parents. The children in particular had wonderful things to offer me that have improved me over time, affection, humour, spontaneity, forgiveness, generosity and different and interesting perspectives on the world. Tim taught me that teaching was not only about what I might have to give children but also about what I might receive from them. This fragment captures an intimate moment of pure and unexpected kindness shown to me by a boy who I carry in my heart to this day. It stirs my emotions now, in recollecting it, as much it did on that summer's day in nineteen eight two. I continue to be as passionate as ever about teaching. However, I am also more keenly aware now of how much I need to learn in order to continue to grow as a teacher and as a human being.

(Ph. D. Journal Entry: May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013).

## **Appendix M Narrative Fragment: A tale of two dresses**

I was teaching first class. Part of my duties involved preparing children for First Holy Communion. It was a lot of work and it was only my second year working as a primary teacher, since qualification. A woman, a friend of my family, approached me and asked me if she and her brother could support a family by each providing a child with the clothes they needed for their Holy Communion day. There were twin girls in my class at the time. I suggested that I might approach their mother to see if this offer would be helpful and acceptable to her. I met the mother privately and discussed the matter. She was very glad of the offer. The weeks passed by quickly. There was so much to do getting the children ready for the ceremony. I received, in due course, two matching large white boxes. They contained identical dresses, veils, bags, gloves, socks, shoes, rosary beads and prayers books, for the identical twins in my class. I passed them on to the mother off site. She thanked me and passed her thanks on to the donors through me. Everything was looking good

On the day of the ceremony I was very preoccupied trying to make sure that everything went according to our, many times rehearsed, plan. I remember one child was late for the mass and I was very, very agitated until she and her family, arrived and settled. When the ceremony was over I could at last breathe a sigh of relief. It was lovely meeting the children with their families and there were lots of photographs taken. It was then that I noticed that the friend of my family had come along to the ceremony herself. She was from the parish and very aware of the challenges Holy Communion placed on families from a financial perspective. She approached me at the back of the church and congratulated me on how well the ceremony had gone. I was grateful for her acknowledgment. I looked around for the twin girls, in order that she could see them in the beautiful outfits she had supplied. They were nowhere to be seen. I felt bad that they were not to be found at the time. She had to leave shortly and said it didn't matter at all. She said that she and her brother were glad to have been able to give some support to a family.

Some minutes later I saw the girls, outside the church, with their family. My jaw dropped. The girls were wearing entirely different dresses, veils, gloves, socks and bags from the ones I had handed over to their mother. I felt secretly relieved that this 'friend of my family' had already left. I was embarrassed and upset. I was also angry. I

felt more and more relieved that the donor had not stayed long enough to witness the switch.

### **Tracing the narrative threads of: 'A tale of two dresses'**

For several weeks after the event described in the story above I felt angry. I had to look at what was causing such a strong reaction in me. I realised that it was my own personal baggage. I came from a background and was socialised to care about people living in poverty. My parents would often have intervened to 'help' people in challenging situations. However, I began to realise that what presented as 'helping' in good faith sometimes ended up being a patronising model of intervention that took choice away from those 'being helped'. They in turn were expected to be grateful. I was the agent intending to be the channel of the expected gratitude of the mother back to the donor of the dresses. I wanted to present the girls to the donor in 'her chosen dresses' so she would feel good and I would feel good.

As I examined my anger, I began to let go of it and to learn something new. I began to admire the mother who used her ingenuity to barter or trade dresses she badly needed (from my friend) as collateral to acquire the dresses she wanted for her girls. I realised I had a lot to learn about the culture and community of the school in which I was teaching and about successful strategies necessary for survival when resources are scant. This mother was doing what good mothers do, providing to the best of her ability, for her lovely twin daughters. Some years later my daughter was herself preparing for Holy Communion. We went shopping together for her dress. I remember that she was the tallest child in her class, at the time. We opted for something beautiful in its simplicity. We could, we were paying after all! I then understood fully the deserved right, as well as the deserved pleasure every mother or father should enjoy in exercising their choice.

The story of the white dresses is a signature story for me. It symbolically represents the gap between my aspirations as a young teacher and the reality of the effects of inequality on the community in which I was teaching. I was in fact on a steep learning curve, as a teacher and as a human being, even though I didn't yet know it. My journey from anger, to reflection, increased empathy and finally to admiration of the mother in question was slow and humbling. I ended up admiring the mother of the twin girls for exercising the right, as I did later with my own daughter, to choose what her precious girls would wear on a very important day in their lives and in the lives of their families and community. As a result of my own painful learning in the case of the dresses I

subsequently understood clearly why, for example, direct provision to refugees in Irish hostels was so immoral. I also understood that people themselves often know the best solutions to solve their own problems. They just need to be asked what those solutions are, then resourced and supported to achieve those solutions themselves. This story reveals how much I have had to learn and unlearn in my early years as a primary teacher. The same need to both learn and unlearn is necessary continuing work as an educator and researcher.

## Appendix N Research Evaluation Forms for Participating Teachers (7)

### Evaluation Form

#### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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Thank you for participating in the research project. I would like to include your feedback, about how you experienced the process of being involved, as part of the research findings. Consequently I would really appreciate if you would take a few minutes to answer the three questions outlined below. It has been a pleasure for me to journey with you and I deeply appreciate the knowledge, as well as the time, you have shared with me.

---

1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*I found the experience very enjoyable. I had no idea when it started what exactly I was supposed to be saying. However, the beauty of it was that the questions were very open which allowed you to express yourself freely. It was a lovely opportunity to reflect back on your own personal journey. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity. The mind map was so insightful in bringing all the elements together. Your own relaxed personality contributed enormously to me being able to speak so openly and sharing my memories / experiences with you.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*I loved the casual manner. It felt like talking to your best friend. There was no judgements. The opportunity to be listened to and be able to speak freely really stood out for me. I was at total ease because I felt the person clearly understood what I was saying. It was the first time since I became a teacher that I have ever had the opportunity to retell my reflections and share them.*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

*I really don't think so. The experience was really insightful on a personal level. I wasn't expecting it to be. I thought it would be something totally different. I got a lot from it. In ways, it felt like a counselling session. I would love other teachers to have a similar opportunity especially those teachers who are overwhelmed or have lost direction in terms of their profession. Thank you so much for such an enjoyable experience. You are an amazing listener!*

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

## Evaluation Form

### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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Thank you for participating in the research project. I would like to include your feedback, about how you experienced the process of being involved, as part of the research findings. Consequently I would really appreciate if you would take a few minutes to answer the three questions outlined below. It has been a pleasure for me to journey with you and I deeply appreciate the knowledge, as well as the time, you have shared with me.

---

1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*By participating in the research I recalled many events that made me both want to laugh and cry. The memories sort of renewed my love of teaching and why I decided to become a teacher in the first place. It made me wonder what paths of the future did the students take and were they happy.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*How vulnerable both students and teachers are. It made me realise how the staff are wonderful and supportive of each other. Also, stress is a dreadful thing and its very common among teachers with results and deadlines.*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.



## Evaluation Form

### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*Participation in this research was not only a pleasure, but most enlightening – I also found that the experience provided further opportunity for reflection. I will greatly miss talking to you!*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*I really enjoyed the meetings – I looked forward to each one. I especially enjoyed sharing the artefacts and recounting the stories behind them. The feedback session – most reflective – feel very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to look back at my career to date. Almost like a 'This is your Life'. Many thanks Mary. Happy Christmas*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

## Evaluation Form

### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*I really enjoyed the whole process. In the beginning I couldn't imagine how it was going to unfold. The idea seemed broad and vague, but I loved how Mary saw and followed particular threads and how it all mapped out in the end. I felt I re-learned stuff about myself that I had forgotten and it helped me to understand my career path and see more clearly the hows and whys of it.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*I enjoyed seeing, and being reminded of why and how I ended up in teaching. It would be a useful experience for all the teachers, to stop, pause, take stock and sort of evaluate, looking back before looking forward.*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

*No, I enjoyed the sessions with Mary and I loved seeing the Mind Map in the end.*

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

## Evaluation Form

### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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Thank you for participating in the research project. I would like to include your feedback, about how you experienced the process of being involved, as part of the research findings. Consequently I would really appreciate if you would take a few minutes to answer the three questions outlined below. It has been a pleasure for me to journey with you and I deeply appreciate the knowledge, as well as the time, you have shared with me.

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1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*I found it very interesting and very easy to talk to Mary as it was more like a conversation. Found it very reflective – was lovely to reflect on being a practitioner. Wasn't too demanding on time, but felt Mary got a lot of information about me and the mind map encapsulated me as a teacher/person.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*Enjoyed the interview process – Nice to verbalise what life is like as a teacher – never really had time to do that type of reflection.*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

*Not that I can think of.*

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

## Evaluation Form

### Teachers' Stories Research Project

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Thank you for participating in the research project. I would like to include your feedback, about how you experienced the process of being involved, as part of the research findings. Consequently I would really appreciate if you would take a few minutes to answer the three questions outlined below. It has been a pleasure for me to journey with you and I deeply appreciate the knowledge, as well as the time, you have shared with me.

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1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*My involvement in this research project has been entirely positive. I enjoyed the experience and never found it to be burdensome. I feel the time was very reflective and that I benefited personally from this exercise.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*I particularly liked the final interview with the mind maps. I found this very interesting and rewarding.*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

*Honestly, I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. I can't say I would have changed.*

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

**Evaluation Form**  
**Teachers' Stories Research Project**

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Thank you for participating in the research project. I would like to include your feedback, about how you experienced the process of being involved, as part of the research findings. Consequently I would really appreciate if you would take a few minutes to answer the three questions outlined below. It has been a pleasure for me to journey with you and I deeply appreciate the knowledge, as well as the time, you have shared with me.

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1. Please describe what the experience of participating in the narrative research was like for you?

*I enjoyed taking time out during the working day to reflect on the journey I have been making. I struggled to attend the sessions as school life was so busy. It was so worth the effort as I miss reflecting practice on my work.*

*The experience was spiritual. I sensed that I was moving into a gentle, calm, reflective and respectful place with Mary. The experience was therapeutic and fun.*

2. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that worked well for you? If so, please specify?

*Being heard, Sharing, the one on one was a deeper experience than working in groups might have been*

3. Were there aspects of participating in the narrative research that could have worked better for you? If so, Please specify?

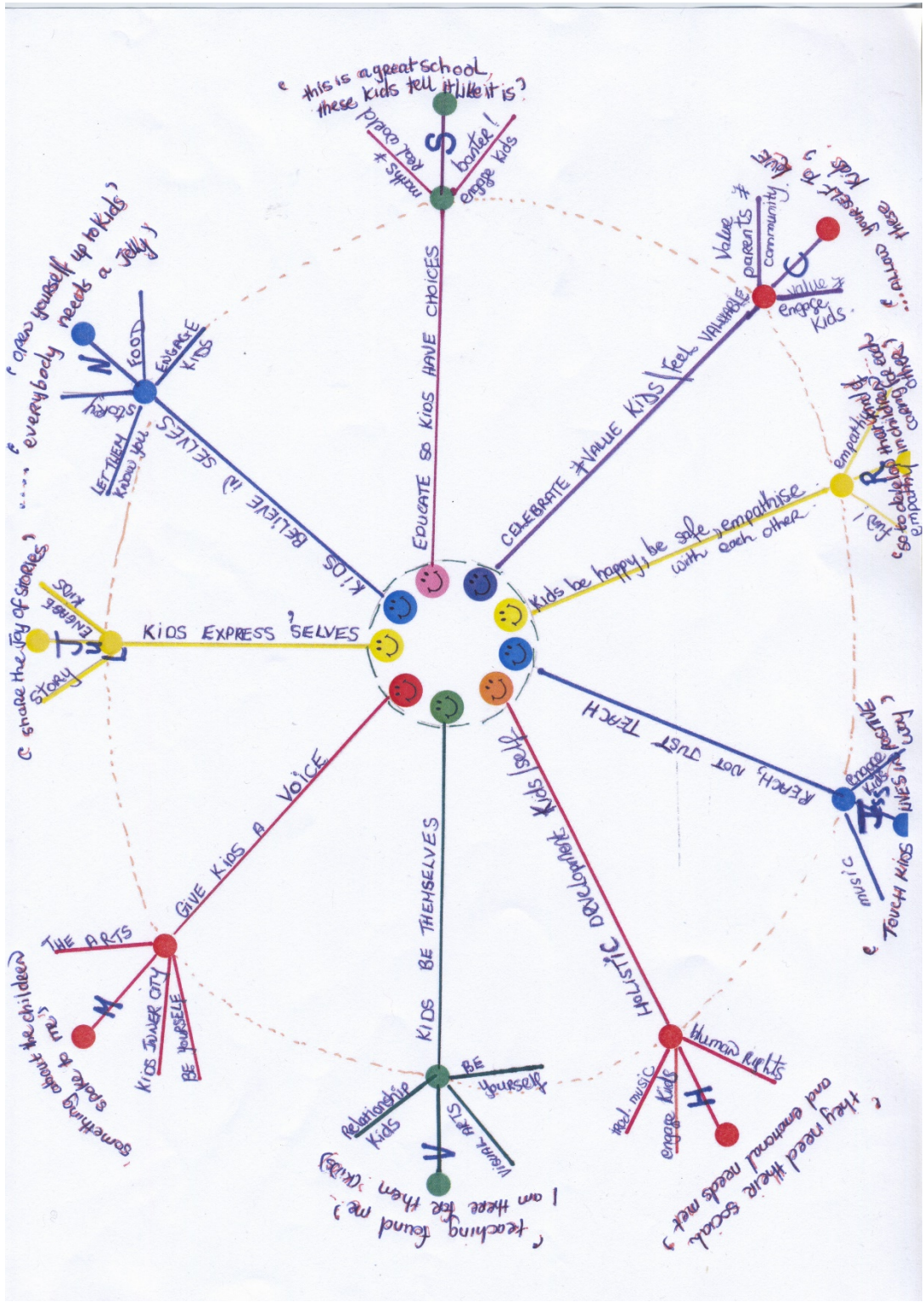
*No. It was as it was meant to be.*

*I am saddened that education providers do not see merit in providing time for teachers to reflect more in this way as part of their work practice.*

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this evaluation form. Please return to me in the pre-paid envelope supplied on or before January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Please do not identify yourself. Mary Kelly.

**Appendix O Teachers' Stories: Mind Maps (10)**

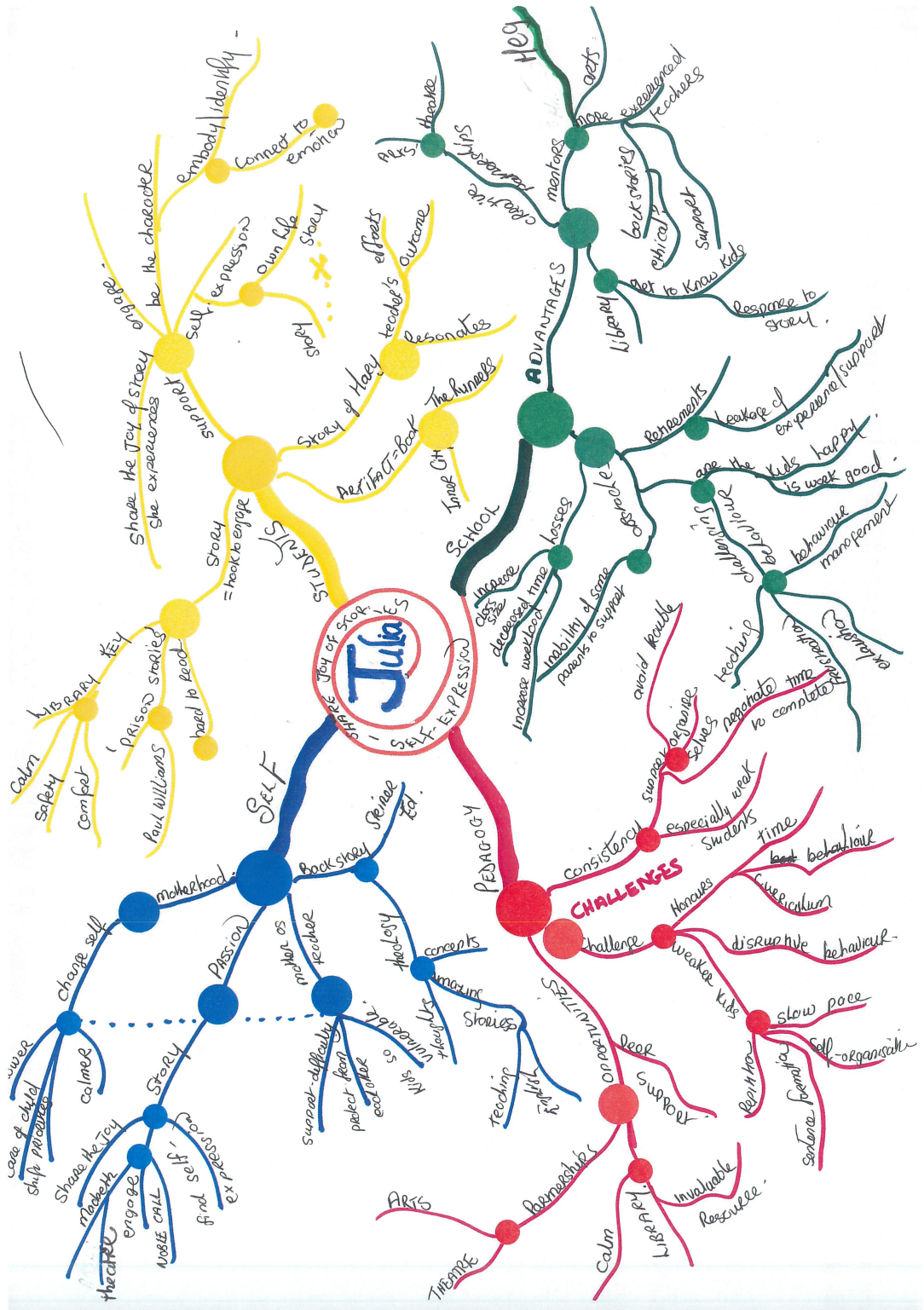




















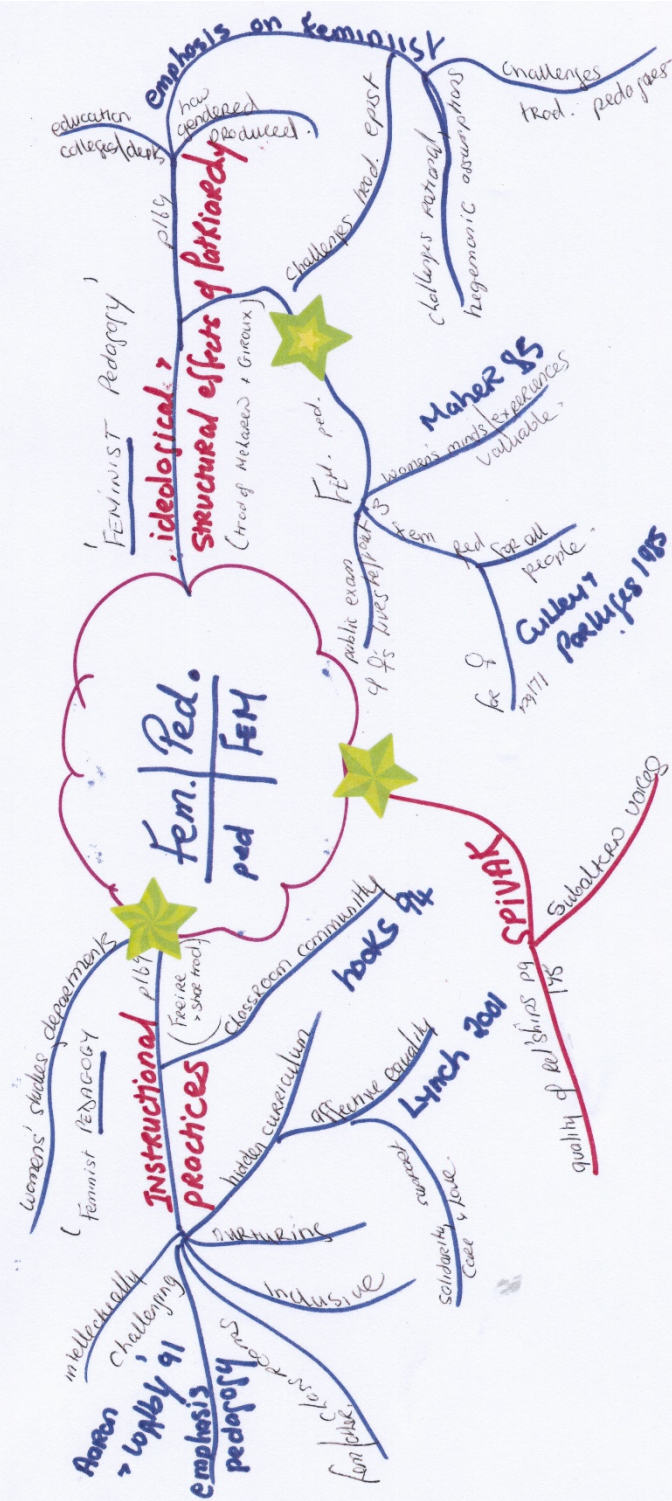






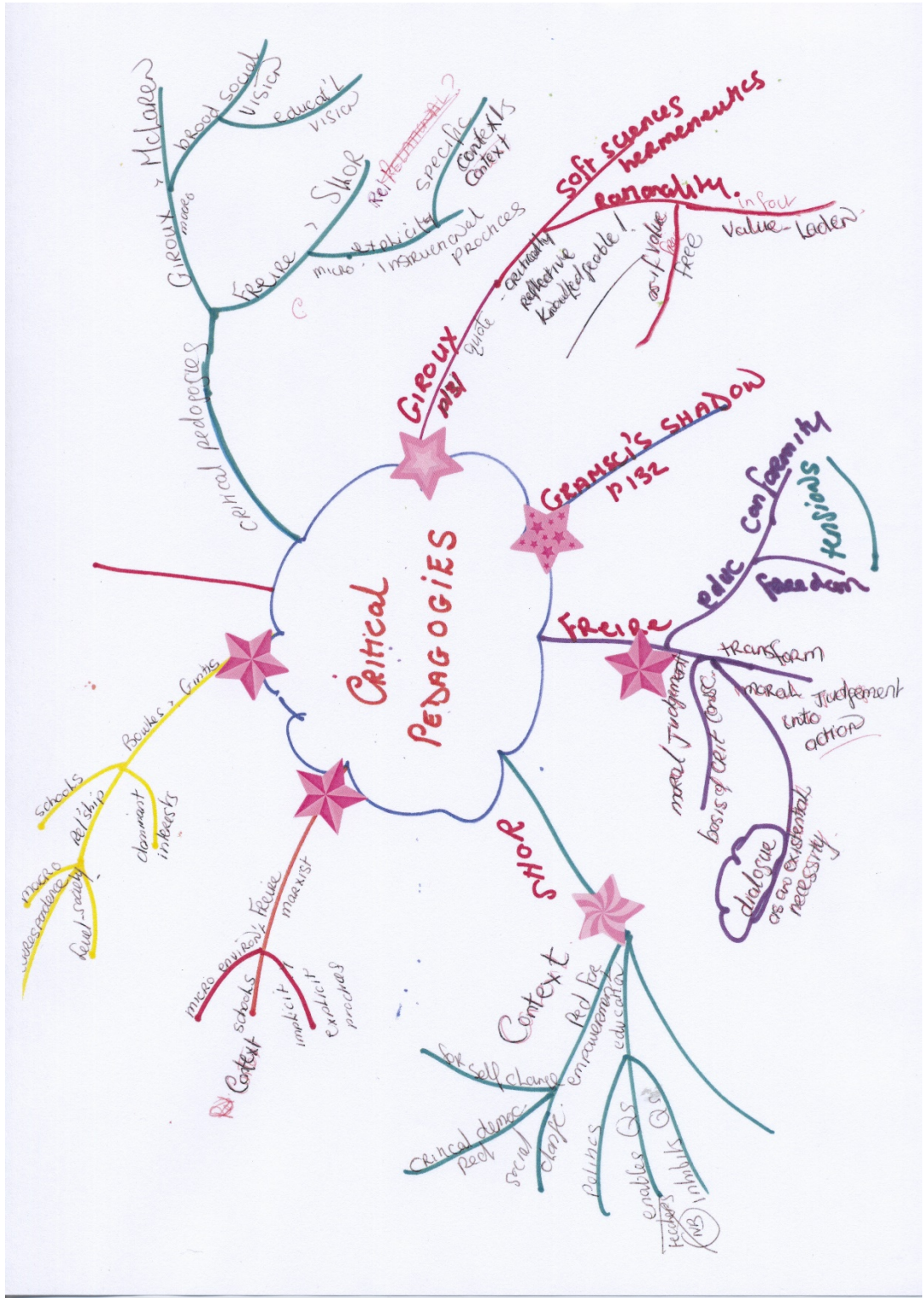






# Backstory to the Discussion













## **Appendix Q Passionate interests and pathways to teaching**

### **1. Nicole's passion and pathway to teaching.**

Nicole re-enters the stage at this point. We already met her in the Prologue. Teaching did not find her in a moment of epiphany. She sought it, always. However her journey into teaching was long and circuitous. As she reveals her story we recognise that the crooked path has taught her a great deal that now shapes her approach to pedagogy, and her engagement with her students.

#### **1.1 Narrative fragment: I always wanted to be a teacher**

**Nicole:** *I always wanted to be a teacher and I didn't get the points to do it directly. I was absolutely devastated when I didn't. But, I started off in in the IT, (Institute of Technology...*

**Nicole continues:** *I left school with fear definitely inbred in me. I was really afraid when I did my Leaving Cert...I wasn't really confident... I never knew how...I wasn't able to say...In actual fact...I could never say then what I realised or believed.*

#### **1.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'I always wanted to be a teacher'**

We learn from Nicole that fear and optimal school performance cannot and did not marry. Because her needs as a student were not met at school her goal to teach was not initially satisfied. Her ambition to teach was steadfast. Nicole took her love of cooking, learned at home as we understand from her backstory shared in the prologue, and took a path to training as a chef in DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology). She never lost sight of her ambition to teach domestic science. We will see that persistence is one of her great strengths and she later found an alternate route into teaching that both satisfied her need for a qualification to teach domestic science and stimulated the student centred pedagogy, in which she firmly believes, and in which she now engages.

#### **1.3 Narrative Fragment: Gumption!**

**Nicole:** *What gave me the gumption to apply for the course in England [Domestic Science Teaching]? I really, really, wanted to do it. Thank god that I had written [to the college to apply]... Then it came, you are successfully accepted on year two of...and I was going absolutely brilliant...Then going abroad to study...I mean I know a lot of people travel but I had never travelled. There wasn't anyone in my college going to be doing this course. Inside I was absolutely petrified, but outwards I was going, yeah I am definitely going.*

She goes on to say:

*Those two years were so significant for me. They were way ahead in that college in terms of practice. When I studied before we might have seven or eight things [pieces of work] going on, but we didn't know as we were going along how we*

*were doing...Here you see we could be doing a pastry module, or whatever, and you knew you got 50% in that, so you knew what you needed to make up...you got this table ...and every assignment was entered...every tutor in the college would give you two hours to talk with you about your assignments...you had the option of working your grade up, which was brilliant. That was such a guided approach. And it was those little small things as opposed to the actual qualification. I remember [a lecturer] saying that 'most teachers are as boring as hell'. When I hear feedback going 'you can't fall asleep in her classroom, she is always telling you stories'. I say 'Great, that means I am doing an ok job.*

#### **1.4 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Gumption'.**

We learn from Nicole's experience that courage and conviction can overwhelm fear. She admits to being petrified at the prospect of studying abroad but she had no doubts that it was the right decision for her. She remembers her teacher there warning student teachers about how boring teachers can be and how we need to create interest for students as a hook to learning. Her backstory highlighted the importance of stories in her own family upbringing and she uses story today as a strong pedagogical tool in her teaching of domestic science. She stresses the enlightened approaches to pedagogical practice she experienced as a student in her domestic science teacher training in England. She remarks on how student centered an experience it was. Students were in full possession of all the facts about their work throughout. Guidance and engagement with teachers was central to the approach. This very positive experience of good guidance and the invitation to engage with teachers met Nicole's needs as a student teacher. Consequently we will learn, as Nicole continues to narrate her own story, that she places engagement with her students, in order to understand and satisfy their learning needs, at the heart of her pedagogy. The reflective approach to appraising her own practice, learned during her teacher training in England, is embedded in her constant reviewing of her own performance as a teacher today. Reflective practice resonates throughout her unfolding narratives and my understanding of Nicole, in the light of our engagement together, is as a deeply reflective practitioner.

#### **2. Meg's passionate interests and pathway to teaching**

Remember Meg. We first met her in the Prologue. Her childhood education, through a loving mother, saw her immersed in the Arts. She definitely didn't plan to be a teacher. This is how she describes her interests when she left college and they were firmly focused on theatre.

## **2.1 Narrative fragment: From the Pig's Back to Passion Machine.**

***Meg:** I went to college not knowing what I wanted to do and I left college passionate about theatre. ...One person who had a profound effect on me was Fred Walsh. Fred taught in Dublin in a DEIS school and he worked with James Browne and Jim Kelly and set up a company called Humpty Dumpty Theatre Company...We set up a company, from college, called No Frills, we were a middle class company doing plays that appealed to us. Then I started working with Fred. Fred was bringing audiences to theatre that had never gone to theatre, from the North Inner City...I realised there were really exciting things going on here. Fred was bringing people to theatre that I didn't know. I would hear this heavy Dublin accent, from hundreds coming into the theatre night after night, and it was a whole world that I didn't know anything about. I was living, I had moved into Sunshine Square. I grew up in a very privileged environment, very middle class, had everything I wanted in terms of material stuff and beautiful loving parents. And it was just seeing this world that I had never seen before, full on, because I was working with Humpty Dumpty. I was living in Sunshine Square and kids used to knock on my door and I used to just banter with the kids on the road and something about the children just spoke to me.*

## **2.2 Tracing the narrative threads of Pig's Back to Passion Machine.**

In the narrative fragment shared by Meg, above, we begin to understand how her passion for the arts set her on a pathway to the North inner city and opened up new landscapes for her learning and her life. Meg identifies as significant mentors, Fred Walsh, and others. These mentors were innovators, educators and creative artists. All were teaching in a second level DEIS school in Dublin. She recognised that both the work they were doing and the audiences they were drawing to theatre, was transformative. Meg already understood the power of theatre for herself. It was her after all her passion. As she worked with Humpty Dumpty she saw the power of theatre working on others, people from the North inner city. She reflects on the experience as deeply exciting, and thoroughly unfamiliar

Meanwhile she had relocated to the inner city and was captivated by the interaction with the local children. They captivated her. Her beautiful phrase 'something about the children spoke to me' captures her identification and empathy then, as now, for young people in the north inner city. Meg's engagement with the possibilities of Humpty Dumpty Theater's vision and mission set her on a path to creatively explore

the full potential of the arts to be inclusive and to educate. The exploration of the full potential of the creative possibilities of the arts to educate and provide a means by which young people in the north inner city can articulate their voices, is her signature as a teacher. What motivates and matters to Meg can be best understood by recognising two significant elements in the narrative fragment identified above: firstly, the strength of her passion for the Arts and her vision and mission to use it as a tool to educate; secondly the strength of her commitment to hearing and honouring children's voices in the North inner city. Her pedagogical tool is the Arts. Her vision and mission is to support young people to articulate their voices and have their concerns heard, and met.

### **2.3 Narrative fragment: Will you try and stay at least for the week?**

**Meg:** *Then I saw an ad for a part-time job as a Religion teacher. So I went down...and this lovely man...the principal, interviewed me and he said 'will you try and stay at least for the week'? And I thought this was very strange. And I said 'yah', and he said, 'no, really now, just try and work it out for the week at least, to get a real sense of us'. So I went into my first class, and I carried the cover of a photocopy paper box and inside I had coloured pencils and I had pages...So, I went into my first class, and I didn't understand, I hardly understood a word the children said. They were tough ...street kids, and I was a poshie, and they were running amuck in the class. I asked them to be quiet and they wouldn't be quiet. They just wouldn't stop talking. So something around self-survival kicked in and I remember something snapping in my heart and I said 'if you don't stop I am going to do something that will make you stop'. And they didn't stop. And I flung the box... and the box hit this child, no sorry, what was in the box hit this child, who stood up, his name was Jimmy, and there was a scissors in the box and it hit him on the nose. And straight away, I thought, I thought I have knocked his eye out... and there was complete silence in the class. And nobody knew what to do or say, including myself. So I decided I had to pick up what I had thrown and I apologised, picked everything up and the bell went. And they all left. And I walked into the principal's office and I burst into tears, and I said "I am leaving". And I understood now why he had asked me to stay for a week. And he said 'No, no, no, just look try and make it to the end of the day'. He said 'go on up to your next class and I will go and see if Jimmy is ok'.*

*So I went up to my next class with the box. I had taken the scissors out [laugh]], and I walked into the room and they were running amuck. I strode into the class, tripped over a chalk, and fell on top of a child. I distinctly remember looking up and seeing them all in shock. And this guy came into the staffroom later...you met him last year Mary, and he said 'who is the one the kids are calling battle axe and flying colours and she will sit on you if you mess with her'? And I said 'I think that's me'. And I thought 'I will be gone out of here before the week's out'.*

## **2.4 Tracing the narrative threads of: 'Battle axe with the flying colours'**

While the voices of the children drew Meg to apply to teach in the inner city, nothing had prepared her for the reality of the classroom. Her first day was humbling, frightening, unfamiliar, out of control, and deeply challenging. Her memoirs trigger my own recollections of early days as a primary teacher in a DEIS school. I remember a child throwing a jam jar, grabbed in anger from the nature table, and smashing it off the classroom wall. I remember the panic of not knowing how to persuade him to stop. The gulf between the theory of classroom management, and the reality of being there and unable to manage challenging behaviour, seemed impassable to me at times. I understand the panic for a young teacher when children are 'running amuck'. I was that teacher too. It is a humbling, frightening, unfamiliar, out of control and deeply challenging experience.

Meg stresses that despite her baptism of fire on her first day teaching, the principal held faith with her from the start. We will hear more from Meg later about how important that support, from even one member of Senior Management, has been for her throughout her teaching life. The significance for teachers of support from principals, and others in Senior Management, resonates through the narratives of the participating teachers and has helped develop their self-belief. Despite her assumption that she wouldn't last the week, she went on to teach in this school for a number of years until she moved on to another school. As researcher I was disarmed by Meg's honesty in disclosing this very difficult start to her teaching career in our first session together. Her honesty and courage to acknowledge when she gets it wrong and her commitment to learn from her mistakes is a signature of her integrity as a teacher. I wondered whether, if I were the teacher/narrator, would I have the courage to share the less heroic moments in my own narratives of self and school.

## **3 Hannah's passionate interests and pathway to teaching.**

Hannah appears again in the research story. This is the girl with the lovely long fingers who we first met in the Prologue. Like Rachel, she took a circuitous path to primary teaching but had years of teaching violin and other teaching experience behind her when she finally did so. She also brought life experience and travel with her to the primary teaching role, coming to it later as she did.

### **3.1 Narrative fragment: Giving it a go, teaching fiddle**

**Mary:** Can I ask you, I am just listening...and then I am thinking about you having said you taught before you taught in Ireland? I am wondering what is

that background? What attracted you to it? How did you land there? Has it echoes in who you have become as a teacher?

**Hannah:** *Maybe, some of it. Like I started when I was maybe seventeen or something, still in secondary school, teaching. Somebody came and asked would [I] teach this girl down the road the fiddle. I said 'yeah, sure, why not, sure I will give it a go'. It was a couple of quid in your pocket when you are seventeen. So I started doing that on a Saturday...After two or three years of it I had nine to four, all half hour blocks on a Saturday. I taught every half hour. That was all trad (traditional ) music. And I would have taught groups of children under twelve, under fifteen, you know 'grúpa ceol' (music group). We would have gone in for 'fleadhs' (festivals) and all that kind of stuff. Then I was teaching for the local 'Comhaltas'<sup>1</sup> branch as well, that I would have been brought up in. So I was teaching there on Thursdays. So that was my income in college. I was teaching Mondays, teaching Thursdays, teaching Fridays and teaching all day at home on Saturdays. But, anyway, that was the only teaching I did then.*

This reflection, on her early experiences of teaching music, triggers memories of even earlier experiences of taking on the teaching role.

### **3.2 Narrative Fragment: Breaking it down for her.**

**Hannah:** *Although, just to go back a little bit, I remember in Chemistry, I just remember this. My mother often brings it up, so that's why I remember it. I remember...Leaving Cert [Certificate] Chemistry. I remember sitting at the back and I would have been very good at Chemistry. I just got it, you know. I just got those electrons and whatever. I am not very good at teaching Science but I get it. I just get it. I liked it and that's why I did a Science degree. I remember sitting down the back and spending all my time with the other nerdy ones. I probably was a bit nerdy. The other nerdy ones would have been nerdy and learning it. But I used to sit in the back row ...with another girl, just another girl in the class, who didn't really get it. Every time the teacher explained it, I would break it down for her. That's what I did.*

**Mary:** So you were already teaching away.

### **3.3 Narrative Fragment : Hannah and her sisters.**

**Hannah:** *Yeah, and I am the oldest, I have three younger sisters. I suppose I grew up, maybe without knowing it, I grew up teaching. Like, I was trying to be mammy at home. I don't ever remember playing teachers mind you but maybe it was in my personality. Anyway that Chemistry story sticks out and I went on and did this fiddle teaching.*

### **3.4 Narrative Fragment: Teaching English in Korea**

**Hannah:** *And then after my degree [Science], I had no idea what to do, so I went off to Korea. Somebody mentioned you could go to Korea and teach English with just a degree and no other qualifications. So I went off. I hadn't a clue what I was doing. I think that was part of it as well because I didn't know what to do. You*

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<sup>1</sup> Comhaltas is an Irish based organization which promotes and preserves Irish Traditional Music.

*know over there, you have no idea, you are just landed in a room and because you are white you must be able to teach English. No, I can speak it but I can't teach it...I used to get on with the little kids the best, with the kindergarten ones, because you could have fun with them. You would teach them the basics, but when it got to conversation classes with teenagers I had no idea what to do. I think, I thought at the time, 'maybe I could be good at this, if I had the training, or whatever, in it'? ...I came back and I wasn't sure what to do. I do think I sort of fell into it [primary teaching] a little bit.*

**Mary:** And how did you get into primary teaching specifically then?

**Hannah:** *I think when I came back from Korea, so I am twenty seven or twenty six, I don't know...Yes, when I came back in November I subbed [substituted] in schools, in primary schools...I just went around with a CV. I went around to principals... I met a couple of them. I had a couple of schools who called me in. So I subbed until the following June...Then I was like 'well if I was teaching', which I knew already I had the ability to do, I had been doing it for long enough, it was something I could have managed. I was like 'well if I was teaching, I could also work with the environment because I would be teaching kids to change the environment'. I think that was where I came in with the Science, stuff.*

### **3.5 Tracing the narrative threads of Hannah's story fragments.**

As Hannah's narrative unfolds it reveals layers of teaching trials before she finally embarked on her present career as a primary teacher. She begins reflecting on teaching fiddle to children and teenagers in her locality. This prompts her recollection of translating Chemistry for her schoolmate. This in turn sparks a reflection that 'I grew up teaching, without knowing it', a role she took up naturally in relating to her three younger sisters. Hannah takes to teaching English as a foreign language in Korea after qualifying with her Science degree. However she recollects the ease and pleasure she felt working with the younger children there, in particular, and thinking 'maybe I could be good at this if I had the training'. That is eventually what she sought, after trying primary teaching out for size by filling the role of a substitute primary teacher for some months after returning to Ireland. She then applied to College to qualify to teach at primary level. Hannah's narrative reveals a rich textured tapestry of trial runs at teaching in various contexts, formal and informal, before she chooses to develop her current career as a primary teacher.

### **4. Caitriona's passionate interests and pathway to teaching**

We have encountered Caitriona previously in the Prologue. She is the eldest of nine children. She is the girl with the seven brothers and a mother with a heart of gold. Though Caitriona always wanted to be a primary teacher, and did train as a teacher

after finishing secondary school, it was many years later before she applied her craft in a school classroom. She reflects on her pathway into teaching in the extract below.

#### **4.1 Narrative fragment: Baseline**

**Caitriona:** *I was very, very lucky. I stayed at home with my children until my daughter went to preschool. I was very privileged to have that opportunity. We lived out foreign and came back. I only actually started teaching about 13 years ago...*

*But when I came in teaching here, it would have been my first teaching post. I had been gone out of College about ten years. I was terrified that anything I'd ever learned, in Mary I, was now irrelevant. I hadn't remembered any of it. The biggest experience I was bringing with me was that as a mother. I used that as my base from the moment I came in the door. I ended up with a fifth and sixth class mix. A very, very, challenging class. Three new teachers started here that year and we got the three tough classes that year. It was fine. It was a huge learning curve for me. But, it was very, very, challenging. I felt I could not refer back to my training. The new curriculum had been brought in and implemented at the time. All I knew was that I had thirty-two beautiful, challenging, girls in front of me and I had no idea where to start. So I spent that whole year winging it. My eldest son happened to be the same age as those children. It got to the stage where it was actually a mantra inside the classroom 'well if my fellow wouldn't get away with that, you're not getting away with it'. And the girls used to see the look coming into my face and they would say to me 'yes Miss, if he won't get away with it, we won't get away with it'. That was my baseline, because I had to find a baseline, but because they were very challenging, I had to work very, very, hard.*

#### **4.2 Tracing the narrative threads of 'Baseline'.**

In the prologue we learned that Caitriona always wanted to be a teacher. She reflected that her home life and her upbringing with seven brothers was later a useful toolkit to bring to the primary school classroom. Here we learn that though primary teacher training came early, taking up a post as a teacher came much later for her, ten years later in fact. Caitriona relied on her reservoir of experiences as a mother in her very first very challenging year of teaching. She is very honest about the degree of challenge teaching posed for her in that first year and stresses that she had to work extremely hard to manage. As luck would have it the fact that her eldest child was the same age as her students allowed her to bench mark them against what she knew and expected of her own ten year old. We will later hear more from Caitriona about the impact of motherhood on her, including on who she is as a teacher. This theme of motherhood as shaping the teacher/narrators emerges as a very significant theme, reflected strongly in the narratives of four of the five mother/teacher/narrators participating in the research.



