

**CARE AND PERFORMATIVITY: WALKING THE
TIGHTROPE**

**A CASE STUDY IN AN EDUCATIONALLY
DISADVANTAGED SETTING**

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Abstract

Our experiences of care significantly influence the quality of our lives. Despite its importance, the current and dominant discourses within society have ensured that care continues to be invisible and misrecognised. This has implications for both carers and the cared for in the public and private arenas. In the current educational context, care has a particular importance in a climate of performativity and managerialism.

This thesis examines the role of care among eighteen teachers and principals in twelve educationally disadvantaged schools, seven primary and five at second level. It traces the development of the ethic of care as a moral, political and relational framework. Drawing on feminist and sociological scholarship, it attempts to highlight and identify the significance of the normally hidden and unacknowledged aspects of care. This work considers public policy in relation to Irish education and educational disadvantage. Drawing on a sample of both primary and second-level educators, the analysis outlines the background in which the particular teacher narratives are situated and highlights the complex and intricate frameworks of care that are part of the daily lives of teachers.

A key conclusion of this research is that care practices are central to the daily lives of teachers. Despite the very obvious differences between the primary and second-level systems, there is a strong and definite commitment to care despite care being unacknowledged within the educational system. It is evident from the narratives that significant emotional labour is involved in maintaining those relationships in which care practices are manifest.

In presenting a clear picture of the daily care practices of the teacher, the research also suggests that care is an authentic identity for teachers and moreover, a site of resistance to the discourses of performativity, school effectiveness, managerialism and rationality of the marketplace in the educational field.

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Introduction

We live in a time of great social change which has transformed the way in which we participate in the world of family, work and community. Despite unprecedented levels of material wealth, society is increasingly focused on the commodification of traditional public goods, the dominance of consumer choice and economic efficiencies in public services. Globalisation, while offering unlimited possibilities for communication and technical expertise, has placed new and ever increasing demands on schools as they struggle in the quest for higher standards and achievement. In the search for standards and targets, the creative and the personal aspects of education have been somewhat marginalised, and inequalities that exist in the system are further accentuated. Such change is underpinned by the principles of justice with its emphasis on the individual as a rational and independent being.

Our inherent need for care remains unaltered. As relational beings we are defined in community with others. Exploring such relations, Held (2006, p.101) contends:

We see how the material and social realities of any individual's life are fundamentally tied to those of others and how the social relations in which persons are enmeshed, are importantly constitutive of their 'personhood.'

Our need for care is life-long and does not end with childhood. We may be more dependent on others for specific care support at different times in our lifespan and as care givers we have different capacities, at different life stages, to meet the care needs in our family and social circles. What remains

constant, however, is our dependent essence. As Baker *et al.* (2004) indicate the need for connectivity and dialogue is central to human flourishing.

Care of the self, care for others and care for the world around us are aims which modern education may need to revisit. The supremacy of a rational, intellectual form of learning has dominated education since the time of Aristotle, has marginalised creative and intuitive education and has excluded many from academic success. As Noddings (1984) passionately argues, trying to reduce all teaching and learning to one prescribed method is part of an overall pattern in science, epistemology and ethics. Trying to condense teaching and learning to one irreducible method is also to deny the inter-personal nature of teaching. Care, in an educational context, is a way of reclaiming that unique interaction between student and teacher.

The aim of this research is to identify and authenticate the care practices of teachers in schools disadvantaged by social conditions. Attempting to define what care means and how it is constructed is not a straightforward task. The complexity of the task requires an inter-disciplinary approach, drawing on a varied literature from sociology, psychology, philosophy and educational and egalitarian theory. This research utilises teacher narratives to uncover the intricacies of care and to highlight their significance.

Chapter One outlines the philosophical framework of this thesis. It traces the historical development of both the ethic of justice and the ethic of care and explores the liberal principles which underpin much of the institutional structures of society. Feminist scholarship has been to the forefront in drawing attention to the affective domains of life and exposing the power

relations involved. The norm of individuality, which governs much of modern schooling, is examined. This chapter also outlines the moral attributes of care and how those attributes might be embodied in the practice of care in schools.

Emotions and the emotional labour in teaching have largely been ignored by educational research, and the main focus has traditionally been on the cognitive aspects of practice. In Chapter Two, the thesis explores the emotional nature of educational practices and reviews the recent and emerging literature on teaching and the emotions. It examines the concept of a professional teacher identity, a complex and intricate subject. This chapter considers that literature on identity and highlights the tension that exists between the caring and performative aspects of teaching, and how teachers incorporate that tension into their own professional identity.

In free market democracies, the drive to make schools more effective and the need to increase the performances of their pupils is a central theme in Chapter Three. The policy framework for educational provision is outlined both in the global and national contexts. Policy implementation is a complex process, and outcomes are sometimes at odds with original objectives. The implication of those contested outcomes is outlined briefly. A significant number of the Irish school population is described as being in educationally disadvantaged schools. It is important to try and understand how the concept of disadvantage is constructed and what the implications of that construct are for those students whose communities are socially excluded.

This thesis is a small-scale piece of in-depth research designed around a case study of eighteen teachers and principals in twelve educationally disadvantaged schools, seven at primary level and five at second level. A case study is an appropriate methodology for a topic which attempts to explore aspects of the human condition. It is also compatible with a feminist approach to research which has problematised issues of knowledge, power and reflexivity in the more traditional research methodologies. Chapter Four describes the steps taken to design and construct this research and explores the rationale for those decisions. It describes the sample and how it was selected. Teacher narratives are explored through the use of semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the data is outlined, and ethical issues are raised and considered.

Chapters Five and Six explore the responses from the participants and build a complex picture of care within the schools that the interviewees work in. Chapter Five describes the daily classroom and school actions and activities that constitute care as a practice. The purpose of this is to build a description of care practices in these educational settings. Chapter Six illustrates, through the teachers' responses, the dimensions of care that constitute it as a moral activity and perspective. It discusses the framework of values within the schools and how individual teacher identity is negotiated in the tension between the value systems of school and community.

The final chapter draws conclusions through the identification of three main care themes that have emerged in the data. These are the significance of care

in schools, the tension between various aspects of professional teacher identities, and care issues for policy

These three themes are discussed in relation to the interview responses and the theoretical framework that has been considered in the earlier part of the thesis. Valuing students only for their academic achievements or just in terms of potential economic resources has far reaching consequences for society (Noddings, 1984). The care practices of teachers go some way to returning an authentic value to individual pupils. Care is also a way of helping socially excluded students make sense of the way in which the complex world of education must be traversed and negotiated.

Chapter 1: The Moral Frameworks of Care and Justice

Introduction

Ethics may be defined as a framework for contemplating moral values and moral principles. How morality works and the sources of moral hypotheses have been central to philosophical investigation; however, there is no absolute or authoritative definition of ethics. The terms morality and ethics are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this thesis and the discussion in this chapter, it is useful to adopt a definition employed by Sevenhuijsen (1998, p.37) who describes ethics as, “the systematic and critical reflection on human action in the light of good and bad, right and wrong.” This definition is useful because, as the discussion proceeds, the notion of moral reflection as a social practice and as a fundamental aspect of the practice of care will be considered.

In the post-modern world there are debates, often heated, about the relevance of *meta theories* or universal principles. The debates in ethics are no different and are particularly relevant to the focus of this chapter. The historical perspective on the development of both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice is equally important for the theoretical framework of this research. Indeed, the focus on the inadequacies of a universal moral obligation with its emphasis on abstract individuals is at the core of the ethic of care as it defines relationships, moral values and political perspectives.

An ethic of care has been traditionally sidelined as dominant epistemologies have consistently and historically consigned those kinds of experiences to the private world including mothering, home and family life. Rationality,

individual autonomy and the principles of justice have dominated philosophical scholarship, defined moral norms and particularly influenced the social and political organisation of society. Consequently, the ethic of care has often been defined in relation to a rational context and presented as what it is not, rather than for what it contributes to moral understanding and development.

An overview of the literature on this topic shows that much of the focus is on the dichotomy between the *ethic of justice* and the *ethic of care*. It is important to compare and contrast both ethical standpoints in order to understand their particular historical and political contexts. Rather than dwell on the particular merits of each ethic, the approaches will be examined to extend the understanding of their significance for the educational context.

This chapter examines the ethic of justice and the ethic of care, focusing in particular on the implications for care practices in an educationally disadvantaged setting. It sketches briefly the development of both the ethic of justice and the ethic of care. It also explores the implications of the supremacy of liberal principles, especially in relation to educational disadvantage. Individuality and the primacy of reason dominate and shape the ethics of the teaching profession.

Writers such as MacIntyre (1984), Rawls (1971), Sandel (1992) and Taylor (1991, 2004), have all written comprehensively about individualism, rights and responsibilities, and the issue of justice. Feminist authors such as Held (2006), Kittay and Feder (2002), Nussbaum (1995), Okin (1989)

Sevenhuijusen (1998) and Tronto (1993), have also produced a body of scholarship on these themes but have argued consistently that none of this research deals adequately with the issue of gender, the concept of family, or how women experience the so-called public and the private sphere differently from men. In attempting to articulate an alternative understanding of the human condition, care is understood as a moral and political ethic. It is also presented as a framework for both moral and political theory.

This chapter is in three parts. The first part traces the historical development of the ethic of justice as a moral code, and examines how such a universal ethic has underpinned many of the social and political institutions of modern society. The second section explores care as a moral framework, and the final part examines care in the context of education and educational disadvantage.

The Ethic of Justice, Individualism and Moral Development

From the time of Plato and Aristotle, the concept of justice, both as a virtue, a moral foundation and as a basis for the organisation of community life, has absorbed the interest of philosophers and social commentators. Plato and Aristotle differed somewhat in their approach to justice as a virtue. While both were concerned with the concept of *eudaimonia* or human well-being, Plato favoured a more public setting for the development of his principles where the good of community or state would take precedence over the individual. Aristotle, on the other hand, focussed more on themes that are of individual interest such as friendship, good fortune, intellectual life and social interaction, and the individual virtues of both objects and people (Noddings, 1995).

In the concept of virtue ethics, every activity has a final cause, the good at which it aims. So the good for human beings is the achievement of virtue and the contented person is the one who achieves a balance between reason and desire. Because Aristotle understood ethics to be a practice rather than an abstract theory, a good deal of consideration was given to moral responsibility. This idea of responsibility is central in an ethic of care, as will be outlined later in this chapter. Of course virtue ethics is not without criticism. The danger of elitism is very strong as different practices demand different virtues and some people have opportunities in society to develop excellences that are highly prized while others do not (MacIntyre, 1984).

Despite their different approaches, both Aristotle and Plato were firmly rationalist when it came to dealing with human knowledge and moral reasoning. Such was their influence that, even to the present day, the primacy of reason has dominated the thinking on justice. In general, any association with impulse, emotions or desires is dismissed as inferior or at least unworthy of serious consideration. The modern foundation of the ethic of justice is essentially framed by Kant's theoretical outlook which required moral principles to be universal, impartial and rigidly separated from personal interest. The individual is responsible for his or her own choice, and this choice is a moral one if it is derived from the principles of duty. Thus, neutrality, impartiality, rationality and the principle of abstraction are employed to help identify the criteria by which one arrives at a morally just decision.

Like Kant, Descartes and the Greek philosophers before them, Rawls (1971) did not believe that there was any room for sentiment with regard to the ethic of justice. While Kant was associated with the concept of the human as a single autonomous moral individual, Rawls was concerned with how those individuals form a just, social arrangement. In his classic treatise, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls explores how social institutions can be developed without creating unfair advantages for some at the expense of the less privileged. In this work he has clearly been influenced by Kantian doctrine whereby the moral position must first be defined before any notions of good or evil are made explicit.

There are two principles involved for Rawls. Firstly, everyone has the right to the greatest equal liberty and, secondly, social or economic inequalities should work for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. The first principle takes precedent over the second, leading to the priority of right over good. Such a theory views justice as the most important basis on which the adequacy of any social or political structures can be assessed. It relies on abstract universal rules and assumes the norm of an individual that is both autonomous and independent. As Sevenhuijsen (1998, p.40) points out, "Since Kant, universalism in ethics has been conceived of as a totality of rules, norms and principles which are equally applicable to everyone, and which in principle should also be recognisable and acceptable to every rational thinking person".

The difficulty with such a universalistic ethic is that the notion of sameness, in equality terms, automatically confers a negative value to the notion of

difference. Such a politics of sameness offers equal access and equal opportunity but ignores the difference in starting points (Young, 1990). Consequently those who suffer inequalities of power and wealth have different life prospects as in the case of those who experience educational disadvantage. Misrecognition of diversity and not valuing difference consigns individuals and groups to the margins. As Young (1990, p.157) points out:

The politics of difference rejects as oppressive 'an ideal of Justice' that defines liberation as the transcendence of group difference.

The resulting issue of 'otherness' implies that some individuals or groups are central to structures of power and privilege while others are positioned outside. Thus difference can only be accommodated as 'other' or as outside the moral domain. The predicament of the marginalised is always delineated from the perspective of the powerful. In doing so the excluded are presented in negative terms, where even the term disadvantaged uses the negative prefix "dis". This is especially true in relation to groups designated as educationally disadvantaged where their achievements or performances are viewed as not reaching the norm of the dominant classes¹.

Policy interventions to remediate the situation, although targeted at specific groups, are still somehow supported by the principle of equal treatment. The

¹ There is a marked silence in policy in relation to class analysis and educational disadvantage in Ireland. The reality is that those who experience educational disadvantage are almost exclusively working class, both economically and culturally, and are consistently kept on the margins by the educational system which operates to reproduce middle class identities and values.

expectation that equal treatment will lead to equal outcomes is further underpinned by the notion that freedom can only be achieved by eliminating inequalities and differences, as Tronto (1993, p. 90) argues:

Those who are less well off also learn that, since they are excluded from all important decisions, they need to cope with the powerful by coming to understand themselves in the terms that the powerful use. In this way, the fact that the powerful can understand their world as normatively superior, functions to maintain their positions of power.

While Rawls (1971) did acknowledge the importance of freedom and an accommodation of justice in a wider theory of rights, his adoption of justice as the primary virtue of all social institutions and his use of primary goods has been challenged by many scholars, most notably, Kittay and Feder (2002), Nussbaum (1995) and Sen (1980,1995). In particular, Sen's *capability theory* has argued that primary goods cannot adequately account for people's ability to convert those goods into what they are able to do with their lives. Sen (1980, p 215) argues that the focus should be on the person's ability to pursue their life plan and on those factors that uniquely affect that ability.

If people were basically very similar, then an index of primary goods might be a good way of judging advantage. But, in fact, people seem to have very different needs varying with health, longevity, climatic conditions, location, work conditions, temperament and even body size.

Sen's (1980) reluctance to specify the necessary primary goods has been questioned by Baker *et al.* (2004) who argue very strongly that primary goods must be clearly identified.

Kittay and Feder (2002) critique the notion of justice as fairness from the point of view of care and dependency arguing that viewing everyone as a free and independent agent in society is not valid in the case of those who are physically or mentally disabled, or indeed for those members of society who care for such people.

The Norm of Individuality

The principle of individuality is one of the pillars on which the ethic of justice rests. Sandel (1992) refutes the claim that justice is a primary virtue both in the moral and the epistemological sense. The moral aspect of Rawls (1971) theory centres on the fact that the right is prior to the good, and individual rights are not to be set aside for the general good. Consequently, principles of justice can be established independent of any particular notion of good. Sandel (1992) and Taylor (1991) reject the fact that the individual can be seen as a free and rational human being but concede that the ethic of the 'unencumbered self' has a good deal of appeal in that it allows the individual to be the ultimate moral authority. Nevertheless, Sandel (1992 p.23) holds that the moral development of the individual is crucial to the well being of the community.

To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments ... is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth.

He believes that the individual does not have a choice in being defined as part of a community with its values, practices and culture. In a moral, social and political sense, it is the community that constitutes the person. A

person's aims and values must be considered when trying to understand individual identity. He argues strongly that the liberal vision is not morally sustainable because it rejects the primacy of community.

There can be little argument with the view that our human spirit is relational in nature. Taylor (1991) contends that it is the caring for the 'other' in society that forms us as moral beings. He argues that human living is dialogical and that our understandings of the good things in life are developed by our shared sense of these events with the people we love. Of course this shared sense of understanding has other implications, particularly with regard to class and culture and will be dealt with later with reference to the work of Bourdieu and the concept of *habitus*.

Taylor's (1991) theory is developed around the key concept of 'authenticity'. He argues that in developing our individual potential as human beings we have the best chance of realising our fullest potential as humans. This is presented as a unique reflective process by which we define our lives. It is important to assess where our lives are going, as an individual's sense of the good is woven into this reflection. He also argues strongly that freedom and individual diversity can only flourish in a society where there is general recognition of their worth. The moral ideal is calculated, not on consequences, but on inherent feelings. It is based, not on what we desire, but on what we *ought* to desire. This argument follows Rousseau's belief that morality is the internal voice of humanity, and individuals are truly free when they decide for themselves. Implicit in Taylor's view is the idea that this kind of reflection is carried out in a communal setting or in a relational context.

Moral Development and the Ethic of Care

While Rawls (1971) may be considered as one of the most important proponents of the model of distributive justice and rational choice, he also contends that moral advancement proceeds very definitely along a developmental scale. In this respect, he is similar to Piaget; however, it is Kohlberg's (1981) cognitive theory of moral development and Gilligan's (1982) response to his findings that has shaped much of the current debate on both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice.

Kohlberg (1981) devised a hierarchical classification of moral reasoning which contained six specific stages. Each of the stages is characterised by the fact that they are:

- cognitive
- dependent on intellectual reasoning
- sequential

Each stage is clearly laid out but the focus of this thesis is on the sixth and final stages. These involved a concern for justice and human rights based on universal principles. Thus, those whose moral thinking involved universal values of justice and rights could be considered to be more cognitively and morally advanced than those whose moral values centred on the importance of human relationships and well-being.

Tronto (1993, p.76) makes an interesting point about the wide acceptance of Kohlberg's (1981) findings. She claims that his work was inherently elitist because the hierarchical system is heavily dependent on the ability to speak

and reason abstractedly (a feature of middle class liberal education). This implies that some traditional groups or societies would never be able to pass beyond the conventional stages.

I suggest that the reason Kohlberg's theory is so widely accepted in the academy has little to do with its truth value and much more to do with its power consequences. Kohlberg's theory yields the result that some of the most educated are the most moral.

The most significant critique of Kohlberg's (1981) thesis came from Gilligan (1982) who was disturbed by the fact that Kohlberg's sample for his longitudinal study was exclusively male, and that early findings seemed to suggest that boys were more adept at moral reasoning than girls. Her critique was based both on methodological and substantive grounds. The most obvious methodological flaw was centred on the fact the sample was exclusively male and the conclusions were drawn about moral reasoning in general.

Although Gilligan (1982) did accept the conception of cognitive development and the idea of hierarchical stages of development, it is on the substantive content of the research that Gilligan makes her most important comments. For her, no system of morality is complete if it only based on the ethic of justice. Women experience a different inner moral voice which lays emphasis on nurturing and relationships. Gilligan (1982, p.100) also asserts that not only is it impossible to live in an atomised (non-relational and individualistic) world, but also to do so is detrimental to the development of the person. Care fundamentally centres on actions that are motivated by a connection to others. For her, the integration of rights and responsibilities

takes place within the 'logic of relationships'. She suggests that morality must move beyond issues of justice and be situated in a dynamic between the self and other. She outlines six elements that make up the ethic of care.

- Acquaintance
- Mindfulness
- Moral imagining
- Solidarity
- Tolerance
- Self-care

As both Tronto (1993) and Sevenhuijsen (1998) point out, there are essentially three differences which distinguish Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care from Kohlberg's ethic of justice. Firstly, the ethic of care revolves around a different set of moral concepts (i.e. responsibilities and relationships rather than principles and rights). Secondly, these responsibilities and relationships are set in specific situations rather than being formal and abstract. Lastly, the ethic of care is laid out as a moral activity rather than a set of abstract principles to be followed. Of course there have been many challenges to Gilligan's (1982) thesis, not only from Kohlberg himself but also from Rawls (1995) and Habermas (1984, 1987) who essentially are re-iterating the notion that the alternative moral voice of care is too narrow, not universal and is more readily identified with the private sphere.

It is important to note that some feminist scholarship is doubtful about the effectiveness of a specific feminine morality. Tronto (1993) critiques the

notion of an exclusive female ethic of care and argues that a feminine morality is not a particularly useful concept since philosophers and thinkers, especially in the western world, have traditionally ignored the questions that have informed women's lives. She argues that all moral theories must be contextualised and contends that the political context, in particular, must be taken seriously as political power is what establishes validity. Tronto (1993) presents a framework of three distinct moral boundaries. The boundaries are:

- The boundary between morality and politics
- The moral point of view boundary
- The boundary between public and private

The boundary between morality and politics can be understood from two separate standpoints. Where political values are dominant, moral values are introduced only as required. This scenario is most often present in totalitarian regimes. Where moral values come first, as in traditional liberal western societies, political life is organised so it conforms to those values. So, for example, the tolerance of economic inequality or non-critical acceptance of the concept of equal opportunity, are issues that do not trouble the political establishment when neo-liberal values underpin the institutions of the state.

The moral point of view boundary has its origins in Kantian philosophy and contends that all moral decisions are based on reason by disinterested, independent actors. As such moral stances are therefore above feelings and emotions, universal in character and unaffected by local conditions. However, as the literature on care in the educational context shows teaching is an affective activity and deeply bound up with the emotions despite the

fact that technical aspects of teaching are often to the fore. Dunne (2005, p.373) refers to this dominance of instrumental reason which he terms 'technical rationality'. He contends that technical rationality:

.... puts a premium on 'objectivity' and detachment, suppressing the context dependence of first person experience in favour of a third person perspective which yields generalised findings in accordance with clearly formulated, publicly agreed procedures.

While the dominance of technical forms of knowledge has been most successful in its control over matter, there is a strong indication that it is also attempting to regulate human relations and human action. So any practice, such as care practices in schools, which does not rationalise itself according to the principles of instrumental reason is likely to be regarded as an inferior form of knowledge and under pressure to adopt norms of rationality. This can be clearly seen in the next chapter where emotions and emotional values are very often consigned to the private and non-professional sphere and have little status in the public world.

The boundary between public and private is familiar territory for feminist theory and allows issues such as care to be excluded from the more valued public arena. As Sevenhuijsen (1998) argues, judgements in the public arena are normally valued as more rational and impartial with the implication of having overcome the individual point of view. The attributes of care such as compassion, responsiveness and empathy are assigned to the more private sphere of interpersonal relationships. This may have implications for the educational context as the lines between school as a public institution and the home as the private sphere can often be blurred, especially for those whose

close and significant relationships may not offer the sense of belonging that all individuals need. Care practices then, are reassigned into the public world and to the professional duties of teachers.

There is no formal recognition of this reassignment and as the research will show, it is carried out on a daily basis by teachers. What also must be considered is the fact that teachers in those schools may be disconnected from the communities they work in or they may not understand the moral significance of such a boundary. As Nias (1999, p.69) states:

In particular, school may be the only place in which some children experience a sense of being cared for and valued in a consistent and predictable fashion, by adults who do not habitually put their own interests first.

Emotions

While the dominant moral position focuses on the dichotomy between the egotistical self and moral principles, the ethic of care is not concerned with individual interests *per se*, but with how those personal interests interconnect with the interests of the other; a fundamental refutation of the notion of individual autonomy. Held (2006, p.10) contends that what separates the ethics of care from the traditional, rationalist approach is the central importance of the emotions. Of course, not all emotions are valued or even useful in particular contexts, but some particular 'moral' emotions need to be cultivated. These are empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness.

The ethics of care ... typically appreciates the emotions and relational capabilities that enable morally concerned persons in actual interpersonal contexts to understand what would be best (ibid).

Emotions are central to care regardless of whether one is viewing care as a moral position, a virtue or a practice. Nussbaum (1995) claims that emotions have been traditionally presented, in philosophical terms, as irrational, disconnected from judgement and adequate reflection. This philosophical standpoint has helped to frame emotions in a more negative way; however, emotions such as anger, grief or love are always experienced in relation to others. This means that in experiencing an emotion it is usually in the context of another person. We are angry because of the actions of another person or persons. We suffer grief because of a sense of loss of something or someone outside ourselves.

Emotions may be considered as transformative in the motivation to achieve goals and so we are not necessarily less focussed on the rational when we experience an emotion (Goleman, 1995). Furthermore, Nussbaum (1995, p. 381) argues that emotions are contextualised by an implied dependency. Considering dependency takes us away from the public to the more private realm of individual people and so lays the foundation for the affective nature of care practices.

But in the emotions, the loves of family and close friends seem all-encompassing, blotting out the fair claims of the distant many. Thus the emotional reasoner, accustomed to cherishing particulars rather than to thinking of the whole world, reasons in a way that is subversive to justice.

Both Nussbaum (1995) and Noddings (1984) argue that emotions are simply alternative ways of perceiving and have their own beliefs and norms. Such a moral vision of emotions gives centrality and significance to the idea of vulnerability and dependence. As Kittay and Feder (2002, p.10) point out:

Whether it is our dependency on another for basic care, on interactions with others for a social identity, or on the earth for materials that make life possible, we must take account of the fact of dependency in our very conceptions of the self.

Dependency is also the central theme of MacIntyre's (1999) later work. While subscribing to the Aristotelian view of humanity as rational, he develops this notion further to claim that we are inherently dependent. A community's care for its dependents is, according to MacIntyre (1999), a measure of its moral reputation.

Dependence and independence are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, practical reason and the affective aspect of our nature are not separate. These are also key themes with regard to care practices and teacher identity; issues which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Although Nussbaum (1995) argues philosophically for a relational view of emotions, she ultimately argues for liberal norms on the idea of an ethic of care. This means that emotional relationships or attachments to others are articulated from a position of equality without coercion or obligation.

Dependency, Vulnerability and the Obligation to Care

It is no surprise then, that many feminist writers, (Noddings, 1984; Held, 1993; Tronto, 1993) reject this view and contend that one cannot always adopt a free, rational choice in our relationships with others (e.g. a child cannot choose its parents). Therefore, as Engster (2005) points out, it is important to articulate a moral obligation to care. This obligation is derived from our dependency on others. If we have a moral obligation to our family

and close friends on the basis of their inherent vulnerability, then we have a moral obligation to our fellow citizens, since they are also vulnerable. Consequently, vulnerability and dependency have a strong interconnection. As Engster (2005, p.59) clearly states, “Our basic emotional, imaginative and reasoning capabilities are not simply fully developed by childhood’s end, but continue to grow and evolve in our relations to others throughout our lives”.

In her own attempt to define an *ethic of caring*, Noddings (1984, p.104) further asserts that, “the twin sentiments; commitment and construction of the ideal, furnish a logical framework for the discussion of ethicality”. There is a very definite effort to maintain and enhance the caring attitude and this, in turn, guides our moral decision making. The emotion of sympathy or compassion involves recognition of one’s own vulnerability in such a similar scenario. The essential element of compassion in caring, frames the relationship between the ‘care-giver’ and the ‘cared-for’. An action of some sort must be present and this action is characterised by commitment and a move away from oneself. Noddings (1984, p.16) believes that in caring for living things we must consider their essence, their needs and desires. In other words, there is a necessity to understand the reality of the ‘other’.

The commitment to act on behalf of the cared for, a continued interest in his reality throughout an appropriate time span, and the continued renewal of commitment over this span of time are the essential elements of caring from the inner view (ibid).

The affective nature of care is its most important characteristic. Jaggar (1995, p.180) claims that the affective dimension of care requires one to respond to the needs of the other as “unique, irreplaceable individuals rather than as

‘generalised’ others, regarded as simply representatives of a common humanity”. The focus on the particular needs of individuals and the specificity of distinct circumstances is a positive characteristic of care. Such a focus is important in highlighting the moral complexities that exist in various social and personal interactions. There are therefore clear interpretations of individual responsibilities in given situations. Experience, status and personal values all play a part in such evaluations, and their significance will be discussed in the next chapter with regard to care practices and teacher identity. Nevertheless, as Jaggar (1995) points out, such attention to the specific can often divert attention away from the social and political structures which frame such situations.

Care theorists such as Bubeck (1995), Held (2006) Kittay and Feder (2002) Noddings (1984), and Tronto (1993) contend that an ethic of care involves an acknowledgement that care, as well as being an activity involving labour of some kind, is a relational activity that can be conceptualised as a social practice. Sevenhuijsen (1998) sounds a note of caution when she argues that care as a social practice is useful, provided that it is not exclusively confined to the areas of care and dependency, such as child-rearing or caring for the sick. For her, care is both directed at others, at the self and the physical environment as well as at the point of intersection between all of these.

Noddings (1984) believes that there is a difference between ethical caring and natural caring. For her, ethical caring requires an effort and in the Kantian view, is an activity born out of a sense of duty. While this sense of duty is not necessarily a cold clinical one, it does acknowledge a moral

position. It should also be noted that unlike Kant, Noddings (1984) believes that women's emotions are the strength of their moral positions not their weakness. The dichotomy between the public and the private is an inherently false one and designed by patriarchal systems to confine care to the realm of the home and the obligations of women. Since, schools are public institutions and important locations for some of the significant functions of the state, there is an additional fundamental tension between the public and private when discussing care in an educational context.

Care Practices and Education

Tronto (1993) defines four distinct elements of the concept of care and these are:

- Caring about, noticing the need to care in the first place
- Taking care of, assuming the responsibility for care
- Care giving, the actual work of care
- Care receiving, the response of that which is cared for.

Accompanying these elements are four ethical considerations - attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Noddings, 1984). The assumption that the object (care recipient) will respond to the care he/she receives is important is assessing whether or not needs have been met. In such a context, the moral dimension comes into play in the assessment of needs and a decision made as to how those needs can be met. The issue is complicated from a moral perspective when there are unequal power relations, such as exists between teacher and pupil. Indeed it could be said

that all moral situations are complicated by power imbalances; however, Tronto (1993, p.110) suggests:

.... caring as a concept provides us with a standard by which we can judge its adequacies. One way to begin to judge the adequacy of care is to consider how well the integrated process of caring is.

Care is both a value and a practice and Tronto (1993) claims, that considering care as a practice rather than a disposition has huge implications for the way in which care is conceptualised. According to her argument, care is marginalised, fragmented and contained by the ideology of the powerful and the privileged. By ignoring the inadequacy of care in our society, issues of the distribution of power, resources and privilege can be conveniently ignored, because care practices are undervalued, underpaid and disproportionately carried out by the less powerful. The dominant ideology of individual autonomy does not readily accommodate notions of dependency or elements of care. Privileged individuals and the class they belong to use their wealth and power to pass the obligations of caring to others (Lynch *et al*, 2009). Care is devalued in a conceptual way, as we have seen, by maintaining the connections with privacy, emotion and dependency.

Part of the devaluing of care is that it is seen as neutral and private. Hochschild (1995) asserts that most care work is so personal and so connected with feeling that it is rarely seen by individuals as work. She believes that there is a care deficit in our western world. She outlines four cultural models of care and while they are not specifically delineated in an educational context, this analysis may be easily replicated in the school environment. The four models are:

- Traditional (embodied in the ideal of homemaker and mother)
- Post-modern (related to the working mother and the dual burden of working and caring)
- Cold-modern (corresponding to institutional and paid-for care)
- Warm-modern (representing a equal participation by both men and women and backed up by institutional care)

Looking at these models in the Irish context we can see very clearly that the market demands of our economic prosperity have forced us to adopt post-modern and cold modern models readily. In such scenarios, care is either ignored as unnecessary (in a world where both parents work) or it is institutionalised (either paid for by multi-nationals who wish to reduce family demand on their senior workers or paid for privately by the same workers). Ruddick (1980) argues that if care and justice are conceived of as separate then there is a danger that care will be excluded from the framework for dealing with economic or welfare needs.

These most recent debates on the two ethical standpoints have moved away from comparative assessments and have centred on how these two perspectives should be combined. Consequently, it could be argued that although justice is more at home in the realm of the legal framework of society, it is also badly needed in the family. Similarly, the ethic of care is necessary for the public domain both in the obvious areas of social welfare but also, as this research argues, in the realm of education. As Held (2006, p.66) contends, "How should the framework that structures justice, equality,

rights and liberty, mesh with the network that delineates care, relatedness and trust?”.

The Practice of Care

While issues of care as a moral or political standpoint are important to understand, care is best understood as a practice in the educational context. The concept of practice is multifaceted, but it does imply both thoughts and actions. MacIntyre (1984) argues that a practice is a complex set of activities which evolve and change over a period of time in a community of practitioners who are committed to maintaining proper standards of excellence.

In considering the caring work of doctors, social workers and teachers, Dunne (2005) argues that as well as the core practice itself, there are three other factors which have an interrelated bearing. Firstly, there is the institutionalisation of the practice (i.e. structures which are set up to protect its priorities and to mediate with the wider social and political contexts). Secondly, a practice must reproduce through the training of other practitioners, and lastly, practice must articulate and legitimate itself to the wider world its own concepts and values.

Sevenhuijsen (1998) draws on the work of Frazer and Lacey (1993) and their conceptualisation of practice. They argue that practice is located in human action which is organised in a social manner and structured by both formal and informal institutions. So then Sevenhuijsen (1998, p.22) is able to define care in the following way, “.... care can be seen as a mode of acting in

which participants perceive and interpret care needs and act upon those needs". Nias (1999) contends that teaching, particularly primary school teaching, lends itself particularly to a 'culture of care'. She defines culture in this respect as a common goal orientation which incorporates beliefs and values as well as common action which is sustained by a kind of normative pressure. She presents an analytical framework to understand the concept of a 'care culture' in which there is a very strong emphasis on values.

Nias (1999) however, also identifies other aspects of the culture of care that are not necessarily to the benefit of teachers. Some of these, such as the notion of *care as altruism*, have been historically constructed. In particular, the linking of the maternal aspects of early education to teachers (traditionally female) has reinforced the notion of self-sacrifice. In the Irish context, the traditional roles of the religious orders in teaching gave a certain recognition to care but within an authoritarian structure.

Care can also be construed as over-conscientiousness. Traditionally, women have been socialised into recognising needs and accepting that their own needs may not necessarily be met. I would argue, however, that the framework presented by Nias (1999) is particularly useful in addressing the nature of care practices in schools. As the literature has shown, care is both an affective disposition as well as an activity, although some care theorists such as Acker (1999) and feminist educators Lynch (1999) and O'Brien (2006) criticise the notion that women naturally and exclusively possess such values and skills. Nonetheless, the development of care theory has helped to challenge the notion that nurturing relationships is a low-level, low status

activity. For teachers, this relationship fostering is intensely emotional work and makes great personal demand on the individual (Hargreaves, 2000; Hargreaves and Goodson 1996; Hochschild, 1995).

Care as Responsibility throughout the School

Nias (1999) argues that the responsibility aspect of care has been documented since the time of Socrates. Responsibility as a moral stance derives its authority from a professional view of duty and because of the unique individual relationship with pupils. It goes beyond the technical skill of teaching and runs directly counter to the marketisation of education, but like all aspects of care there are emotional costs to the teacher, as an emotional worker (Hochschild, 1983).

This aspect of the culture of care is particularly important in the educationally disadvantaged setting. The maintenance of the emphasis on relationships throughout the whole school and between all of the significant players is vital. Each is an overlapping circle of responsibility. Collegiality is not just an abstract professional relationship but refers to a unique, personally supportive environment because having the experience of care allows individuals to care for others in turn. Knijn (2000, p. 206) contends that the importance of outlining the various categories in the care concept is valuable in showing that care is everywhere in society and not just limited to private relationships. "The advantage of these feminist conceptualisations of care is that they go beyond the dichotomy of public and private life and beyond the distinction between paid and unpaid work".



Vogt (2002), in her study of primary school teachers' conceptions of caring has identified a number of ways in which caring can be examined within the professional work of the teacher. For her, the concept of caring is interfaced with the discourses on nature, altruism, ethics and parenting. Vogt's study identifies categories of care along a continuum which includes the following.

- Commitment
- Relatedness
- Physical care
- Expressing affection
- Caring as parenting
- Caring as mothering

Many of the teachers in her study were encouraged to be involved in care practices that regularly crossed over in to what could be termed parenting obligations. Vogt (2002) suggests that the organisation of primary teaching into single classes encouraged this practice. While few would disagree with the nature and levels of commitment and relatedness that were necessary, there were understandably significant differences as to the nature and extent of physical care; however, a significant number of teachers in her study were of the opinion that 'in loco parentis' obliged them to act in a parenting role.

This situation was also a cause of tension in terms of the professionalism of teachers and the obligation to manage emotions in the professional setting. In fact, the identification of caring with parenting, and in particular, with the role of mothering, was highly contentious for some teachers. While gender is

not a central focus of this thesis, the reality is that women are socialised into the role of caring and the teaching profession is largely female. Vogt (2002, p.262) concludes:

Defining a caring teacher as committed to teaching and to professional relationships with pupils would allow one to value this very important aspect of teaching without perpetuating patriarchal discourse which links caring to femininity.

In attempting to define the particular dimensions of care, Hargreaves (1994, p.147) believes that, as a basic, care can be interpreted as the interpersonal experience of human connectedness; however, he strongly asserts:

When the purposes of care are balanced with those of group management and instructional effectiveness, and when care is construed in social and moral terms as well as interpersonal ones, its contribution to quality in education can be exceptionally valuable.

Hargreaves (1994, p.178) also contends that the issues of care, ownership and control are all bound together in a complex mixture. He argues that much of the organization of teaching and school administration is framed by an ethic of responsibility, which he views as contrary to the ethic of care. His research shows that the concept of responsibility is dominant in the structures of school while care is the motivating force for teachers. He states that while care and individualism are associated with one another they must be separated; “With that kind of loosening, it may be possible to change the culture of individualism without challenging the ethic of care that teachers hold so dear”.

This broad, balanced and inclusive definition of care could be a valuable framework within which the exploration of the care practices of teachers in

the context of educational disadvantage could take place. Sugrue (1997) also argues for the importance of this balance. He terms them 'scaffolding' and 'shepherding' which he explains as striking the balance between challenging learners cognitively and paying attention to their social and personal well-being. Held (2006) makes a further relevant point when she argues that caring relations appear to require significant capacities for sensitivity to the needs of others. Such exercises of judgement are not necessarily part of a teacher's professional training and may only be acquired with experience.

Hargreaves (1994; 2000) sounds a note of caution in his argument that teachers' commitment to care is often located in a type of 'guilt'. While possible sources of guilt can also be found in other aspects of teachers' professional lives (i.e. the open ended nature of the work and the pressures of accountability), he contends that the deeper the commitment to care within a teacher, the greater the sense of guilt. On the other hand, Noddings (2003) explores the notion of 'healthy guilt' and argues that it can be a strong motivator for individuals to take responsibility for a particular situation. This thesis will explore the moral dimension of care as part of the motivations for teachers to participate in caring practices in their classrooms.

Conclusion

The literature shows how the ethic of justice has developed over the centuries and how it has come to be presented as the dominant moral perspective in western society. It also shows that human beings are not fully autonomous and the interdependent nature of our relationships is inescapable. The liberal political and moral framework of western and Irish society cannot easily

accommodate this notion of interdependency as this challenges the basic principles of autonomy and rationality on which it functions. There is a fundamental tension between liberalism and the requirements of human interdependency. Liberal political and moral thought has consistently sought, and been very successful, in defining dependency as something to be overcome and where necessary, confined to the private world of family life; however, if the view of care as a moral position is accepted then the care practices that inform that perspective are a daily part of the lives of all.

Nonetheless, although the *ethic of care* is undervalued and somewhat ignored in terms of its importance, care on its own is insufficient as the only moral framework for our society. Issues of equality, power and privilege need an all-encompassing ethic that incorporates both moral positions of justice and care.

The work of some of the care theorists has been important in showing that the ethic of care is not only a virtue and a moral position but also a political outlook. Tronto (1993) and Held (2006) in particular, believe that the practice of care is an excellent foundation for the development of all citizens in a pluralistic society where the qualities of attentiveness and responsiveness are not just confined to particular incidences of care but inform our outlook as citizens. Moreover, Baker *et al.* (2004, p.220) contend, "Narratives of love, care and solidarity are therefore familiar, if latent political narratives, a factor that greatly enhances their scope for facilitating political mobilisation".

In the Irish context this has important implications for excluded members of society in educationally disadvantaged communities. The *ethic of care* has traditionally and historically informed the practice of teaching, particularly at primary school level. Moreover, although it is a source of motivation and professional satisfaction to individual teachers, care may also be a source of great professional and personal stress. As the Irish educational system is firmly located within the liberal tradition, issues of motivation, satisfaction and stress have particular implications for teachers working in educationally disadvantaged schools. The next chapter will deal with the literature on these topics.

Chapter 2: The Interface between Care Practices, Emotional Labour and Teacher Identity

Introduction

The previous chapter has traced the progress of care theory and the growth of the ethic of care in relation to the ethic of justice. Care theory has developed to such an extent that it is now worthy of scholarship in all of the social sciences with significant contributions from politics, philosophy, sociology, economics and education (Lynch, 2007). Each domain of scholarship contributes its own understanding of care and allows the researcher to create a variety of frameworks within which the practice of care can be located. While the previous section discussed the philosophical and moral nature of care, this section deals with the pragmatic considerations of care as labour and more importantly, the interface between care and emotional labour, which shapes the contexts of both teacher identity and care practices.

The quality of a person's life is utterly dependent on care and care practices as we are, by nature, relational and affective beings. This is regardless of whether or not we support norms which are 'other-centred'. Thus, care practices are fundamental to our well-being. As Lynch *et al.* (2009) point out, care practices are so fundamental to our personal and professional capacities that even in an individuals' working life, their occupational success is dependent on being surrounded by others who have had their care needs met.

A deeper understanding of care needs and care practices has come at a time of great social and cultural ambiguity. Woods and Jeffrey (2002) argue that in a post-modern world where uncertainty is the norm, the degree of trust that

used to exist in everyday life and in social relations has been significantly diminished. Such a lack of trust has also permeated the lives of teachers where the extension of accountability, assessment and self-management are increasingly becoming the standard that governs all professional relationships. For disadvantaged communities where some of these teachers work, poverty, social deprivation and difficulties in meeting the day to day challenges of modern life, create an additional burden for some families or individuals in meeting care needs or having their own care needs met in any meaningful way.

This chapter will explore the emotional aspects of teachers' lives and the emotional labour involved in care practices. It will be argued that teachers expend a considerable amount of emotional labour in carrying out the care practices which good teaching and the creation of optimum learning environments necessitate. It will also examine the tension between emotional components of teaching and the formal duties of curriculum delivery and how this tension interfaces with teacher identity and care.

Care as Work

There can be little argument with the notion that caring involves emotional labour and that teaching, while embedded in social practices, is an activity which is predominantly and specifically bound up with emotions. Emotions are the means through which teachers interpret and make sense of their professional obligations. So teachers must have a way of connecting emotions with self-knowledge (Zembylas, 2005). In addition to human relationships being central to teachers' lives, human relationships are also

ends in themselves, and schools are expected to foster these as important educational outcomes of children's learning.

As Nias (1996) points out, teachers not only experience the emotionality of the human interactive side of their work, but also they are in a sense asked to take responsibility for its quality. Developing high quality, complex relationships between teacher and pupils, teacher and colleagues, and teacher and parents involves a range of interpersonal and intra-personal skills. The emotional labour involved in such work helps to build personal bonds and frames the context of friendship and well being that is necessary for the learning environment (Allardt, 1993; O'Brien 2008).

Research by Murray (2006) into primary teacher educators found that they celebrated the individual interest they took in their students' lives. For them, a professional commitment underpinned by an ethos of care and moral responsibility, was central to their professional identities (Furlong *et al.*, 2009 forthcoming). While the research dealt with teacher educators, it is not invalid to argue that, for many teachers, this is the basis of their professionalism. Nias (1989) also found that a central component of teachers' feelings of belonging was located in the relationships they formed with their students and the sense of investment that they made in their lives.

To my knowledge, very little formal training takes place to prepare teachers for this kind of work yet they are expected, both individually and as a group, to exercise these skills in an advanced way from the outset of their careers. As well as being expected to have or to develop these inter-personal skills, in

the current climate, teachers are also expected to give precedence to the technical, rationalist assumptions of policy mandates. It is assumed that if any of the necessary personal skills to balance all of these demands are not present or not functioning optimally, they can be acquired through training or through more effective work practices.

In addition to investing emotional labour to develop the nurturing relationships fundamental to the pedagogical role, another challenge presents for those teachers who work in an educationally disadvantaged setting. It will be argued in this research that these teachers use emotional labour, through their care practices, to develop the necessary support to steer their students through the complex and complicated world of school where values and cultural norms are not necessarily compatible with those of the home or local community.

The notion of *habitus* developed by Bourdieu helps explain how social and cultural messages shape an individual's way of thinking and how the thought process controls social actions (Swartz, 1997). Thus, class-based factors are hugely influential in affecting educational choice. Working class families or families in educationally disadvantaged communities may not have the type of knowledge required to understand the unique and particular dynamics of school organisation. For teachers in those schools, additional emotional investment may go into support systems for their students so that the school experience becomes more meaningful and accessible.

The literature on 'care as work' explores the problematics of care as paid or unpaid, formal or informal and the gendered and emotional nature of care work (Baker *et al.* 2004; Lynch, 2007; O'Brien, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Hochschild (1983) has been credited with pioneering scholarship on the notion of emotional labour in the workplace. Her examination of the working lives of service personnel in an American airline showed how emotions were regulated by the demands of the marketplace and commodified for corporate profit. In her early research, she showed very clearly that individuals learned to control and manage their emotions to meet the demands of a tailored service for air passengers. Such constant control and management of emotions, especially in a climate of non-recognition, are a potential source of extreme anxiety. As Hochschild (1983, p.153) points out:

For these workers, emotional work, feeling rules and social exchange have been removed from the private domain and placed in the public one, where they are processed standardised and subjected to hierarchical control.

The creation of a *false* identity for the purposes of managing one's emotional responses can lead to a source of inner tension and alienation. To make any lesson interesting in the face of student apathy or to remain calm in response to angry or threatening behaviour requires hard emotional labour and involves the development of a *professional persona* to deal with these particular challenges.

There are, however, some reservations about Hochschild's (1983) view that the emotional labour involved in such work, in keeping up a kind of public and professional identity is essentially a contrived picture of oneself. While

accepting the premise that teachers are obliged to exercise control over their emotions and this involves varying degrees of emotional labour, it is, as yet, unclear whether teachers are creating a totally artificial persona to avoid becoming too involved in their role. It is also unclear whether the emotional labour involved in carrying out the caring aspect of the teaching role is perceived by teachers in the mostly negative terms that Hochschild (1983) ascribes to such labour.

There is evidence to suggest that teachers are energised by the pleasures of acting and interplay and that the emotional labour expended combines to make classrooms and classroom interaction a positive experience (Acker, 1999; Fineman, 1993; and Hargreaves, 1999). This notion will be revisited in the examination of the data in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis as the notion of an authentic self can be viewed as a resistance to a formalised professional identity.

Teachers occupy an unusual position with regard to care practices and the emotional labour involved in caring. They are in paid employment, belonging to one of the 'caring professions'. As a consequence their work is prescribed and paid, but caring practices, which are a constituent part of that work, are neither recognised by the status of financial remuneration nor formally acknowledged. As Lewis (2002, p.73) contends:

In a world where dignity as well as welfare in the broadest sense derives mainly from wages, it is crucial that care is valued ... But if care is not valued it is degraded and exploitative.

Where market forces are increasingly undermining more traditional moral values, this has important implications for the role of the classroom teacher and the caring aspect of education in general. Care and ‘other centeredness’ are vital for the functioning of society, but while they produce outcomes, these are not clearly visible, nor are they easily measured. In fact care outcomes are most often determined by their absence (Lynch, 2007). Thus, in the current educational climate of accountability, measurement and self-managerialism, the lack of recognition of care practices is of some significance. They do exist and such lack of recognition renders them invisible. Held (2006, p.115), in her own criticism of such values, states:

The way the worth or value of an activity should be ascertained is by seeing the price it can command in the marketplace; those whose work is not rewarded with profits are not doing work that has worth.

In the Irish educational context, teachers are deemed to be ‘in loco parentis’, a legally recognised concept. While it is acknowledged that the legal origins of this concept are based on common law (i.e. legal judgements as a result of case law), the obligations of this term have been copper-fastened by Section 22 of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) and consequently, indicate an acceptance of a certain degree of responsibility and duty. The *Children First Guidelines* (Government of Ireland, 1999, 6.8.1) also echoes this sentiment. “(Teachers)... are the main care givers to children outside the family context and have regular contact with children in the school setting”.

Under these legal and moral obligations, teachers are expected to ensure that their students are not placed in any physical danger. In this sense they are

expected to exercise the same 'duty of care' as any reasonable parent would; however, they are not expected to provide the same degree of individual care that a parent or guardian would normally deliver. On the other hand, the boundaries of this responsibility are neither immediately obvious nor clearly defined. This legal concept does not exist in European law and is only recognisable in the English, Irish and Welsh jurisdictions, but the situation may very well change as Irish legal norms harmonise more with a European standard.

Another anomaly must be noted. The Irish Constitution gives moral and legal authority to parents as the primary educators of their child. Public policy reflects this notion through the assumption that much of the support necessary for the successful journey through school will be given in the home. O'Brien (2005, 2008) concluded that some parents, working class mothers in particular, despite expending enormous amounts of emotional labour, are unable to offer the type or degree of support necessary for such support. The values of the school system, underpinned by the neo-liberal, marketplace values of society, are often at odds with the values of educationally disadvantaged and excluded communities.

Social inclusion is a significant aim of current public policy so, if support for schooling needs to be given by families, then those families who cannot undertake that responsibility must, in turn be supported by the state in this work. Sadly, public structures do not adequately reflect this egalitarian concept, and families, especially in areas of educational and social exclusion,

are under resourced and often poorly served by agencies set up to support them.

Despite the blurred boundaries between policy norms, legal obligations and the difficulties of excluded communities, it should be clearly stated that this thesis is not concerned with the legal obligations of the duty of care, nor with any formal or paid arrangements for care practices but with the broader concept of care both as a value and a practice in the educational setting. Such care practices are neither prescribed nor recognised and yet occupy a considerable proportion of teachers' time, effort and emotional labour.

Discourse, Emotions and Teacher Identity

Sutton and Wheatley (2003) point out, in their review of the literature on the emotions and teaching, that there is a significant body of research related to the role of beliefs in teaching, but a particular dearth of scholarship on the role of emotions in learning to teach. Their review found that most research deals with teacher experiences in cognitive terms and fails to articulate the many layers of emotion that are involved.

As Hargreaves (1998) points out, the emotions are virtually absent from all kinds of educational research; strategic planning, cognitive leadership, standards-based reform or teacher reflection. Accordingly teachers' ways of making sense of their world, including emotional sense has largely been treated as matters of personal or moral choice. As a result, surprisingly little is known about the role of emotions in learning to teach, how those emotional experiences affect the practices of teachers and how the social and

cultural contexts of teaching interact with those emotions. According to Sutton and Wheatley (2003), there are two reasons for this.

- The relatively recent focus on emotions in psychology and related disciplines²
- The traditional distrust of the emotions in western culture

This traditional distrust is clear from the discussion in the previous chapter where the dominance of the logical and rational has been a feature of western philosophical discourses. The literature on the nature of emotions is therefore framed very definitely in personal and individualistic terms with a very clear-cut, and usually psychological, focus on the interpersonal nature of the emotions. In this framework, attitudes, values and beliefs are the foundation stones of emotional reactions. These reactions are, in turn, intimately connected with how teachers understand themselves, their colleagues and their pupils. This more traditional perspective holds that the emotional rules in teaching are contingent and that teachers play a part in their own emotional control. As a result, teacher identity is constituted in relation to the emotional rules of the context in which they teach. An individual's identity has both reflective and active dimensions and teachers' personal and professional identities are often quite closely aligned because of this dual aspect (Nias, 1996).

² Psychological research on the emotions only really began in the 1990s and as Sutton and Wheatley (2003) indicate, this type of research was taken up later in that decade in the context of teaching

An alternative, feminist approach is to focus on the lived experience of teachers, an approach that this research has adopted. It is the individual narratives of teachers' professional and lived experiences that bring this research on care to life. Research in the narrative tradition shows how intuition and other emotional qualities form such a central component of the personal and professional knowledge of teachers. (Hargreaves, 2000; Nias, 1996; Noddings, 1992; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002).

A note of caution has been sounded by Kelchtermans (1996) who contends that the power of all-encompassing stories has been seriously diminished in a post-modern world. Teachers therefore depend heavily on their own judgement and their personal reflections. Nias (1996) argues that the influences on teacher emotions have historical, social and cultural origins and accordingly these form the social and organisational structures of the learning experience. Thus emotions cannot be separated from perception nor can affectivity be understood without judgement (Goleman 1995).

Judgement, which is an extremely important skill in teaching, is enhanced by passion and feeling in the same way as cognitive reflection can moderate and temper our feelings and emotions (Damasio, 1994; Nussbaum, 1995). Judgement gives emotional expression its unique subjective experience. Judgement also explains how the same event might have different emotional outcomes for different people. In a classroom scenario, one teacher might react with anger to a defiant student or an unacceptable behaviour while another might have a more pragmatic approach and attempt to locate the student's behaviour in a context shaped by personal or family considerations.

Dunne (2005, p. 376) describes judgement essentially as, “... an ability to recognise situations, cases or problems of this kind (which are perhaps of no clearly specifiable kind) and to deal with them adequately and appropriately”.

Emotional Vulnerability in Teaching

Arguing from a socio-cultural lens, Lasky (2005) understands emotions as both a biological and social construction mediated by social structures, culture and identity. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, priority is therefore given to the social contexts and cultural tools that influence and shape an individual’s beliefs, emotions and ways of acting. In a school environment these actions are reflected in the structures of policy mandates, curriculum and assessment. Although Lasky’s (2005) work focuses largely on teacher agency and the professional vulnerability of secondary teachers in relation to school reform, the research has highlighted a number of significant issues that are of importance to this research on care practices.

Defining emotion as a “heightened state of being that changes as individuals interact with their immediate context, other individuals.....” Lasky (2005, p. 901) goes on to stress the importance of teacher vulnerability. For her, there are both positive and negative sides to vulnerability. On the one hand, it is absolutely vital for the development of openness and trust which are fundamental to the building of viable relationships. High-quality and open relationships are the foundations blocks for a productive learning environment. Nevertheless, vulnerability can be present when there are feelings of powerlessness, disloyalty or anxiety. In such situations,

individuals may feel that they are being forced to act in ways that are contrary to their values and so withdraw to protect themselves. The learning is then inhibited, trust no longer exists and collaboration no longer possible. Extending the logic of this argument to caring practices, it is reasonable to assume that teacher vulnerability, in the form of emotional openness and risk taking, are fundamental emotions in care practices.

Feelings of autonomy and freedom are constantly balanced by significant degrees of uncertainty and vulnerability. Acknowledging and understanding the emotions of uncertainty and vulnerability, as well as the power of positive and negative emotions both personally and in a collegiate sense, is important for the teaching and learning process. As Hargreaves (1998) points out, positive emotions such as trust, support, openness and commitment are favoured on the agenda far more than the more passionate and volatile emotions such as anger, joy, excitement and frustration. Thus, teachers have to learn very quickly which emotions are acceptable in the various contexts of the school day. A particular emotion in the classroom may not have the same degree of acceptability in the staffroom or when dealing with the school principal.

Golby (1996, p. 424) takes the view that if education is understood as education of the 'whole person' then both teacher and learner must be authentically present. Such a perspective makes no distinction between learning for the "head, hand or heart" and so accepts that "emotions are unintelligible without reference to cognition and irreducible without intellectual work" (ibid).

Gardner's (1985) work on multiple intelligences added considerably to the view that schooling and education must be about the whole person. His identification of both inter-personal and intra-personal intelligences is important, not alone for the learning process in students but also for teachers themselves. The principle of multiple intelligences clearly underpins the new revised curriculum at primary level in Ireland.

Second level is, however, a completely different system where performance in public examinations is a key determinant in curriculum; consequently, there is considerable tension between the demands of the curriculum and the aspiration of multiple intelligences. As egalitarian research into the Irish education system has shown, there is little value placed on subjects which do not fall into the scientific, mathematical or linguistic categories (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Lynch, 1999; O'Brien and Flynn, 2007). This creates a further tension with the need to mediate the school experience for some pupils from educationally disadvantaged environments. This tension will be explored further in the next chapter.

Discourse and Teacher Identity

Disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy and feminist theory all work out of their own particular theoretical perspective for understanding emotions. Despite an increased relevance for research into the emotional nature of teaching, there is no easily identified or comprehensive theoretical framework in which to locate the conceptualisation of teachers' emotions and their work. (Nias 1996; Hargreaves, 2000; van Veen *et al.* 2005)

Zembylas (2005) argues that the conventional view of teacher identity as coherent, structured, and the origin of its own actions, largely ignores the power interface of culture and ideology. The significant social and cultural changes as a result of globalisation and the spread of neo-liberalism have, in any case, forced educational research to re-consider more traditional approaches. In expanding this argument further, Zembylas (2005) has developed what he terms *genealogies of emotion*. This taxonomy draws heavily on the work of Foucault whose importance lies in the exposition of the notion of a discourse³. Knowledge is therefore not innocent or neutral. Accepting this premise allows one, for example, to see how deviancy and legitimacy are relative concepts whose purpose is to control the contradictions in society and so provide an illusion of stability.

The *genealogies of emotion* therefore permit the exploration of the complex interface of power, identity and resistance in education and this, in turn, can provide a useful backdrop to the location of care practices. According to Zembylas, (2005) this approach creates a space in which to question how the emotions in teaching are shaped and formed, how some emotions are disciplined, and what emotional rules and boundaries are imposed. By using such a discursive framework, two basic assumptions can be made. They are:

- Emotions are neither private nor universal but instead are formed through language and are uniquely referenced to the social world. In this respect they are performative.

³ In simple terms, a discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. The integrity or coherence of a discourse does not come from one particular person or place; however the subject of the discourse becomes part of that very discourse.

- Power relations are inherent in this language, which consequently permits the expression of some emotions and denies the expression of others. Discourses produce power and these in turn, continually constitute identity (Burkitt, 1992).

In the analysis of the genealogies of emotion it is argued that identity is constantly in a process of becoming, embedded in power relationships, ideology and culture. What are considered universal norms are actually socially and historically contingent. As Bourdieu (1997) has articulated, teachers come to their professional roles with unique personal histories and values which have formed their *habitus*. These processes shape the expression of the emotions by legitimating some emotions and denying the expression of others in a 'discourse of professional neutrality'. Thus, to display inappropriate emotions such as anger or fear is to act in an unprofessional way.

The findings from this research, (Zembylas, 2005) also show that school policies, practices and other social conventions regulate the type of emotion and context within which expression is permitted. Interestingly, the research also found that those teachers with greater amounts of both professional and life experience were more confident in dealing with these issues and so where there was resistance to these discourses such resistance became easier over time.

My own experience as an educator has shown that many newly qualified teachers are often less knowledgeable in a range of organisational,

management and pedagogical skills. As Troman, (1996) points out, a teacher's sense of professionalism and professional identity is defined by sets of professional knowledge, attitudes and values. These in turn determine the character of teacher practices. Troman's (1996) findings also support the view that where the teacher is located in terms of their career, their personal life and their professional experience has a significant influence on the shaping of that particular professional identity.

In their review of the literature on teacher identity, Day *et al.* (2006) indicate that a substantial body of research shows that, although distinct, there are inter-connected and overlapping relationships between teachers' professional and personal identities. On the other hand, Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, p. 123) argue that the emotional labour, intimately connected with the care practices of teachers, is the optimum interface for any examination of the professional identity of the teacher. They argue that the emotions become emotional labour when teachers attempt to modify or manage emotions (especially negative ones), and that emotional labour involves many emotional costs. They also agree that it is often invisible, rarely acknowledged and never without effort. "In other words, emotional labour is what teachers perform when they engage in caring relationships but they have to induce, neutralise or inhibit their emotions so as to render the appropriate to situations (*ibid.*)".

Care and Emotional Geographies of Teaching

In his own attempt to advance the scholarship on emotions and teaching, Hargreaves (2000) takes a social-constructionist view by investigating how

the emotional character of teaching is shaped by teachers' own lives and the changing conditions under which they work. He too argues that emotions are not peripheral to people's lives nor are they separate from the rational. "Emotion, cognition and action, in fact are integrally connected" (p.812). This particular interface is constructed around the inter-connected contexts of emotional intelligence, emotional understanding, emotional labour and emotional geographies and how they contribute to a conceptual understanding of the emotional nature of teaching. Of particular interest from this list is the concept of *emotional geographies*. These, according to Hargreaves (2000), help identify the supports and the threats to the emotional bonds in relationships. *Professional geographies*, for example, explain how the traditional 'masculine' notion of teacher professionalism may create a distance between teacher and student and may be particularly hostile to the more feminine and caring aspects of teaching.

Importantly, Hargreaves (2000) is intensely critical of an over-emphasis or a sentimental approach to the emotions, particularly in areas of social deprivation. In such circumstances, he holds that if schools are unable to set clear achievement goals for their students, then there will be no improvement in long-term prospects and their educational attainments will be firmly located in a context of welfare and apathy. It is one of the many challenges of care practices that teachers are able to separate their caring actions from this kind of *sentimental welfarism*. It is also a particular challenge to this research in facilitating the space for teachers to articulate their views on this matter.

In a similar warning, Tronto (1993) refers to the dangers of care which she labels as paternalism or maternalism and parochialism. In the first case, there is the danger that those involved in giving care may view themselves as having more competence in terms of needs' assessment than the care receivers. Parochialism, on the other hand brings with it the danger of viewing the care relationship as the only important one. Tronto (1993, p.171) proposes that the solution to these possible problems lies in the connection of care to the theory of justice and "to be relentlessly democratic in its disposition". Noddings (1984) agrees with this position and argues that the ethic of care is a tough ethic, which limits individual and institutional obligations. Therefore it does not involve itself in unrealistic visions of universal love or a perfect system of justice.

Motivation and Commitment

Using a more social-psychological approach, van Veen, *et al.* (2005) treat the issue of emotions in an individualistic way and how the person perceives his or her own particular environment. The emphasis in this particular approach is strongly on the identity and evaluation process and on the cognitive-affective processes of the individual teacher. Like many contemporary studies on the emotions and teacher identity, the focus on this study is on educational reform. Their findings, which are similar to other studies, (Day, 2002; Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Nias, 1996) show that teachers are concerned about the personal, moral and social aspects of their work. They are motivated by concern and passion for their students' learning and, as the next section discusses, are involved in the emotional

labour of care practices on a daily basis. I would argue that these findings, as the findings of the other studies, may be easily transferred to the context of educationally disadvantaged settings.

The motivation and concern that teachers have with regard to their students is suffering constant erosion in today's environment. Woods and Jeffrey (2002, p.104) point out that humanistic values (part of the traditional, professional, teacher identity) are central to a holistic approach and are now being eroded continuously by the current technical, rationalist discourse underpinning educational reform. "In general, teachers have been forced to become more strategic and political in defending their self-identities against the countervailing inroads of the new teacher social identity (ibid.)".

Many writers refer to the satisfaction that teachers receive from activities that involve helping to improve students' lives (Hargreaves, 1994, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Nias, 1989, 1996). Indeed, as Isenbarger & Zembylas (2006) point out, there are many different types of caring, including moral caring, pedagogical caring and cultural caring, implying that it is not always easy to make a clear distinction between caring and the emotional labour involved. Acker (1999) makes a similar point in that caring can be seen as both an approach as well as an emotion.

Emotional Intelligence and Teaching

Along with Gardner, Goleman's (1995, p.80) work is closely associated with the concept of emotional intelligence. He states, "Emotional Intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either

facilitating or interfering with them". He further claims there are five basic competences that must be mastered. These are:

- Self-awareness (recognising ones feelings and discriminating between them)
- Mood management (reacting appropriately to given situations)
- Self-motivation (setting goals and moving purposefully towards them)
- Empathy (being attuned to the verbal and non-verbal cues of others)
- Relationship management (handling interpersonal action and managing conflict)

While this framework is a useful and realistic method for analysing the nature of emotional intelligence, his claim that people who can build up their own emotional intelligence have a stronger chance of leading content and fulfilled lives seems to be a somewhat simplistic one. More importantly, it places enormous emphasis on the individual and does not take any account of the gendered, cultured or social status contexts in which individuals contest their daily lives.

Hargreaves (2000) is also critical of Goleman (1995), arguing that emotional management cannot be simply presented as a set of skills to be trained in and ultimately mastered (Boler, 1999). The brief sketch of some of the literature on emotions and teacher identity shows very clearly that all teaching operates in a complex, multi-layered environment. Teachers own narratives are intertwined with this complex environment and the skills and expertise involved in making sense of that world are neither simple nor easily analysed.

Care Practices and Emotional Labour

Many of the ethnographic studies, on the topic of care and teaching, show that the ethical and humanistic dimension of teachers' work is a fundamental motivator and one of the principal reasons for educators continued commitment to their profession (Acker, 1999; Golby, 1996; Hargreaves, 1998; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Nias, 1999; Noddings, 1992; Revell, 1996). They also identify, quite clearly, that there are emotional challenges in the enactment of teacher caring and that such emotional labour is often peripheral to mainstream educational research which largely ignores the central position of caring as a phenomenon. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, p.121) contend:

Arguments that caring teaching and caring teacher education have three cornerstones - commitment, intimacy and passion - fail to recognise that performing caring teaching involves a significant amount of emotional labour that becomes the principal site for the formation of what is perceived as a 'caring teacher'.

I contend that the arguments about caring are especially true of Irish education and particularly relevant for the context of educational disadvantage. The previous chapter has shown how feminist scholarship has opened up the debate on care and care practices and shifted the focus from the private and domestic to the public arena. Other writers and commentators, both in academic circles and in the popular media have also written about the diminished sense of community and solidarity and the need to rethink this (Cohen, 2006; Etzioni, 1995; Putnam, 2000). In particular, Sergiovanni (1994) has argued that schools have an important function in building a sense of community among its students. Furthermore, increased

commodification of both formal and informal care raises new challenges for the social and economic life of society. In disadvantaged communities, the unequal distribution of resources makes it more difficult to access both forms of care. As Lynch (2007) clearly contends, the quality of love and care is influenced greatly by the financial resources to purchase the time of others.

Lynch (2007) argues that care and the love labour it implies signifies the emotional engagement that enhances human emotionally. It is characterised by a strong sense of mutual dependency. She outlines a taxonomy of 'other centeredness' which maps out and differentiates concepts of love, care and solidarity in terms of the emotional response and the practice involved. Three categories are identified.

- Love labour / Primary care relations
- General Care work / Secondary care labour
- Solidarity work / Tertiary care relations

In the first category, there is a sense of intensity and very strong attachment coupled with an all-encompassing engagement. This type of relationship is mirrored most easily in a positive parent child relationship or in a similar familial relationship. Many studies show that teachers, particularly primary school teachers develop strong and intimate relationships with their pupils. Baker *et al.* (2004) contend that good teachers love their pupils and few would argue with this statement. Students learn best in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect; however, it should be pointed out that while this relationship may mirror that of a committed and caring parent, it is fundamentally different.

Teachers are not the primary carers of the children and young people in their schools. While they may often carry out actions that are identical to that of a parent, or develop significant supportive relationships with students, their involvement in such caring is usually for ethical reasons. In the model, secondary care relations are normally associated with relatives and friends and represent a less intense engagement in terms of emotion and responsibility. Again, elements of this category are presents in teachers' care.

The third category, solidarity work, is similar to statutory obligations, such as paying ones taxes to fund public services or voluntary work in the community. As teachers have a duty of care to their pupils as part of their paid employment, tertiary care relations are also recognisable in teachers' care practices. It is not easy to locate teachers' care practices accurately in any one specific category. Each of the three dimensions is inter-connected and each involves labour that produces outcomes, which are visible and experienced by those involved, but not easily documented. Each involves varying degrees of emotional labour, moral commitment and cognitive capacities to organise and plan.

Lynch (2007) claims that while each involves care responsibilities and attachments, tertiary care relations do not carry the same levels of emotional engagement or moral commitment. Depending on the context, both secondary and tertiary care relations can change to primary relationships in certain circumstances. The unique position of teachers, who are in paid employment, must be pointed out. While acknowledging that they are in paid employment, the care practices of teachers and the emotional labour involved

does not carry any formal recognition. While Lynch *et al.* (2009) argue that love labour has no exchange value in that another person cannot be paid for the emotional work involved in loving another person, neither can the care practices or secondary care relations of teachers continue to go unrecognised or unacknowledged.

The affective dimension of teaching carries the implicit notion of well-being or welfare of the individual pupil. Nias (1989) argues that the process of teaching demands a 'culture of care' and that a child must feel safe and secure in order to learn and develop as an individual. Care has traditionally been understood as connected with the context of the home, the private sphere and connected with the female domain. In modern times, the teaching of young children has mostly been considered 'women's work' and associated with maternal activities of nurturing and caring. Educational support work in the home, an aspect of care, has also been traditionally carried out by mothers (O'Brien, 2005). Indeed it could be argued that because of its almost complete association with the role of the mother and its unpaid status, caring has been considered as *non-work* (Acker 1999). As Lynch (2007), points out, those involved in paid care work in Ireland have the same status as semi-skilled workers and as such occupy the bottom positions in any occupational ranking scale. In a domestic or private setting their position is even lower, with a label of unskilled attached to their labour. On the contrary, caring in an educational context involves very highly skilled actions underpinned by a strong ethical commitment which is often at odds with the formal role of teaching. While the technical aspects of teaching are

those which are formally valued and rewarded, it is care which makes the difference and it is the tension between care and performativity that individual teachers must deal with on a daily basis.

Caring and Performing

Forrester (2005) contends that teachers engage both consciously and unconsciously in a variety of activities on a daily basis that might come under the umbrella of *performing* (doing the utmost for the completing curriculum obligations) or *caring* (doing the utmost for the pupils). This is not to say that these two activities are in conflict with each other. Indeed, at any given moment, there are continuous balances between the roles of helper and motivator and evaluator and disciplinarian. Nonetheless there is a constant tension between the various demands.

Noddings (1992) adds weight to this argument by pointing out that caring cannot be achieved in a formulaic way. It must be tailored to the individual and requires different responses in different situations. Forrester (2005, p.275) goes on to argue that the increased focus of *performativity* in the public service in Great Britain has radically changed the professional status of the teacher. "Characteristics that once defined professionals and were valued by teachers, namely respect, trust and social status and which were exchanged for professional judgement and autonomy have become displaced".

She also states that while there are differing definitions of care, the most important point to be made is that the ever-increasing scrutiny of teachers'

work reduces it to that which can be measured. Consequently, any activity, such as care practice, which is not assessed in such a manner, is both eroded and diminishes its status. This argument finds a familiar resonance in the Irish public service context with the ever-increasing emphasis on competence, efficiency and productivity that has characterised the recent national wage agreements. The advent of Whole School Evaluations (WSE) at both primary and second level is underpinned by notions of self-monitoring, and self-management. For Forrester (2005), this has transformed teaching and learning into *performing*.

Conclusion

It is clear from the literature that teaching is an emotional activity and should never be reduced to sets of technical competencies despite a current climate of managerialism assessment and globalisation. As Woods and Jeffrey (2002) have pointed out, the discourse of performativity establishes particular behaviours and affects a variety of relations. Despite the dominance of this discourse, their research concludes that teachers seem to be retaining the human aspect of their role. The essence of a humanist approach is an emotional one. An understanding of the role of the emotions is central to an understanding of teacher identity. As Hargreaves (1998, p 835) has indicated:

Good teachers are not just well oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity and challenge.

Although there has been an increase in research on the significance of emotions in shaping teacher identity, emotions are still a largely unexplored,

unrecognised and of lesser significance in terms the daily tasks of school life. The same may be said to be true of care and care practices. Teacher narratives identify very clearly that care and a caring role in the classroom are fundamental to a sense of professionalism.

The establishment of deep, personal and professional relationships with pupils involves varying amounts of emotional labour and is the interface in which care practices are located. Teachers' professional identities are socially and culturally located within the lived experiences of their lives. Teachers can, and do, receive enormous boosts and motivational energy from caring practices. Such practices can be central to easing the natural tension that exists within the competing contexts of meritocratic achievement and the realities of educationally disadvantaged school communities. Maintaining high standards of academic achievement tempered with a strong ethic of care demands additionally high levels of emotional labour. This theme is at the core of this research and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Notwithstanding this point, these care practices are an inherent part of teachers' professionalism as they struggle with the necessary flexibility and tolerance necessary for working in educationally disadvantaged schools and dealing with the particular challenges facing pupils, their schools and local communities.

In the Irish context, the boundaries between the role of parent, the role of teacher and the policies and legal norms which underpin those roles are blurred and overlap to a considerable degree. While teachers are required to exercise a 'duty of care' this is not clearly defined nor is it recognised as

work with any real value, either monetary or otherwise. Similarly, society expects parents to provide all the necessary support for their children as primary educators, but it does not provide any realistic back-up framework for those families who are unable to do the emotional labour that such support involves.

The next chapter will show how the context of educational disadvantage has been constructed in Ireland and will discuss the implications of the realities of school life, in those school communities, for care and care practices.

Chapter 3: Care and Inequality in Education: The Irish Context

Introduction

In a global context, free and obligatory education is an important basic entitlement recognised under both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations High Commissioner, 1990). As Blyth and Milner (1999) argue, compulsory, free and state-organised schooling is of such importance that it is considered to be a defining principle of a democratic society. Consequently, most western democracies have legislation to ensure the universal availability of such a system of schooling and have, in some form or other, policies in place to maximise full participation of its young people. Compulsory schooling implies that attendance at school is invariably a 'good' thing and that the absence from same is invariably not. Compulsion is also premised on the notion that individuals would not attend *en masse* were the obligation removed.

The view that formal education (schooling) is fundamentally beneficial to all pupils is a rarely challenged principle. It would appear that a single non-differentiated system is seen to provide the optimum provision for all groups regardless of their gender, ethnic origin, class position or even learning style. As Skilbeck (2004) shows, universal schooling has had mixed success depending on one's class or even geographical location. Schooling, according to Skilbeck (2004), is in direct contrast to a process of life-long

learning and the latter is much better placed to address the issues of justice, access and inclusion in a globalised world.

Nonetheless, the compulsory nature of schooling fundamentally shapes the relationship between parents, pupils and the state. In reality, parents have very little choice about whether to send their children to school, but crucially, some have a choice in where their children go to school (Lynch and Moran, 2006; O'Brien, 2005; Reay and Ball, 1998). In doing so, both sets of parents transfer significant rights and authority to agents of the state (teachers). Baker *et al.* (2004, p.143) further argue, "This compulsion makes it all the more important for schools to be an enabling and enriching experience for young people that not only develops their capabilities, but also reinforces their sense of well-being and self-esteem".

In many cases, educational institutions provide a safe, secure and nurturing environment for pupils where they can maximise their social, personal and academic development and attain the high levels of literacy and numeracy, skills that are required for meaningful participation in the social, political and economic life of a globalised society. Critically however, this is not the case for all pupils and serious problems of structural inequality are an inherent part of the Irish educational system (Baker *et al.* 2004; Breen & Whelan 1996; Lynch, 1999; Nolan & Whelan 1999; O'Brien 2008a).

Education has a major emancipatory role to play in the empowerment of marginalised or excluded groups; however, as Bourdieu (1974) points out, schooling is also a method of maintaining power and privilege among elite,

vested interests. The education system therefore functions to transmit and preserve particular types of technical knowledge as a form of cultural capital. In doing so it reproduces social class arrangements thereby reinforcing the unequal distribution of social and economic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

In the Irish context, the most recent Department of Education and Science statistics (Department of Education and Science, 2006) show that there were 471,519 pupils registered in 3,284 primary schools. The majority of primary schools are still denominational in their management structures although they are controlled centrally by the Department of Education and Science. At second level, 330,718 pupils attend 732 schools which include vocational, secondary, community and comprehensive schools. With a total of over 55,000 teachers between both levels, this represents a significant percentage of the population engaged in first and second level education in Ireland.

This chapter explores the construct of educational disadvantage and examines the global and Irish policy contexts for educational reform. It also reviews the literature on inequality in education and maps out the egalitarian context within which care practices are located. Finally, it explores the local conditions, within schools, which are shaped by the global and national policy frameworks. This exploration includes school ethos, leadership and the interface with care practices.

Educational Disadvantage

The liberal political assumptions which frame the contexts of access, participation and measurable outcomes structure the Irish education system as a culturally and sociologically homogenous system. Given the recent rapid change in the demographics of Irish society, such a definition seems seriously out of tune with the current realities of life in the twenty-first century. As Downes and Downes (2007, p.24) point out, "In today's world we are all a processed people. We are either processed into the mainstream cultural matrix of society or processed out of it to languish and struggle for survival on the margins".

In defining the overall system as a unified and homogenous whole, the only possible way to structure the understanding of educational disadvantage is in terms of a model of deficit. The deficit model has also been a central theme in some of the Irish based research that has been undertaken into educational disadvantage. Since the 1960s, educational scholarship has extensively documented the nature and prevalence of educational disadvantage (Clancy 1995; Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Kellaghan, 2001).

There is a degree of agreement among researchers that the lack of a shared understanding of what is meant by educational disadvantage is a hindrance to a common focus for research into the issue. So although there is no commonly accepted definition, the literature is clear on the identification of the causal actors. Kellaghan (2002, p.17) recognises six areas, which are normally associated with educational disadvantage:

- Low income and material poverty

- Individuals marginal to the labour force
- The inter-generational nature and limitations of upward mobility
- Reliance on state income support
- Limited schooling
- Prevalence in areas of social deprivation

This type of research has been named as, “theories of difference, deficit, discontinuity and equality of opportunity” (Zappone, 2007 p.10). The language, used in the research has implications for the types of outcomes that such research produces. Different terminology often represents different political or ideological positions, and this discourse itself is implicated in policy making and social implementation (Spring, 2007). Using the term *disadvantaged* automatically constructs another group, namely the *advantaged*. Similarly, the use of the term *diversity* implies that there is an arbitrary, but unwritten norm, about whom or what is considered diverse. Consequently, the use of language has implications for the solutions proposed and the underlying approach to be used. O’Sullivan (2005, p.318) argues:

There are differences in what the ‘problem’ is considered to be, how it originates, and what the possibilities are for intervention ... The role of schooling ranges over enslaver, redeemer and benign medium. Educational personnel are cast as concerned professionals, cultural dupes and collaborating activists.

Cox (2000) suggests that the negative language of disadvantage appears to be themed by future predictable scenarios, which, by implication, means that something can be done in the present to alleviate or prevent this scenario

from unfolding. Labelling, in order to facilitate early intervention, is often negative and has connotations of a self-fulfilling prophecy but also implied is the notion that, given the 'right' educational experiences, the problems can be mediated or alleviated over time. In this context it is relatively easy to argue convincingly that if the intervention was better targeted, given earlier, or with greater intensity and commitment, then disadvantage would no longer be a drain on resources. There is often a sense, even if it is never fully articulated, that the victims are somehow to blame for their own misfortune. Consequently, the underlying assumption is that if the working class or educationally disadvantaged student can be given enough support to adapt and change then they can participate fully in the opportunities that the system offers (Archer and Leathwood, 2003).

Policy Frameworks

The implementation of social policy is mediated through the public organisations and institutions of a society. While policy makers desire to affect change in some tangible way, policy, rather than having a definitive or prescriptive function, can be conceptualised as a set of interventions into practice. Ball (1994, p.20) argues that policies enter power relations rather than change them; "Policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things".

Many social policies have ambiguous goals. Matland (1995) distinguishes between ambiguity of goals, where the emphasis is usually on the enactment of the policy and ambiguity of means, where there is a complex environment

and the roles of the main players are unclear. He argues, however, that ambiguity is not necessarily a bad thing as it can reduce conflict in the implementation process and allow a wide spectrum of political players to be involved. Spillane *et al.* (2002) concur with the notion of ambiguity and contend that ambiguity in policy allows individuals or groups at opposing ends of the political spectrum to support a particular policy. These considerations must therefore be taken into account when reviewing the implementation of social policy as the outcomes of policies may be somewhat removed from the original goals and objectives.

Global Context

A comprehensive programme of educational reform has been underway in most western countries for some time now. By and large, the educational policies which have resulted from the reform movement aim to restructure the relationship between governments, schools and parents. This reorganisation is being undertaken with market values to the forefront and is clearly following a global pattern (Power and Whitty, 1999). Indeed, Giroux (2006) believes that we are now governed by three 'fundamentalisms':

- The values of the market place
- The 'virtue' of self-reliance
- The idea of 'freedom' as access to consumer goods and commodities

Technological innovations, and the ever-increasing influence of communication such as the internet, have ensured that traditional, political, cultural and even geographical barriers are less and less relevant to the

organisation of society. More importantly, there is clear evidence that education is conceptualised more as a commodity for private consumption and less as a public good. (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Ball, 1994; Giroux, 1992). Such market values are seen in the issues of parental choice, the construction of parents as *consumers*, and the publication of school league tables (Lynch and Moran, 2006).

As Hargreaves (1994) points out, these pressures of post-modernity are rapidly changing both the role of the teacher and the methodologies and knowledge banks that are in daily use in education. Under such changes, it is assumed, as Forrester (2005) argues, that greater accountability, clearer targets and goals alongside more regular assessment will enhance the performance of schools and teachers and will raise both the achievement levels and the retention rates of the socially excluded.

Positivist educational researchers such as Slavin (2002) argue that if education and educational research were more concerned with improvement in teaching and learning standards, then schools would be able to initiate programmes to mitigate against early school leaving, violence prevention, etc.. Over time, education would build up irreversible expertise, similar to medicine, to deal with these 'problems'. In the Irish context, benchmarking for public sector pay and conditions has been viewed as an important mechanism for enhancing the performance of teachers and thus, in turn, increasing the output of schools.

Liberal Values

As outlined in the previous two chapters, the values which underpin the educational and social institutions of western society mean that competition for resources, based on the premise of individual ability, is considered to be moral and just. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report (HDR 2007) placed Ireland fifth in the world in terms of the overall quality of life. The placing includes life expectancy, educational attainment and income levels. More importantly, Ireland was ranked only in 17th position among the OECD countries in the measurement of poverty in the same report. Ranked as the second last of the OECD countries, some 16% of the Irish population were deemed to be living in poverty. These figures indicate that inequality in Ireland is well above the average in the developed world with a lower than average spending on education (Cantillon *et al.* 2008).

Liberal and neo-liberal perspectives view equal opportunity policy as important in securing equality in education as it attempts to make the rules of the competition more equitable. Lynch (1999) argues that this represents a working of the traditional distributive model of social justice where the emphasis is on the opening up of access and of equalising participation. Such a position empowers individuals to pursue personal interests and legitimises the acquisition of social goods, such as prestigious private school places or high status third level courses in education. Far from being equitable, market values in social goods, such as education, are distinctly exclusionary and

class based, as they favour the socially competent and already privileged middle classes and at the same time further exclude marginalised groups.

As writers such as Ball (1994), Cohen (2006), Etzioni (1995), and Putnam (2000) point out, such principles have also had the effect of eroding the more traditional values of community, teamwork and co-operation and eroding the notion of a common good, although it is fair to argue that this process is usually more discreet and implicit rather than overt. An alternative to the conception of distributive justice is a social rights approach, as Cantillon *et al.* (2001) point out. Such an approach, properly applied, would include an emphasis on rights, duties and responsibilities, not only for service providers but also service beneficiaries. In a sense it would act as a type of contract between the individual and the state. While such a model might appear as logical and fair minded, it does not take into account that those who are socially excluded are very often not in a position to carry the burden of duties and responsibilities, particularly if they are in need of basic support.

As education policy continues to be shaped by centre-right governments, both in Ireland and western democracies, there is a sustained focus on high-status, technological knowledge. The attendant competitiveness and emphasis on personal profit that dominates policy and public values mean that despite the public statements on the importance of social inclusion, there can be little real improvement for excluded groups while such principles abound.

Irish Social Policy Context

In the last decade Ireland's new found wealth and high profile internationally as a thriving economy have brought a degree of prosperity previously unknown in modern Ireland. While it has generated resources to expand participation in the educational system, it has also placed additional pressure on it. From a political and economic point of view, having a well-educated and motivated workforce is central to continued economic prosperity. Irish social policy is, therefore, constructed very definitely on the basis of human capital theory⁴. There is much to be criticised in human capital theory, not least that it views human activity only in terms of exchanges of commodities. Furthermore as Block (1990) argues, society and culture cannot be separated from the economy and both social and cultural factors affect and influence economic transactions.

A unique feature of Irish social policy in the last three decades has been the partnership approach. Tovey and Share (2003, p.85) assert that a partnership approach such as this could be defined as 'corporatism' (i.e. the state acting, in tandem, with a small number of specific interest groups). Conroy (1999, p. 45) argues that by using a partnership framework, Irish social policy skipped a phase in its development and passed directly into mainstream national policy without any comprehensive resources, rights, entitlements or systems of redistribution. Thus, while maintaining economic competitiveness and

⁴ The principles of human capital theory are formulated on the notion that all human behaviour is directed by individual, economic self-interest operating under market values. Consequently, other behaviours are treated as a distortion of the market (Healy, 2000).

agreement on public finances has been a feature of partnership agreements, there has been no reduction in very high, by international standards, levels of income inequalities⁵.

Sugrue (2004) further contends that formulating policy by means of a partnership methodology, while being lauded in some political circles, has, in actuality, served to allow vested interest groups to pursue their own agendas and interests. Thus, what seems inclusive in theory actually excludes marginalised and powerless groups. The structures for local decision making or the full democratic recognition of local autonomy simply do not exist or work effectively in marginalised communities (O'Broin, 2006). Indeed Young (1990, p.118) points out the inequity of such a scenario, "...because their greater privilege and dominant position allows some groups to articulate the common good in terms influenced by their particular perspective and interests".

The current legislative framework has been developed through and alongside a number of significant policy statements and review reports. The White Paper, *Charting our Educational Future* (Department of Education and Science, 1995) laid the foundation for the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) which was the first real attempt to establish a legislative framework for the organization of the education system. It delineated a sense

⁵ The distribution of disposable income has not changed greatly since the 1970s with the top 10% of the income distribution having approximately 25% of total income and the bottom 10% having approximately 2% of total income (Cantillon, 2008).

of the individual and society and also outlined the importance of pluralism, partnership and equality. While the exact nature of equality was not specifically defined, it did state that the needs and ability of the individual are to be the basis on which all levels of participation are understood. Thus a differentiated delivery of education was envisaged. “The education system of the future should have a philosophy that embraces all students, female and male, on the basis of equality (ibid. p.7)”.

What actually constitutes differentiated delivery is, however, not spelt out, and there is an understanding that whatever form the differentiated delivery of the central curriculum would take, it would be in the form of universal participation with the addition of any necessary supports. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS, Government of Ireland, 1997; 2002a) has been an important component of the partnership agreements. Both the original report in 1997 and the review in 2002 identify educational disadvantage, alongside income adequacy and long term unemployment, as key areas for reform if social inclusion is to be achieved. The integrated approach and the targets set forth are in line with European targets, identified in the Lisbon Strategy (Commission of the European Community, 2000)⁶. The National Development Plan (Government of Ireland, 1999a) stated that funding would be directed at key target groups, provided on a devolved basis and integrated within area-based interventions (in the case of areas with significant

⁶ The Lisbon Strategy is an action and development plan to make the EU a dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy capable of sustainable economic growth, better jobs and greater social cohesion. It was set out by the European Council in 2000 and is a ten year plan.

concentrations of educational disadvantage). An example of this type of integrated provision is seen in the *School Completion Programme* (SCP), an initiative designed to deal with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage. Schools involved in this initiative are required to operate on a multi-agency basis establishing appropriate cross community links and developing appropriate local responses to communally identified problems.

The report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (Department of Education and Science, 2005) was comprehensive in setting out the nature and outcomes of the various provisions to eliminate educational disadvantage. The report recognised the progress that had been made in attempting to develop a multi-faceted approach in schools but also pointed out that in addition to a need to intensify strategies for literacy and numeracy and undertake comprehensive school reform, more could be done to promote an integrated area approach to alleviate the effects of poverty.

The efforts to tackle educational disadvantage have developed along a definite continuum over the last four decades. Initially, efforts were directed at access and the introduction of free second-level education in the late 1960s, alongside the development of the school transport scheme, was a combination which opened up education to many excluded families and communities. As Clancy (2005) points out, equality of access could never be equated with equality of outcome and that a one dimensional approach, framed only by access, was always going to come up short in attempting to deal with the challenge.

There is no doubt that many of the initiatives currently in place are now more directed and more focused. These include: Early Start, the School Completion Programme and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme⁷. The provision is somewhat haphazard as, for example, many educationally disadvantaged schools do not have access to Early Start. Furthermore, several of the evaluations of these programmes have not shown significantly positive improvements. The report of the Education Disadvantage Committee (2005) is critical of weakness of research in this area and urges a comprehensive approach to understanding the nature of the phenomena at the core of educational disadvantage.

Legislative Framework

The policy initiatives outlined above have been copper-fastened by a number of significant legislative enactments that have been specifically targeted on the interconnected contexts of educational disadvantage, social inclusion and poverty. As such they can be regarded as the state's own particular framework for equality in education.

The Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) devotes a full section (Section 32) to the issue of disadvantage and to the interdisciplinary nature of any proposed policies or strategies to alleviate educational disadvantage. Educational disadvantage is defined as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving

⁷ The Department of Education and Science (2003) listed over sixty different initiatives that were directed at alleviating educational disadvantage, although some of these were replica schemes or programmes between primary and second-level (See Appendix A).

appropriate benefit from education in schools” (Government of Ireland, 1998, 32: 9) In the same section (32), the Education Disadvantage Committee is given a statutory role, “to advise the minister on the policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage”.

Other noteworthy pieces of legislation include the Education (Welfare) Act (Government of Ireland, 2000) which attempts to improve the incidences of poor attendance among some pupils by working in a co-operative way with the families and other relevant statutory agencies. The Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland, 2000a) specifically promotes equality of opportunity and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of nine identified categories. It also defines discrimination as occurring when a person is treated less favourably than another on the basis of membership of any of the nine specified grounds; however, it does not include disadvantage or poverty as one of the nine grounds but states in rather general terms that there are considerable barriers to equality. While organisations such as schools are encouraged to take positive measures or provide preferential treatment for those who are designated disadvantaged, little or no direction is given as to how this might be achieved or what the implications of such preferential treatment might be.

Viewed separately or as part of an overall strategy, there can be little argument that the main thrust of the legislative framework appears to be egalitarian and socially inclusive. Nevertheless, a cursory analysis of the actual implementation of such legislation shows that the desired outcomes

are often diluted or even negated when juxtaposed with the dominant political and cultural values that underpin the operation of all social institutions. A pertinent example is seen in the Education (Welfare) Act (Government of Ireland, 2000), where a comprehensive framework for dealing with the problematic issue of poor school attendance is outlined. The act is innovative and socially inclusive in its rationale and provision, but several years after its enactment, it is still chronically under-resourced and struggling to make an impact in those communities where its provisions are desperately needed. Another example is seen in the decision to eliminate undergraduate fees at third level. Because of the disproportionate participation rates that are related to social class, the effect of this particular policy provision has been to further the amount of state aid going to middle class families.

Not all of the legislative framework or policy provision falls so dramatically short of its promise and the two most recent acts relating to education, The Education for Persons with Disabilities Act (Government Of Ireland, 2002) and the Education For Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (Government of Ireland, 2004) attempt to make inclusive provision for pupils whose needs are different to mainstream provision. It is worth re-iterating that the reality of policy designed to mitigate the effects of social inclusion can often fail those who most need its carefully targeted implementation.

The silence in relation to class is also significant. It is clear that one's life chances and the degree of inequality one endures is fundamentally connected to the class into which one is born as Sayer (2005, p. 1) contends:

Class matters to us not only because of differences in material wealth and economic security, but also because it affects our access to things, relationships, experiences, and practices which we have reason to value and hence our chances of living a fulfilling life.

The policy and legislative framework appears comprehensive but is very much focused on school reform. The lack of recognition of the issue of class in any policy documents represents a fundamental denial of the structural nature of educational inequality. The framework is also constructed with a strong emphasis on economic outcomes. The tendency for employer groups to become more involved in the development of educational policy was marked by the report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1991) which emphasised the need for an increased emphasis on vocational and technological training. Consequently, many of the intervention programmes that have been put in place in schools have had a narrow focus on the raising of test scores or achievement levels.

With the exception of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme where there is a focus on the improvement of relationships between parent and child and parent and school, all of the programmes to alleviate the effects of educational disadvantage are designed to raise reading scores, achievement levels or retention rates. The 'points system' which allocates places to students in third level institutions continues to exert a significant influence on how educational success is judged. The points required to enter a high status course, such as medicine, are the standard by which the achievement of all students is judged. Except for a small elite, everyone somehow falls below that achievement bar. Treating the educational system as one, compact and

unified, and constructing policy on this principle is problematic in the current profile of Irish society where, as Baker *et al.* (2004, p.32) argue:

.... people have complex and diverse needs and differ profoundly in their moral and political beliefs; we must surely take steps to tolerate their differences, to protect their personal freedoms and to enable them to participate in decision-making.

As already outlined there is an underlying sense in current policy that if interventions were more intense, better targeted and offered at an earlier age, then educational disadvantage would be eradicated from the system.

The report from the inspectorate on the issue of literacy and numeracy in disadvantaged schools (Department of Education and Science, 2005b) is indicative of this policy principle. The aims of education as outlined in the Irish primary school curriculum, re-iterated in this report, are holistic, aspirational and are legitimate for all students. Contextual criteria such as the high rate of absenteeism, poor levels of parental involvement and chronic poverty are identified but no analysis is offered as to the real impact of those factors.

A more recent report to launch the DEIS⁸ (Department of Education and Science, 2005a) initiative follows a similar pattern. It is acknowledged that high levels of literacy and numeracy are important to a superior quality of

⁸ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) launched by the Department of Education and Science in 2005 to provide a focussed action plan for greater social inclusion and better education attainment for educationally disadvantaged school communities. Primary Schools are either in Band 1, of which there are 198 schools, or Band 2 consisting of 147 schools. Second-level schools are not banded and there are 204 of these under the DEIS scheme.

life and that achievement levels of literacy and numeracy are still disappointingly low in schools serving disadvantaged communities. The report stresses however that insufficient emphasis has been given to measuring and reporting those lower achievement levels; consequently, the individual learning profile for low achieving students has not been adequately employed. It is acknowledged that effective planning and evaluation are essential to enhanced teaching. This will only be the case if teachers fully understand planning and evaluation as a tool of improvement and not as an additional layer of administration and paperwork on an already overburdened profession.

In regard to this thesis, a deficit model of educational disadvantage has an important implication in terms of addressing low teacher expectations. Maintaining positive and optimistic outcomes for students in areas that are socially excluded requires a great deal of emotional labour as the previous chapter has indicated. It also puts enormous pressure on teachers and schools to operate in a climate of constantly trying to make up a deficit in human capital. The educational system and schools and teachers in particular cannot do this alone.

Equality Framework

There can be little argument with the view that formal education is an important requirement for participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of society. It is also a means to self-fulfilment and an important indicator of the character of a given society (Lynch and Baker 2005), but clearly, not all citizens have equal access to the system nor are all citizens in

a position to benefit from what is being offered (Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Lynch, 1999; O'Brien, 2005; Reay, 1998). Irish research has, without a doubt, identified the nature and extent of educational disadvantage in Ireland and documented the unequal participation of students from low-income backgrounds. It has further demonstrated the inability of this socio-economic group to compete on the same terms as their more privileged counterparts (Clancy, 1995, 2005; Kellaghan, 2001; 2002). Indeed some commentators have remarked that the phenomenon of educational disadvantage is the most investigated topic in both Irish and international research.

A recent report in the Irish Independent newspaper (Walsh, 2006) revealed the large number of fee-paying and grind-school entrants to University College Dublin. While this might be a cause for celebration in those institutions, it is a depressing reminder of the two-tier system that now operates largely unchallenged in Irish education. Bourdieu (1974) has shown, those with economic capital are in a very good position to convert it into the kinds of cultural and social capital necessary for success. It is also clear that not everyone with economic capital alone has the necessary capacity to make the exchange. His theoretical framework also shows that working class students rarely aspire to high levels of educational attainment because they have internalised the limited opportunities for success that are available for those with lower levels of cultural capital.

The concept of *habitus* explains the way in which individual actions are structured to perpetuate existing opportunities. Chances of failure or success are internalised by individuals according to their social position and then

transformed into individual expectations or and aspirations. This explains the significant difference in values that often exists between school and the local community in educationally disadvantaged areas.

O'Brien's (2005) work on identifying the role of emotional capital of working class mothers in supporting their children through schooling has indicated the complexity of the processes which shape and perpetuate inequality in the Irish system. A key finding of her research shows that working class or educationally disadvantaged families are unable to use the system to their own advantage, particularly in relation educational care work. "Being marginally positioned means not being able to be as effective in doing educational care at transfer because of lack of knowledge and familiarity with the codes and practices dominant in the educational system (ibid., 2005 p. 226)".

Baker *et al.* (2004) identify four main inequalities in education.

- inequality in educational and related resources
- inequality of respect and recognition
- inequality of power
- inequality of love, care and solidarity

While each merits detailed discussion in its own right, the explicit naming of care and love as contexts for human flourishing is significant for the focus of this thesis. Nonetheless, the interconnectedness of each type of equality is important in building an understanding of the effects of the nature of systemic inequality. As Lynch and Lodge (2002, p.11) have argued, schools need to be acknowledged as 'affective enterprises'. This means interweaving

the care practices of teaching into the teaching and learning which is seen as the fundamental activity of school.

Care and Educational Disadvantage Framework

This discussion of the Irish educational system, its policy context and the values which underpin the concept of educational disadvantage has served to explore the background within which individual schools and teachers operate. The aims and objectives of policy mandates are not always clear and do not always have the outcomes that were intended. Although some of the ambiguity is part of the implementation process, another more pertinent reason is the way in which policy is filtered down through the system. Such filtering is played out both in schools and in the classrooms within those schools. Lipsky (1980) argues that the final delivery of policy is shaped on a daily basis by what are known as 'street level bureaucrats'. How the interaction between those bureaucrats and policy occurs shapes the unique atmosphere and culture of a particular school. It also fundamentally affects the nature of the education that pupils experience and shapes the care practices of the teachers who work there.

As the first two chapters of this research have pointed out, the ethic of care and care practices are traditionally located in society in the realm of the affective, private domain of parenting, especially mothering. However, teaching is an activity in the public, cognitive domain where skilled persons with specialist, technical knowledge engage with students in a formal manner and where detailed goals and objectives guide the operation of that engagement. The formal structures of school are also framed by a number of

external factors which include the type of leadership in the school structure, the degree to which democracy is present in the decision making process. These are considered in an examination of the framework of care within the school:

- Curriculum
- Ethos
- Teacher Identities
- School leadership

Care interfaces with, and is shaped by with each of these aspects of school life and so each will be considered in turn.

Curriculum

Western philosophy has been shaped by the view that intellectual thought and the cultivation of rationality are superior activities in human endeavour. While many might disagree with this idea, it is still a powerful force in modern society and it can be argued that it is a fundamental principle on which the formation and development of curriculum has been founded (Dewey, 1966; Noddings, 2003). Consequently, there exists a hierarchy of subjects which are abstract or theoretical and which are valued more than the creative or the practical. The examination system at second level is a reflection of this principle where the high-status and much sought after places at third level are those with a strong mathematical or scientific orientation.

The situation at primary level is somewhat different. The introduction of a new, revised primary curriculum in Ireland in 1999 emphasised the development of the creative as well as the scientific and rational. In practice, a very demanding array of subjects, including Visual Arts, Drama, P.E., Music and Social and Environment Science, along with the requirement to spend fifteen hours per week on English, Irish and Maths, leaves very little accommodation for creativity.

In educationally disadvantaged schools with as many as 30% of the school population struggling with basic literacy and numeracy, there is considerable pressure on teachers to deliver the breadth of curriculum that is theoretically envisaged. However, one cannot ignore the most obvious fact that there are two opposing systems at primary and second level, one child-centred and holistic and the other focused on achievement and examination success.

The discussion of the legislative and policy framework has shown that while significant attempts have been made to tackle the challenge of educational disadvantage, it is a reform on the periphery of the system. This is evident in the compensatory nature of the programmes that have recently been put in place (Leaving Certificate Applied, DEIS, School Completion Programme, etc.). At primary level, increased support for literacy and numeracy are added on to the existing programme of reading and language, although efforts are underway to support teachers in the more effective methods of teaching reading and writing. All of the programmes, whether at primary or second level, are in turn bound by increased levels of accountability, assessment and performativity criteria.

There is an underlying assumption that keeping all students in schools for longer and supporting better access to, and participation in, a single mainstream curriculum is the best option for everyone. In this sense, curriculum is seen as a product to be consumed by all and to be imparted by a teacher, who has the knowledge, to the student who does not (Looney, 2000).

This is especially true at second level where the curriculum is rigidly segregated into specific subjects and the school day is broken down into small (usually forty minutes) instructional units. The arbitrary delineation of subjects in such a manner in an age where knowledge is simply not organised in the same way makes it almost impossible for some students to make connections between the types of learning and the borders of knowledge bases. The concept of curriculum, as a self-contained package, designed to be imparted by teachers to willing students, is a rarely challenged notion.

Ethos

The notion of school culture or ethos is a concept which, although significant, is often an intangible and obscure one. The White Paper, *Charting our Educational Future* (DES 1995, p.9) describes school ethos as encompassing collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions aspirations and goals. Furlong (2000) further contends that it is the defining reality within the school providing its members with a sense of identity and a structure of support. In a sense it is the 'glue' which holds the organisation together. The

caring ethos of a school is therefore an important location for the care practices of teachers⁹.

Glover and Coleman's (2005) review of the literature on this topic suggests that the terms, ethos, culture and climate are often used interchangeably even though they have different meanings and different contexts. Both educationalists and researchers can be unsure as to what specifically they mean when talking about school culture, climate or ethos and are only really consistently sure that every school is different no matter how many significant factors they have in common.

The literature further suggests that the term *climate* is more often used when describing the practical considerations of the organisation of school (Moos 1979), while *ethos* is more often understood in terms of the relationships (Donnelly 2000; Smith, 2003). *Culture* may also be viewed as the integrative force that binds the two former terms and acts as a descriptor of the uniqueness of each school. Handy (1993) identified a number of differences in organisational climate which may equally apply to schools. These were:

- Power culture (revolving around a strong central leader)
- Task culture (getting the task done)
- Role culture (a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure)
- Person culture (individualistic)

⁹ Just as care can be understood as the 'glue' that holds society so may the caring ethos of the school be seen as that which holds together the various and sometimes competing aspects of school life.

How a school positions itself within some or all of the above categories shapes the types of relationships that form between teachers and the following - pupils, fellow teachers, other school leaders, parents and the wider community. It is the formation of relationships that is central to understandings of care practices in schools and indeed the nature of teaching itself. There is sufficient international evidence to indicate that an absence of positive social relationships between pupils and teachers will have an adverse effect on performance, absenteeism and pupil self image and increase the chances of early school leaving (Boldt, 2000; Darmody, 2007). These relationships are formed in the context of the individual school policies and practices. Thus the way a school deals with absenteeism, what its approach to democratic decision making is, how it develops pupil self-esteem and how it organises subject choice are significant in the assessment of a school's ethos (Konu and Rimpela, 2002).

Schools may be located in various combinations of organisational structures at particular times in the life of the school. A school that is preparing for a Whole School Examination (WSE) will have a very different climate to a school that is preparing to celebrate the award of a Green Flag¹⁰ or similar occasion.

There are many descriptions of the term 'ethos' but the one which seems most suited to this research comes from Donnelly (2000 p.162). "Ethos is a fashionable and nebulous term often employed by organisational theorists,

¹⁰ This is an award given for excellence in Environmental Awareness.

educationalists and theologians to describe the distinctive range of values and beliefs which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organisation”.

Although the definition is formed from the point of view of a specific religion or church, this designation is apt for the general ethos of a school as it uses the term atmosphere. This is the term that many people use to describe the feeling they get when they enter a school for the first time. While it may be impossible to define accurately, it is the term that most encapsulates what an individual senses about the school, its beliefs, its approaches and its values¹¹.

Teacher Identities and Expectations

As the policy framework has shown, the basis of school reform and the increased focus on improving standards has been on the academic performance of its pupils. This can create fundamental tensions within a school and affect the balance between performativity and care that teachers must negotiate on a daily basis. This negotiation is part of the ongoing process of identity formation which was the part of the discussion in Chapter Two. A teacher’s experience, both professional and personal, is part of the process whereby knowledge of practice is built up. The pedagogical practice

¹¹ Increasingly, as educationally disadvantaged schools become more involved in their local communities as part of new and innovative ways of networking, there is an opportunity to re-define the ethos of a school in tandem with the values of the local community.

that evolves is based on the response to student needs and is continuously enacted through the personal and professional beliefs of the teacher.

Alsup, (2005 p.88) states, "As teachers pursue their professional lives and commit more and more successful classroom experiences to memory, their expertise grows". Of course, this expertise is not simply a cognitive one. It is constructed through the memories, values, relationships and emotional interaction with the many realities of teaching life (Dunne, 2005).

All the teachers interviewed for this thesis work or have worked for a number of years in schools designated as educationally disadvantaged. Their collective experience and expertise has been formed to a large extent in that educationally disadvantaged setting but also has been continuously negotiated through their own beliefs, values and understandings. This may present as another site of possible tension which will be examined later. Such conflict between value systems affects teacher expectations and the unique ethos of each school. Smyth (2000) has identified two significant factors that cause schools to differ:

- The nature of the pupil intake
- The policy and practice within the school itself

Educationally disadvantaged schools traditionally have had little or no control over their pupil intake and this is especially true of primary schools where schools are required to accommodate pupils from the local catchment area. As O'Brien (2005) has clearly indicated, working class families almost always tend to choose the local school (particularly at second level) as their

preferred option. Thus the schools are rather homogenous in class intake. A number of reasons are cited for this but the choice was made primarily on the basis of informal knowledge and the knowledge of their own children. 'Local' was considered to be the safest option and the place where their children would be most content.

With respect to individual policies and practices, educationally disadvantaged schools do not exercise the same degree of control over their intake as more middle class schools do. Nevertheless, the practice of streaming, prevalent in most second-level schools and in some primary schools, ensures a certain stratification of pupils, even if the process is internal (Oakes, 1985; Smyth, 2000). As Baker *et al.* (2004) indicate, the literature is clear in indicating that the placing of students in a lower track or stream significantly disadvantages them both in terms of their attainment and their self-esteem. It also has a significant effect on teacher expectations and motivation.

In a discussion on classroom knowledge, Keddie (1984) remarked that teachers most dislike the teaching of 'C' stream pupils because they believed them to be least like themselves (teachers). There is an assumption that pupils in this band or category will both contest the knowledge on offer and disrupt the norms of in terms of appropriate social and moral behaviour. Smyth (2000, p.100) also argues, "Teacher expectations also play a significant role in shaping pupil experiences of schooling with pupils doing better in their exams in schools characterised by higher expectations".

Although teacher expectations are somewhat unclear as a concept, there is evidence to suggest that ‘academic optimism’ or an individual’s positive belief that he or she can make a difference does have a very positive effect on students’ outcomes (Hoy *et al.*, 2008) Whether that positive outlook is an individual teacher characteristic or the product of the culture or ethos of a school is the subject of debate. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to argue that a strong sense of ‘academic optimism’ is a product of a structure made up of positive emotions, a robust sense of purpose and a climate of democratic co-operation. Indeed, academic optimism could be regarded as a central component of the care ethic.

Leadership

Without a doubt the concept of educational leadership is central to understanding schools and how they work. The position of school leader is at the core of how the school operates and the type of experience it provides for the students, staff and parents alike. Staff members who are not necessarily in formal leadership roles may also display real leadership and can be a powerful influence in the determination of the type of educational experience in the school. Formal leadership responsibility, of course, rests with the school principal and until relatively recently in Ireland, there was no formal training for this important educational role. In the literature, there is broad agreement that educational leadership makes a difference, but not surprisingly there are a substantial range of definitions as to what educational leadership actually is, and which versions are specifically the ones that are more significant than others. Broadly speaking, instructional leadership and

distributive leadership are two distinct styles of leadership. While instructional leadership tends to focus on student outcomes and the learning process within the school, the distribution of leadership facilitates a more collaborative approach and shapes a collective agency within the school. Spillane *et al.*, (2003, p. 542) argue that “school leadership is best understood as distributed leadership stretched over the school’s social and situational contexts”.

Beatty (2000) contends that while views of leadership as *influence* and leadership as *support* have dominated international literature, the absence of the emotions has seriously restricted our understanding of the creative aspects of human organisations. In Beatty’s view, teachers and leaders have to manage a great number of relationships, both personal and professional every day, which often fall short of or even compromise the individual’s capacity to perform well. Sachs and Blackmore (1998, p.270) emphasis the emotional aspects of leadership.

Being a leader in schools involves immense amounts of emotional labour. This is not only in terms of performance or ‘acting out’ feelings superficially, but also in terms of consciously evoking the necessary emotional engagement required to undertake one’s job effectively in one’s own eyes but also in the eyes of others.

Leaders then can be the ones to make important links to teachers, bridging the sense of isolation. In other words, the interface of care and care practices can be the location for school leaders to integrate various styles and personal approaches. As Noddings (1992, p.171) points out, “caring for a set of ideas such as mathematics or art has much in common with caring for people”.

Conclusion

Ireland's educational system, a single, non-differentiated and unified one with a common curriculum and a common format for assessment has not always best served the interests of those who live and go to school in excluded and educationally disadvantaged communities. Policy interventions with inadequate resources and objectives that are underpinned by neo-liberal values, have often served only to maintain the power and privilege of the middle classes even though they appear to be inclusive in both aspiration and content. As Lynch and Baker (2005) argue, education is inherently connected with the economic system of the country. The necessary resources must be available to enable successful participation in the opportunities that education has to offer, but it is also a means of selection and stratification for the labour market. In the current climate, the idea of education as a common good has been replaced by education as a commodity which is subject to the forces of consumer choice.

This chapter has explored the global background to the current international educational reform movement and outlined the values and philosophical principles which have underpinned its momentum. It has also mapped out the Irish policy framework which has shaped current provision. The construction of the concept of educational disadvantage as a deficit has been presented in the inter-connected and sometimes opposing circles of values, policy and provision.

While it is acknowledged that educational disadvantaged is a much researched topic, some of the research may be criticised as too narrow in its

focus and too reliant on outcomes that overlook other causal conditions. Educational achievement cannot be assessed outside of the social and cultural contexts of local communities.

As this thesis is concerned with the care actions of teachers, the chapter has also outlined some important school-based issues (i.e. curriculum, ethos, teacher identity, expectations and leadership) which are pertinent to the connection between care and practice in an educationally disadvantaged setting. These will be developed fully in the discussion of the data in Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

One of the more important reasons for undertaking educational research, especially practitioner research, is to enhance practitioner knowledge so that improved knowledge will contribute to further theoretical understandings. The status of such research, however, has traditionally been low and beleaguered by fragmentation, under-funding and ideological differences which have their roots in the political, cultural and economic discourses of society. Currently, it is uplifting to know that there is an increasing awareness of the significance of practitioner research among teachers and educators themselves and within the research community.

Griffiths (1998) contends that this type of educational research tends to focus on recent educational contexts because of its inherent need to be innovative and original. Very often, themes of social justice and equality can be presented as an open challenge to economic efficiency, but the crucial challenge is the positioning of the research question to facilitate such a challenge. The report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (Department of Education and Science 2005, p.31) touched on this issue in its criticism of some of the evaluations carried out on various Department of Education and Science intervention programmes to tackle disadvantage. "It is possible that the failure to find achievement effects is due to the features of the evaluation design rather than the weaknesses in the programme".

Consequently, a key issue for practitioners, such as myself, is whether or not the research topic is focusing on the right questions. This thesis, which

focuses on teachers in disadvantaged schools and their care practices, is located within the interpretive tradition where there is a focus on reality as experienced by individuals and groups. Consequently, one of the important challenges is to frame a question or a series of questions which will adequately highlight a relatively unexplored aspect of education in general and Irish education in particular.

This chapter will outline the research context and hypothesis and examine the theoretical frameworks used to articulate the question. It will also identify the various steps taken to construct the research design and gather the data as well as discussing the merits of the steps undertaken. A description of the interview sample, along with the interview schedule is presented. Lastly, this chapter will highlight the analytical issues and the significant challenges that the research framework presents.

Research Context and Hypothesis

As an educator who has worked exclusively in educationally disadvantaged settings, I have, over the years, experienced many school-based interventions designed to alleviate social exclusion. In particular, I have observed at close hand the more recent trend for increased evaluation through assessment and measurement. The traditional focus on improved literacy and numeracy skills has not yielded the desired improvement in better educational achievement for educationally disadvantaged pupils, nor has it altered the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who participate in third level

education¹². This is not to say that improved standards in literacy and numeracy are not important. On the contrary, they are fundamental to the quality of an individual's life; however, even a cursory examination of the most recent action plan, *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS 2005a, p.35) shows clearly where the policy emphasis lies. "To date, sufficient emphasis has not been placed on measuring and reporting, on a systematic basis the achievement levels of children in literacy and numeracy". Pursuing such policies without any real acknowledgement of the structural inequalities in Irish education will ultimately continue to fail the most socially excluded and marginalised members of our society (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Ball, 1994; Lynch 1999).

Research Context - Care and Schooling

This research on care practices is mediated through a number of different contexts (educational disadvantage, emotional labour and teacher identity) each of which has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters. The Irish educational system has undergone considerable reform in the last decade but increasingly it is shaped by economic rationalism, managerialism and accountability. The pressures of the market have placed a greater burden on all schools, but especially on educationally disadvantaged ones, to prioritise subjects such as information technology skills, science and foreign languages. For those schools in socially excluded areas, these supplementary requirements generate an additional challenge above and beyond the more

¹²O'Connell *et al.* (2006) showed that although there was an increase in third level participation rates among the children of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, they are still disproportionately under-represented in third level institutions.

basic problems of low attendance, poor achievement levels, particularly in literacy and numeracy, early school drop-out and substance misuse. Given the multiplicity of social problems within the local environment, schools are often forced to play a supplementary role in the social and familial care of their pupils.

O'Connor and Paterson (1994, p.115) argue that because of rapid social changes, "many teachers are being asked to undertake some of the functions that families traditionally performed". This significant caring role, while given some lip service, is in reality, largely ignored in Irish education. Baker *et al.* (2004 p. 222) echo this sentiment in strong terms.

Resistance to narratives of love, care and solidarity comes not only from those who regard such issues as private, unnameable non-political matters, but also from those who fear that such narratives would distract from a necessary material analysis of economic and political relations.

Perhaps one of the most important issues facing pupils in socially excluded communities is the issue of early school drop-out. Research has shown that the pupil-teacher relationship is often the crucial factor in whether or not some pupils remain in school. (Boldt, 1998, 2004; O'Brien, 2004 and Smyth *et al.*, 2004). The rational measurement approach in Irish education, particularly at second level, means that issues of care, within the pupil teacher relationship, are not valued or given significance by policy makers and many researchers.

Lynch (1999, p. 278) contends that caring and love labour are undervalued because they do not have an exchange value.

For it is undoubtedly the case that caring has been hidden behind capital, and the resources, skills and capacities needed to care have not been seriously examined, nor has there been a serious attempt to develop them through schooling, which is after all the major culture-legitimizing institution in our society.

The ethic of care, according to Held (2006, p.13) “works usually with a concept of the person as relational rather than as the self-sufficient, independent individuals of the dominant moral theories”. In such a conceptual framework it is possible to view care practices as a type of resistance to the liberal values which shape Irish education offering a critical voice to the curriculum and the unified nature of provision. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996, p.9) are especially vocal on this point and argue that the kind of knowledge that is valued by school systems (i.e. academic, abstract and controlled by university departments) is exactly the kind of knowledge that has little or no relevance or interest for children of excluded communities.

(Such education) ...also privileges knowledge and cognition above care as the foundation of school-teaching - yet it is the absence of being cared for much more than the absence of being cognitively challenged that mainly leads young people to drop out of secondary school.

While the larger context of care provides the backdrop to this research, there are many issues that need to be explored within the consideration of care as an aspect of teachers’ professional practice. These were discussed in Chapter Two. Despite the fact that there is a growing recognition of the connection between caring and teaching, there is still somewhat of a reluctance to address the emotional labour involved in those care practices actively (Isenbarger and Zembylas, 2006). Consequently, this research hopes to establish that care practices are essential to the advancement of educational

goals and vital to the quality of educational experiences that are available to students in educationally disadvantaged schools. Using this broad context, the responses to the questions and the commitment of teachers to care and care practices are examined.

The final dimension of care practices to be explored is teacher identity. Increasing managerialism and public service accountability have led to a situation where teachers are forced to move away from their moral and social commitments even though a significant body of the research into teachers' narratives indicate that many experienced teachers take caring for the well-being of their students as part of their professional ethic (Hargreaves, 1994; Held, 2006; Nias, 1989; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2003). There is an increasing tension between the demands of the system and the need to maintain the caring aspect of the teaching role.

Masculine values which define professionalism and new institutional norms therefore undermine the traditional affective practices of teachers. In a sense, the concept of care highlights the processes that transform teachers from educators to a type of 'educarer' (Lynch *et al.*, 2008). Of course, some more mainstream or traditional teachers may object to this transformation, but my experience has taught me that for very many teachers working in socially excluded communities, teacher identity is significantly influenced by a strong ethic of care. This study then is important if, as my initial hypothesis, asserts, a significant part of the teaching and learning process in an educationally disadvantaged environment is framed by care practices. Consequently, in

some sense, care practices may be seen as a resistance to the economic imperatives of the post-modern world.

Theoretical Perspective

Knowledge claims at the inception of research are important for a variety of reasons. The epistemology, philosophical assumptions and the methodology locate the research and the researcher in very definite theoretical and political arenas (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003). The significance of a knowledge claim also lies in the fact that it can contribute to the accumulated knowledge on the particular topic while challenging existing theoretical ideas and offer significant improvement in practice (Bassey, 1999).

This research is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and that individuals make sense of their world through an examination of their own experiences. It is also framed by the notion that meaning is generated by social situations. Nonetheless, as Harding (1991, p.116) points out:

What we see in the world around us is a function not just of what is there plus our individual talents and skills but of how our society designs the cultural filters through which we observe the world around and within us and how it institutionalises those filters in ways that leave them invisible to individuals

The goal then of research underpinned by this knowledge claim is to seek out complexities of meaning and interpretations of that meaning. Feminist scholarship has consistently critiqued mainstream epistemology as a male defined theory. It has unswervingly rejected the notion of a separate theory and practice, and of a division between researcher and researched (Williams,

1993). While the development of a single feminist epistemology has been beset somewhat by ideological differences, it still continues to contest existing epistemological norms and highlight the hidden relations of power. In doing so, objectivity is incorporated with subjectivity and there is an awareness of the need to avoid exploitation of research subjects. A feminist epistemology disputes the conventional view that the mind is the only reliable source of knowledge. Therefore, it fundamentally challenges the Cartesian stance which gives primacy to the rational as the only valid means of generating knowledge. It also critiques the notion of the 'knower' being an independent being, unaffected by the social context.

This research has a solid focus on the emotional labour involved when teachers carry out care practices. A feminist approach is a way of validating those emotional experiences and legitimising the knowledge produced. Arguments made by Krook (2007) strongly suggest that the emancipatory aspect of feminist epistemology and feminist methodology is found in consciousness-raising.

Assisting participants to recognise the hidden (i.e. care practices) is important in helping to identify strategies for change. Such an emancipatory approach to research, especially educational research can be closely associated with the writings of Freire (1998) where the oppressed are liberated through focussing on their own particular lived experience. To engage in critical dialogue is one of the most effective ways to delimit opportunities and open up a newer, more confident view.

My own values as researcher and my experience as an educator have shaped the choice of topic, the framing of the research problem and the design of the research. I have had a lifelong interest in the issue of care in the school setting and in the latter part of my career have been able to articulate my understanding of the issues and challenges through a combination of professional experience and further study. Moreover, my current position as school principal has brought me to a position of greater intellectual and professional confidence.

Maykut and Moorehouse (1994) argue that tacit knowledge (unarticulated knowledge) and explicit knowledge (knowledge subject to critical reflection) form the basis for the interpretation of meaning. As I have worked for most of my professional life in socially excluded school communities, I have come to believe, through a process of theoretical and experiential learning that disadvantaged school communities, while debarred from access to power and privilege in society, *can* be agents of transformation. A first step in that transformation is the articulation of experience. Although it is debatable that the experiences of teachers are integral to the narratives of the local community, they are significant care givers and that care is mediated through members of the local community. My task as researcher therefore is to stimulate the process by documenting the narratives of selected individual teachers.

This perspective also finds a resonance in critical theory which is focused on the need to build relationships between individuals and to mitigate the effects of the free-market, capitalist economy on the individual, and on society in

general. The concern of critical theorists is on how everyday life has been colonised by the social, systemic world of institutions and how systems of power and authority are increasingly making interpersonal relationships more calculated and impersonal (Habermas, 1984; Bourdieu, 1974, 1997; Giroux 1983, 1992). There is an imperative not just to understand the social constraints and inequalities in the system but to facilitate change. Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.28) sum this view up succinctly.

Its purpose (critical theory) is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society.

Research Question

The interconnected dimensions of care, educational disadvantage, teachers' emotional labour and professional identity shape the framework for this research. The purpose of this study is to identify the actions and attitudes that constitute the concept of care among teachers in those educationally disadvantaged settings. The issues of *what* are the actions that teachers carry out on a daily basis, *why* such care practices are significant and *how* they impact on educational disadvantage are the main questions which will underpin the investigation. This framework formed the basis for the pilot interviews and the final interview schedule. Questions which the research will address are:

- How do teachers understand their own actions in daily care?
- What is the significance of those care practices for teachers themselves?

- How are those care practices significant for educational disadvantage?
- Can care practice among teachers be seen as resistance to liberal principles of individualism?

Research Design (Case Study)

The research focus is on the daily care practices of teachers in schools designated as educationally disadvantaged in order to build understandings of the meaning of care for teachers in these schools. The case study, as Bassey (1999, p.3) suggests, is an excellent method for both *theory testing* and *theory seeking*. Yin (1993) also identifies these categories but refers to them respectively as 'explanatory' and 'exploratory'. In this way a case study can investigate the significant features of a case and present a plausible interpretation of the results. As this research is concerned with documenting the care experiences of teachers in their daily practice, it seems that the use of the case study in this case will be more on the line of a *theory seeking* case study.

Previous research in the general area of care has favoured the ethnographic approach as the researchers deemed it to be a more suitable way of building up narratives based on individual experiences. Local, in-depth case studies have often been criticised by the traditional, positivist, research community on the basis that they rarely produce quantifiable facts or figures from which broad statements can be made. The feminist approach fundamentally rejects this view, and it is because of the focus on the actual lived experience of the

participants that the case study was chosen as a methodology for this research.

Denscombe (2003, p.31) argues that the advantage of the case study is “to arrive at the general by looking at the specific”. Moreover, it also allows the researcher to focus on relationships and processes which are fundamental to building up understandings of care in teachers’ practices. He states:

In this respect case *studies tend to be* ‘holistic’ rather than deal with ‘isolated factors’. It follows from this that within case studies there is a tendency to emphasis the detailed workings of the relationships and social processes, rather than restrict attention to the outcomes from these (emphasis in the original) (ibid.)”.

This seemed to me to be significant as the research is attempting to articulate, through the educators’ own narratives, a vision of care practices in the school setting. Another important consideration in selecting the case study was the inductive aspect of the data analyses and the greater significance given to trustworthiness rather than the more traditional components of reliability and validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is important to recognise that a case study is not as much a research method as a research strategy.

In an educational world where bureaucratic consensus and achievement targets are increasingly the norm, the unexpected or the unexplored are easy to overlook but need to be considered (Hargreaves, 1994). For this thesis teachers were selected on the basis of their understandings of care and their experience in working in a disadvantaged setting. As a research topic, care practices among teachers is a relatively new area, especially in the Irish context. To maximise the amount of research data and to increase the

trustworthiness of the conclusions, it was important to select both teachers who had a familiarity with the issues involved and who worked in a variety of educational roles.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a means of collecting the data. Maykut and Moorehouse (1994) contend that this approach is valuable when little is known about a topic as is the case with care practices of teachers. Creswell (2003, p.186) believes that interviews are useful when participants cannot be readily observed and that they allow the researchers to take control over the line of questioning. Cohen *et al.* (2000, p.279) identify a number of dimensions that must be kept to the forefront when designing the interview schedule and more importantly, when conducting the interviews themselves.

These dimensions are:

- Cognitive (has the interviewer sufficient knowledge of the issues herself?)
- Ethical (e.g. clarifying the status of ‘off the record comments’)
- Emotional and interpersonal (e.g. active listening on the part of the interviewer)
- The power relations between the subject and the interviewer

Power and Reflexivity

Trust, curiosity and naturalness are qualities that interviewers and participants need to generate the in-depth responses necessary for data analysis in qualitative research (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). I believe that because of my long association with the local community and the fact that all of the

participants were known to me, made it easier for those participants to have a high degree of trust in the integrity of the interviews, and also to feel a sense of naturalness about the process. High degrees of trust are extremely important in an exploration which will probe details of teachers' daily care practices and which will also examine teachers' own perceptions of themselves as care givers.

The issue of reflexivity is a challenge to any ethnographic study as the cultural, social and personal experiences of the researcher play a central role in mediating all aspects of the research (Denscombe, 2003). Reflecting on the particular challenges that this poses for the research is an important element in the overall research process but no matter how hard one tries to minimise it, there is an inherent imbalance between the interviewer and the interviewee. Feminist and egalitarian scholarship has rightly and consistently highlighted the challenges that power differentials pose for the interview process (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Lynch, 2005; Oliver, 1997).

It is the work of Wolf, (1996, *cited in* Harding and Norberg 2005) that clearly illuminates the three main aspects to the dilemma of power in a feminist approach to field work. The first is related to the social power differential between researchers and researched. In my own case, as a school principal, I was conscious that for some participants, I might be perceived as an authority figure and so the levels of trust that are needed for the interview process would be compromised. To lessen this possibility, none of the interviewees were from my own school as I felt that any articulation of individual care practices in the school context would be too awkward in that

case. On the other hand, as a number of the interviewees were also school principals, my own position was helpful in establishing a level of openness and collegiality for those participants. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees faced the same set of educational, social and resource challenges on a daily basis, so I felt that there would be an inherent curiosity on their part to explore the topic of care practices.

The second challenge in the issue of power is related to the formation of the research process. As teachers' care practices are a relatively un-researched phenomenon in Irish educational research, I felt that there was little opportunity to include the participants themselves in the design or shape of the research process as, for many, the subjects of care practices had not been articulated prior to this. In formulating the research questions and framing the design I have attempted to include my own extensive experience in the area of educational disadvantage combined with a thorough search of the literature.

The final issue of power relates to the writing up of the research where I have endeavoured to present, as accurately as possible, an understanding of what the interviewees were attempting to express. Of course, it would be impossible to be completely objective as my own values and experiences shape the way in which I have understood what the participants expressed. A way to minimise this difficulty would have been to utilise additional modes of data, such as focus groups. Initially, this was considered but given the time and personal commitment that the participants had already pledged, it was decided not to pursue this.

Pilot Study

Before the research began, I was unsure about the ability or willingness of teachers to engage with me in articulating their care practices. While I had been in a number of discussions and dialogues with colleagues and friends on this topic over the course of my professional life, I had not conducted any formal exploration of care or care practices before. The solution then, was to undertake a small pilot study to examine the parameters of the research design, to test the effectiveness of the interview schedule and to test my own confidence as an interviewer. Although the participants in the pilot were also known to me, I prepared a short statement to outline, in a uniform way the aims and purpose of the research and the other considerations that would be of interest to the interviewees. The statement (included in Appendix Two) covered the following areas.

- The purpose of the research
- The purpose of the interview
- How the findings will be disseminated
- An assurance of confidentiality
- Permission to record the interview either in writing or on tape
- Permission to use the actual data in the study

Three participants were selected for the pilot interviews. They were a second-level teacher who was currently working as a Visiting Teacher for Travellers, a primary school class teacher and a recently appointed primary school principal. All had experience of working in educationally

disadvantaged areas and all had a considerable amount of teaching experience. The pilot interviews took place in August 2007.

The pilot study, although small, was useful, primarily to test the focus and accuracy of the interview schedule. It was also important for me as an interviewer to gain experience with the semi-structured interview process where there has to be a balance between direct questions and more free ranging discussion. Such a balance is central to eliciting as much of an in-depth response as possible from the participants.

Case Studies (Theoretical Sample)

Qualitative research such as this exploration of care practices requires a different type of sample to the more traditional, randomness of a quantitative sample. The purposeful selection of a group both acknowledges the complexity of human and social phenomena and the limits of the generalisability of any such study (Maykut and Moorehouse 1994; Yin 2003). The school community is made up of a number of different players with varying degrees of access to power and influence. Several possibilities for the sample were available, including an in-depth study of a particular school, a selection of teachers from a single primary and a single second-level school, or a sample of teachers and principals from a variety of different educator roles. Each of these was considered in turn as selection on the basis of 'suitability', is an important justification for any case study (Denscombe 2003).

Because of my own interest in the area of care and my long association and experience of the issues facing educationally disadvantaged schools, I decided to focus on teachers, in general, as the key informants for this research. While work has been done on the care practices of women, and mothers in particular, (O'Brien 2005) the care narratives of this group have not been noted before in the Irish context. Teachers are one of the more powerful groups in the school community and while it would have been interesting to design the case study around a particular school or schools, this research was more concerned with individual teachers, teacher identity and the emotional labour involved in care practices. Consequently, the type of sample, which is outlined below, is a 'theoretical sample', which is designed to generate categories so that the relationship between those categories can be shown. This type of sample also minimises variations and highlights commonalities while at the same time maximises differences to increase the depth and facilitate a better integration of the findings (Glasser and Strauss 1967).

The case study (theoretical sample) was divided evenly across primary and second level. A total of 18 (n=18) teachers were selected. The number of males and females were not evenly divided as the teaching profession is predominately female and so an even number of each gender would represent a disproportionate number of male educators. The sample contained six male educators.

The teaching profession has changed in many ways over the last number of years in Irish schools, especially in those schools with designated

disadvantaged status. There are a variety of new positions in the system that are somewhat removed from the more traditional role of class or subject teacher. The sample therefore includes a number of those roles as are currently in operation in educationally disadvantaged schools. Special Needs Assistants (SNA) were not included as they are not teachers in the more traditional sense and because they have a very specific caring role for individual students who have special educational needs¹³.

Those selected were chosen on the basis that they were currently working or had experience of working in an educationally disadvantaged setting. The nine primary school participants worked in seven different schools. Three of those schools were located in the same geographical area, one in an adjacent area, and the remainder were based in schools in the greater Dublin region. At second-level, eight of the participants worked in five different schools, three of which were based in the same area. The remaining interviewee worked in a number of different schools all of whom were in the greater Dublin area.

There were five principals among the participants, two second level and three from the primary sector. The table below indicates the participants, their professional role and the length of their teaching experience. It is clear from the table that the participants are by and large, very experienced teachers with an average of twenty six years teaching across the sample. The literature

¹³ The term 'special educational needs' is one that is used by policy-makers and is familiar to those in the educational setting. It is recognised that the disability movement does not accept this term and prefer to use the term 'learning disability'.

(Hargreaves, 1999; Nias, 1999; Sugrue, 1997; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002), has suggested that those who have a good deal of professional experience are more likely to have integrated their personal and professional identities well and be more confident in their both the practice and beliefs. For this reason, those with longer teaching experience were considered ahead of newly qualified teachers. All the names are pseudonyms. The three interviewees from the pilot interviews are included in this table and are indicated by an asterisk.

Table 1: Participant Profile (N = 18)

Primary				Second-Level			
Name	Gender	Role	Experience	Name	Gender	Role	Experience
Fionn	M	Principal *	26 years	Helena	F	VTT*	25 years
Nikita	F	Class Teacher *	23 years	Eileen	F	HSCL	17 years
Hilary	M	Principal	32 years	Fergus	M	Principal	31 years
Peter	M	Class Teacher	33 years	Brenda	M	Principal	32 years
Tim	M	Class Teacher	34 years	Matt	M	HSCL	36 years
Bernard	M	Class Teacher	36 years	Amy	F	Class Teacher	27 years
Annette	F	Principal	35 years	Celine	F	VTOS	25 years
Gillian	F	HSCL	8 years	Sally	F	Class Teacher	11 years
Carmel	F	Class Teacher	21 years	Pamela	F	Class Teacher	16 years

*= participants in the pilot interviews

HSCL= Home School Community Co-ordinator

VTT=Visiting Teacher for Travellers

VTOS= Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme

Roles

Class Teachers

In Irish primary schools class teachers teach a full class of pupils for a minimum of a year. In rural schools there may be multiple class levels in a single class grouping. The majority teach all subjects in the curriculum. In some cases, depending on the internal organisation within individual schools,

they may work in a collaborative or co-operative way with resource or other special needs teachers and special needs assistants. At second-level, class teachers are usually subject teachers although they may have responsibility for a particular class or groups of classes as a class tutor or year head. Class teachers or subject teachers have responsibility for preparing students for public exams at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels.

Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinators (HSCL)

The role of the HSCL co-ordinator is similar at both primary and second level. The task of the co-ordinator is to maximise the involvement of parents in their children's education. It is a wide ranging role and includes home visitation, organising training and development and giving support to parents in their dealings with the school. At primary level, a HSCL co-ordinator is shared between two schools which have the same parent base (i.e. a junior and senior school or a boys' and girls' school). The HSCL co-ordinator is school-based.

Visiting Teacher for Travellers (VTT)

The work of the VTT is somewhat similar to the work of the HSCL but the focus is exclusively on Traveller families. VTTs work in a particular geographical area and support the Traveller families in that area with regard to education. This can involve helping students to enrol in school, assisting the smooth transfer from primary to second level, or working with school personnel on issues relating to Travellers and education. The VTT is geographically based and works with a number of schools in that area.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

VTOS co-ordinators teach on a programme of vocationally oriented certification designed to give educational opportunities to students who left school early. They are attached to the VEC schools or VEC Post-Leaving Certificate Colleges (PLCs). They provide preparation for Junior Cert, Leaving Certificate and FETAC¹⁴ level certification

School Principals

In the Irish context at primary level, the majority of school principals are also teaching principals in small schools; however, in an urban environment it is usually the case that principals are administrative and do not have teaching duties to perform. All the primary principals in this research are administrative principals. At second level, the principal is always in an administrative role and, depending on the size of the school, may also have an administrative deputy principal.

Table 2 Breakdown of sample by level and role

Primary	Secondary	Principals	Class Teachers	Other teachers
9	9	5	8	5
50%	50%	28%	44%	28%

Interviews

The interview format is especially suited to the case study approach because the research involved is about human affairs or the human condition. Interviews are more guided conversations where the emphasis on flexibility

¹⁴ FETAC is the National award body for further education and training.

and fluidity (Maykut and Moorehouse, 1994; Yin, 2003). It is important then to balance the questions designed to gather the data with the need to be friendly and non-threatening. This is especially true of this research where participants were being asked about aspects of their professional lives that had not been researched before. For many teachers in this study, care and care practices were deeply embedded into the daily classroom routines and pedagogies. The challenge then was to encourage the participants to identify and name these actions and then reflect on them.

The semi-structured approach was selected as it seemed to offer the best balance between direct and non-direct questions. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) stress the importance of trying to achieve a certain symmetry between the interview pair. In that way I attempted to conduct the interviews with both the researcher and the interviewee as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.126) term them, 'participant observers'.

This approach was not without its challenges. On the one hand, as all of the participants were educators, there was an implicit understanding that both the researcher and the interviewees shared the same body of professional knowledge. The shared personal and professional knowledge provided a unique context for the participant responses. On the other hand, because of that shared knowledge, I felt that some responses were not as defined as they could have been because the interviewees felt that I already knew what they were talking about. In those cases I added some additional probing questions.

The interviews took place between September 2007 and January 2008. In each case I telephoned the participant to explain the research and to arrange a possible interview. All who were contacted agreed to take part and were given a choice of location. Some chose to complete the interview in my school while others wished to be interviewed in their own school. Three people opted to have the interview in my home, while two others agreed to the interview in their own homes. Each of the interviews was taped and field notes were taken. The average interview was about one hour in length.

Interview Structure

The interview was structured around three main areas which, broadly speaking, covered the 'why' 'what' and 'significance' of care. The questions attempted to identify the school conditions that facilitate care practices. The interviews also tried to ascertain the values that each interviewee held and how those values determined their care practices. Lastly, the way in which teacher identity was formed around care practices was explored as well as how teachers themselves felt about that identity. As stated already, the interview process was formed around a semi-structured approach. Where a participant was comfortable talking or where there was a flow of narrative, this was not interrupted to ask questions in the particular order laid out in the schedule, but a checklist was employed to ensure that the main areas were addressed in the content.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the ethical guidelines laid down by the governing body of Dublin City University. Access to the interview transcripts is limited

to me, the researcher. The findings will not be used for any other purpose other than the stated aims of the project. Every effort was made to ensure that the transcription of the interviews was as accurate as possible. I also drew on field notes, which were taken during the interviews. To facilitate an 'audit trail', transcripts and tape recordings are stored safely. All participants had the right to withdraw at any stage in the process. At all times I endeavoured to act in an acceptably ethical manner and acknowledge that without the contribution of these teachers the research could not take place.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Before the interviews took place participants were informed of the ethical guidelines under which the research would be conducted. The issue of confidentiality was explained to them and all agreed to participate fully in the interview.

The issue of anonymity for participants is always a difficult and challenging one in small-scale ethnographic projects. The risk of the informants being identified in a small closely-knit educational community was explained as a possible issue for those participants. None of the participants seemed worried about this issue and this was especially true in some of the cases where more than one participant came from a particular school; nevertheless, it was a challenge that had to be addressed. To maximise their anonymity I have not included any separate section on individual biographies in the appendix but have given small amounts of biographical information in the text where this information is relevant.

Data Analysis

There are a number of important and significant issues to be taken into account when analysing qualitative data and this research attempted to consider those aspects at all stages of the analysis. Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p.55) argue strongly for the construction of an analytical frame to guide this process. These include questions such as

- *What* do we notice?
- *Why* do we notice it?
- *How* do we interpret what we notice?
- *How* can we know the interpretation is the right one?

Within the emancipatory research paradigm, the importance of developing an adequate meaning for the research is by far the most important concern and can only be arrived at by utilising a combination of the theoretical assumptions, an acknowledgment of rival explanations and the development of case descriptions (Yin, 2003). This view is also echoed by Denscombe (2003) who notes that qualitative research is more closely associated with description than the numerical analysis of quantitative research. This descriptive process, where the behaviour is contextualised, is known as ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973).

Firstly, the interviews, which were all taped using a digital recorder, were transcribed by myself. Although hesitations or other speech delays were not noted verbatim, non-verbal indicators were noted where I believed them to be significant, such as a delay in one of the interviews where the participant became some upset at an incident that occurred.

Based on the categories identified by the pilot interviews, the data were coded using the broad divisions of the interview schedule that the interview transcripts presented. Care was taken not to disrupt the holistic dimension of the interview in an effort to be more exact in analysing and interpreting the units. Because there are particular challenges to the issues of trustworthiness and generalisability in data which is acquired from a single source (i.e. interviews) particular efforts were made to make the data analysis procedures clear and transparent. When laying out the data for analysis it is important that clear and significant connections are made with regard to the conceptual and theoretical coherence of the entire research project. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the identification of patterns, processes, commonalities and differences is vital to the work of the qualitative researchers.

When the data had been transcribed, the process of identifying the patterns and categories began. The literature, reviewed in the first part of this thesis, assisted with this identification. After several readings of the transcripts clear categories presented themselves and these were colour-coded for later analysis and discussion.

Trustworthiness and Generalisability

In a qualitative piece of research the questions of validity and reliability are generally replaced by the notion of trustworthiness. Maykut and Moorehouse (1994, p.145) state that the issue of trustworthiness essentially revolves around the question, “how much confidence is there in the outcomes of this particular piece of research?” With the exception of giving the participants the opportunity to read the transcripts and make additional comments, this

research did not have the benefit of multiple methods of data collection. It did however employ a permanent and clear audit trail which Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim is one of the integral checks for qualitative research; the others being working as part of a research team, member checks and multiple data collection methods.

Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggest the best way to increase the validity of the interview process is to minimise the amount of bias which is inherent in the attitudes and expectations of the interviewer, the questions being asked and the understanding of the answers of the respondent. While having highly structured interviews would reduce the risk of bias, I felt that the open-ended or semi-structured approach was the best way to document the unique and personal understandings of teachers and their care practices.

Significance of the Study

A function of critical educational research is to interrogate the relationship between schools and society and to expose the structural inequalities that are an inherent part of that relationship. The focus of a feminist approach is to use raised consciousnesses as a means to social reform. There is no doubt that schools, as institutions, contribute to the perpetuation of inequality but from time to time, and in individual circumstances, there are a number of processes which serve to reduce it, or at least mitigate the effects of it. Documenting the narrative of teachers' care practices (a largely ignored narrative) also serves an emancipatory function. Oliver (1997, p.16) claims that the significance of emancipatory research is in its ability to change the social relations of research production. "The issue then for the emancipatory research paradigm

is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what research can then do to facilitate this process”.

This research will be significant to a number of educators working in educationally disadvantaged settings. It will be especially relevant to those teachers who have had a deep and life-long commitment to excluded communities and issues of justice and equality. Many of these professionals have been pioneers in their school communities, embracing new methodologies, working alongside non-teaching and non-educational personnel and taking a deep and personal responsibility for their students. As the concept of care in the practices of teachers is a largely un-researched topic in the Irish context, this work may be the stepping stone to further, more comprehensive studies in this area.

Conclusion

Teachers’ own understandings of their practice, motivation and beliefs are the central components of this case study research. Using the literature as a starting point and an impetus for the direction of the research, the narratives will bring the care practices of teachers to light and situate them the context of the experiences of the students.

This chapter has outlined the rationale for this study. It has outlined the steps undertaken in the design and construction of the case study and presented the theoretical framework which underpins it. Educational research in the interpretive tradition accepts that the cognitive and emotional understandings of one may differ significantly from another. Language, a symbolic system to express those understandings, is really only a *more* or *less* agreed way to

organise the understandings. Consequently it is the job of the researcher to describe and then interpret understandings so that a shared perspective may advance the knowledge of a particular area.

My own professional and personal experience has indicated that the best way to examine the practice of care in an educationally disadvantaged setting is to adopt a feminist methodology for such an exploration. Experience is central to feminist epistemology and it is the lived experience of teacher narratives that will assist in identifying care practices, the moral value of care and its significance for educational disadvantage.

Chapter 5: Care as a Practice

Introduction

The examination of the literature in the previous chapters has shown that schools are complex, multi-purpose institutions with moral, social and academic obligations. Within these multifaceted institutions, care and care practices are framed in the context of relationships. Teachers have a responsibility not only to create a caring learning environment but also to develop the capacity to care both in themselves and in their students. The research now considers the school context and these aspects of care. Two major themes have been identified both from the literature and the responses from the interviews. These are:

- Care as practice
- Care as a value

This chapter will consider the first of these themes and consider how care practices are constructed and experienced within the school setting. It will also document the routines and responsibilities that frame the actual care practices, in order to make this significant aspect of teachers' work visible and to problematise it across the settings in relation to social class and resources available in the school.

As documented in Chapter Four, the sample consists of eighteen teachers and principals across 13 primary and secondary schools. In Ireland, there are considerable differences between the educational systems at primary and second level. Given the largely unexplored aspect of care and education in Ireland, I expected the respondents to have some difficulties in articulating

the nature of care work in the context of teaching; however, with the exception of two respondents, both of whom were male, all participants showed levels of understanding that indicated they were highly conversant with the care dimensions of teaching.

The literature has also shown that care and care practices are very closely associated with parental, especially maternal care and that female teachers especially primary teachers, have a strong care ethic as part of their approach to their teaching. Although the respondent sample is mixed in terms of gender and in terms of single and mixed gender schools, gender does not appear to be a dominant issue in terms of the responses. Of course, there are some differences and where those differences are of some significance, they are noted.

Location of Care Practices

All care practices involve varying levels of awareness of the significance of care and of the need for care. This was reflected both in the nature of the answers given and in the way in which some participants took time to formulate their answer or requested a clarification.

Relationships

The literature is clear on the fundamental relational nature of care and although not everyone made a direct reference to it, there is a strong sense that teachers understand that care practices are very firmly located in the sets of relationships with the school community. These relationships are central to

the construction of care and are also significant in terms of understanding care as a value; this is a key issue which will be analysed in the next chapter.

Comments on the sets of relationships within the school referred to a variety of different types of relationships. These included the totality of relationships in the school community, the relationship between teacher and pupil or the relationships that existed among the members of the staff. The two primary school principals below reflect a number of similar comments made by others. The first principal, recalling the scenario in the school in which she began her career, described the atmosphere in the staff room as cold and functional. In contrast, when she began teaching in her current school, relationships among the staff were described as warm and personal.

.... and it was functional. You went in there and got your tea and you might get talking to someone but there was some warmth that was missing and I found that here immediately in the questions; 'Who are you?' 'Where have you been?' and 'What do you like?' You know people were interested in me as a young teacher. (*Annette, primary principal*)

My own philosophy is that the quality of the school depends on the relationships that teachers have with their students in the corridors, in the classrooms and in the school generally. I would encourage that. The students need to get to know you, not the intimate details of your life but get to know you as a person. (*Fergus, second-level principal*)

Others were more specific about the type of relationship they were describing and the sense of solidarity and collegiality that existed in the staffroom environment.

I like the atmosphere when I go in. I like ... I think one factor that I really love about the school is that the staff are as one.
(*Gillian primary HSCL*)

Where I was, I found there was a nucleus of caring staff and I think it is very important - you know - that whenever I was teaching there I didn't feel that I was working in a vacuum. *(Bernard, primary)*

But if you had a bad experience in a bad class and you go into the staffroom in our place you'll get great support. I expect that staffs in a lot of disadvantaged schools are a lot closer because you just couldn't cope. If you went into the staff room and said 'I'm just after having a dreadful class with Janice', you'd never get the response 'Oh she's grand for me'. You never get that. *(Pamela, second level)*

This last comment came from a second-level teacher who had worked in a middle class school prior to her arrival in her current school. Throughout her interview she made comparisons between her own situation and what she imagined would be the case in schools in more affluent areas. She based these comments both on her own previous experience and that of friends who were working in other schools. This comment also reflects the sense that staff would not let an individual teacher down in terms of isolating him/her when support or solidarity was needed.

Relationships with Students

Almost all the participants were clear about the importance of the teacher pupil relationship both as the basis for good effective teaching and as the basis for care practices. Some outlined the levels of work involved in building those relationships and were quite explicit in setting out the goals for such relationships. Others identified how a good relationship was easily recognised.

Having a good relationship with some of the more troubled pupils involved me having a kind of charismatic approach. You have to try and set yourself up so that the kid will like you ... You engage with them as a genuine person who is genuinely interested in them and who doesn't have an agenda. *(Peter, primary)*

You'd know a good relationship between pupil and teachers because there would be very good eye contact ... Along the corridor you might see them and they would be walking like 'journeying' together. You would see smiles ... it comes across as a partnership between the two. *(Carmel, primary)*

The idea of partnership in the teacher pupil relationship is important in that it signifies a degree of equality and a sense of respect between teachers and students. Others stressed the naturalness of the relationship and the degree of flexibility that was needed to maintain it. The term 'natural' here is used in the context of ease and empathy. Such a description is similar to Noddings' (1984) ethical caring. In such a context the teacher pupil relationship was no different to any personal relationship, although the fundamental focus was professional rather than personal.

You have to have a bit of fun. I know discipline is important and that kids need to have boundaries but you need to be flexible. If so and so is having a bad day then what's the point of making his life totally miserable when it could be solved with a bit of time out. *(Eileen, second-level HSCL)*

I think the student must know that you care. The student must know that you like them. It's really worth getting to like them. Show them you care and that you like them. It's the same in any relationship. *(Fergus, second-level principal)*

Because of the professional basis of the student teacher relationship, labour is involved in demonstrating care. The amount of effort involved varies both from individual to individual and school context but is clearly recognised as labour by the participants.

Recognition of Care in the Selection of Staff

Acknowledgment that care practices do not happen accidentally was implicit in many of the responses. Some made reference to the fact that school leaders as well as individual teachers recognise and undertake responsibility for the organisation of care within the school. This may involve an explicit policy at the teacher selection stage or else working to getting a degree of flexibility from the staff with respect to how they work with the pupils. Two comments, both from primary principals talking about new teachers that they employ in the school reflect the need to see such relational knowledge in those new teachers.

It is a commitment to caring for children that they can identify in their first couple of weeks. It's about knowing that there are children who have other needs beside pure educational needs and that's what I look for when I'm interviewing teachers. You can have all the right kinds of questions and all the right kinds of answers at an interview but you get the vibe from somebody. I know that if the candidate for interview sitting in front of me is a perfectionist then she is not going to suit. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

I think it has continued (caring atmosphere) partly through choosing staff at interview that one knew would fit into the ethos of the school. I know that I've had the great privilege of interviewing and appointing ten new people in the last three years, ten young people. I would have known at the interview the kind of people who would fit in with the staff and with the ethos here. (*Annette, primary principal*)

The same primary principal, (Annette) worried about those staff members who are unable to relate to the pupils in a particular way and describes the ability to do this as being 'on speaking terms with their own inner teacher'. This was an important concept for her as it represented self-awareness or a self knowledge that good teachers need to have in order to gain the trust of

the pupils. She believed that teachers without such awareness could be very inconsistent or out of tune, which was not what pupils needed.

They, in my opinion, haven't that knowledge or awareness. It's almost like they are living somebody else's scripts and you know they will say things like, 'this is how it should be' or 'this is how the last principal did things (*Annette, primary principal*).

This comment is a good example of how those who are not necessarily operating out of an ethic of care might be contrasted with those who do. The former group are able to rationalise their position in terms of sets of procedures and formats and so seem to be working more with a justice ethic to the fore. In comparison to a more caring teacher, these teachers seem very polarised and unable to adapt to their particular local context. It is not possible to reflect the tone of her words in a written quote, but the interview transcripts and field notes show a certain level of antipathy towards these types of teachers. This was true of a small number of other participants who commented on this issue. With those who did comment on the negative attitude of colleagues, there was a consciousness that these teachers can have a very powerful negative voice in the school:

So in every school I worked there were teachers who believed they weren't social workers ... These teachers often have a very powerful voice in the staffroom because they'll say things like; 'I say it like it is' or 'that's all mollycoddling nonsense'. (*Helena, VTT*)

You can see some teachers that you know they don't really care about the child. I suppose I shouldn't really say this but it's just a job to them ... Some couldn't care less, teaching is just a job with a pensionable salary. (*Amy, second level*)

These responses clearly show that there is a considerable difference between individual teachers in terms of their approach to care. Those whose care practices are a significant part of their overall practice are somewhat intolerant of the more traditional authoritarian teacher. There is similar distrust on the part of those teachers for educators who 'care too much'. At best, a mutual professional distance seems to be kept by both sets of educators.

Systems of Care and Commitment

Many participants made reference to the more formal systems of care within their schools and this is particularly true of those at second level, where the Pastoral Care system is an important structure in the school's organisation. For some teachers there had been a long tradition of care in the school that they worked in, either on the basis of the founding religious order or the inclusivity of the school.

I suppose by their very nature, vocational schools are ...the fact that they were always traditionally inclusive. This automatically set them up as caring. (*Brenda, second-level principal.*)

It has always been known as a caring school and even going back over the years there has always been a very strong Pastoral Care system. The order that founded the school would have had a strong caring ethos for the poor in society. (*Fergus, second-level principal*)

One particular respondent noted that the frameworks of care were carefully and deliberately laid out in the policies of the primary school where he worked.

Where I am at the moment there are levels of care. The children are invited to and encouraged to care for each other. The adults then who care for the children are invited to care for them so that there is this element of respect and reciprocity between the two. The adults will also care for each other because if they are not cared for then they are less likely to care for the children around them. *(Peter, primary)*

This comment is one of the few which makes direct reference to the need for the adults to care for themselves and each other in order to provide adequate levels of care for the pupils; however, as outlined already, other respondents did make reference to the support they got from colleagues or friends among the staff.

Schools by their very nature are orderly and shaped by complex frameworks of behaviour. Care practices then involve an intricate understanding of the purpose of that structure and the need for flexibility. Although expressed in different ways, many were keen to emphasise the need to have a fluid and adaptable approach so that care practices could be easily incorporated into the structure of school life. At the same time the value of consistency and order was emphasised.

I think you have to trust the teacher. The child needs to trust you from a practical point of view, if you are going to keep them safe in their environment. For a lot of these kids school is a safer place than home. School is predictable. Trust is connected with consistency, possibly not in the way that every day is the same but when, for example, the copies are moved to one side then it is time to tidy everything away. This is a structure that, for some children, has made a huge difference. *(Nikita, primary)*

Other respondents felt the strength of Pastoral Care was entirely dependent on individual commitment and the relationships that existed between various members of the teams. Several made reference to the fact that not everyone

has the same approach to care, whether it lies within the Pastoral Care system or in the ethos of care that exists in the school.

.... but another Year Head will do the bare essentials and that's it, forgotten about. There's no continuation or even asking how that student is doing. Some Year Heads actively ask how students are progressing, especially in my case where I'm dealing with the honours students. Whereas some couldn't care less whether the student did honours or pass.
(*Amy, second level*)

I think that the kids would feel that some of the teachers were caring and that some of them weren't. It's easy to see that they didn't like the ones who were weren't. I suppose it's unfair to say that teachers don't care. It's maybe that some teachers don't know how to do that bit or else they get caught up in the in the 'task' thing which is to get through the course before June. Maybe teachers feel that they are caring by doing this. (*Celine, VTOS*)

This is an interesting comment because while the interviewee understood that other teachers were unwilling or unable to care, Celine was somewhat slow to be critical of their adherence to task rather than care practices and suggests that caring about learning is key.

Some primary teachers were fearful to some extent for the transfer of pupils to second level, because they felt that the care practices in their primary school were doing a special job of engaging some pupils in the system. It was a genuine fear and individual pupils were often referred to in a way that a parent might express worry or concern about her or his own child:

You realise that when you go up the school and into secondary school it all seems to fall apart. It isn't the secondary school as such. Possibly they get more attention when they are that young and they're cute. But when they get a little older in 5th and 6th and secondary it's almost if they don't need any more care or attention but in actual fact they probably need more. I think they are not going to last in that system that doesn't reach out to them. (*Gillian, primary HSCL*)

I would be really worried about a couple of mine (pupils). I can just see them dropping out after less than a month in post-primary because I cannot see anyone having that overall knowledge of that child. What they will see during a forty minute class is this 'messenger' who is disrupting their class and they'll just want them out. (*Carmel, primary*)

These comments perhaps reflect the more personal nature of the relationship between class teachers and primary school pupil who have the children for much longer periods in the day and thus can build up a greater awareness of individual needs.

Awareness of the Need for Care

There was a strong sense from the responses that teachers and principals were able to position care very firmly in the hierarchy of needs that must be met for human flourishing. Some named Maslov's hierarchy directly, while others simply referred to the fact that academic work could not take place in any effective way unless other needs were met. For some, care was synonymous with the basic recognition that everyone requires as a human being.

You can't be teaching a child without taking into account the state of mind or the state of physical condition that they're in when you come into them. So unless a child is comfortable, fed and warm they're not going to be able to learn anyway. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

I do feel that our school has to be cognisant of the fact that our families attending the school need us to be caring, need us to be informative and need us to be giving them opportunities for integration. I do feel we have to assist in the protection of kids in our care because some of them are in very vulnerable positions even within their own families. *(Fionn, primary principal)*

The need for care was connected, in many of the comments, to ensuring a better learning environment for the pupils, reflecting a tacit rather than overt understanding of the affective nature of learning.

An awful lot of education is the ability to take in information and in order to do that your emotional state would have to be in a 'good' state. *(Gillian, primary HSCL)*

The 3Rs are the least of what I do and that's the way I see it. In fact the 3Rs won't happen for a lot of kids unless I do what I'm doing (care practices). Then there is a greater possibility that they will continue in education. All the teachers trying to do the same thing acknowledge this and are focussed on the fact that the children have needs other than their learning needs. To find the most effective way to meet those needs is important. *(Tim, primary)*

Valuing the student individually is a constant theme in the descriptions of care practices. Almost everyone referred in some way for the need for students to feel valued and how important this was in the development of a learning environment.

Children need to feel valued. As a child, if you are going to a school where you do not feel valued then you're not going to care about the school because the school doesn't care about you. *(Bernard, primary)*.

So the first thing is being with the pupils in the classroom. In my previous school we knew that every child who walked through the door must be made to belong. The teacher is there to provide a service to these children. That's your job. They're (the students) not there to make your life easy in any way. In that school it was incredibly easy to put my ideas of education and care into practice under that kind of regime. (Helena, VTT).

It is significant that almost no one suggested that it was not the place of the school to try and meet those needs. Some did refer to the fact that others on their staff had expressed the opinion that such tasks 'were not their job'.

It is something that is debated on the staff as it takes up so much time. Sometimes we ask ourselves 'are we too much for them?' There is a time that we have to make them take responsibility. (Brenda, second level principal)

This comment reflects a very definite tension between the teacher as a professional with curricular and pedagogical obligations and the role of the teacher as care giver. This is a major theme of the research it will be dealt with in depth in the next chapter on Care as a Value.

Routines and Responsibilities of Care

This section describes the various care acts and actions that teachers and principals do on a daily basis. In terms of the literature on care this could be described as '*taking care of*'. Some of the actions were carried out within a defined structure of care that operates in the school, and others are the responses of the individual teachers' perception of the needs of students.

Observation of pupils was a common theme running through the responses. Teachers were very aware of changes in demeanour, attitude or engagement with the class work among their students. Being aware of these changes

alerted teachers if something was amiss or if there was a positive change in a particular student's work or attitude. Some spoke movingly of a number of students who had succeeded against the odds and they felt had really benefited from the extra time and effort that participants had given to the students. At second level in particular, respondents were prepared when they noticed these changes in behaviour or work levels to try and find out the reason for it.

Care practices fell into four main categories.

- Care work
- Emotional labour
- Preparing for learning
- Alternative pedagogies and strategies

Care Work

While some of the respondents were able to name individual or collective actions, the overriding sense was that all participants were aware of the need for a 'presence' in the life of the child. Almost everyone referred to the fact that, for them, it was extremely important to spend time really getting to know the child, their background and their family circumstances. The need to get to know the individual in order to care for them was shared by both primary and second level principals as well as class teachers.

Several respondents referred to the importance of meeting the pupils at the start of the day with a pleasant interaction in order to begin the working day

on a positive note and to provide recognition for all pupils at the start of their day.

Every child should be greeted in the morning and these are very basic things. (*Tim, primary*)

The principal, who has taken over for the last year and half, greets everyone at the door which is very nice, even for the teachers. So when he is not there you notice it. (*Pamela, second level*)

Just the ordinary way that you greet the children, hear and see the child. So many children are invisible in their own homes ... so using children's names, all the time. (*Helena, VTT*)

When children come in the door they need to see a smiling face. They don't need to see somebody that is giving out to them for being late. When I answer the door at 10 o'clock I'll say; 'isn't it great you came - better late than never'. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

This selection of comments from across the respondents contrasts quite starkly with the one school where the respondent was not so positive about his school being a caring school. Relating an incident where children in wet clothing were made to stand at the entrance hall and then spend the rest of the day in class in wet clothes, this respondent felt very upset at the hard line and uncaring attitude of his colleague. His more general comment at the start of the interview sums up his views.

Basically, to be honest, if I look around the staff, we have a very formal structure. The best way to describe it is that if a kid arrives at the door of the school and he hasn't got his uniform on, he's in trouble. He's sent home and I would personally be very slow to send some kids home in that situation knowing their background. There's that attitude there among the staff. (*Matt, second-level HSCL*)

Others observed that, for them, care involved taking a particular interest in the pupil and their lives in the course of the day. This seemed to the researcher to be a deliberate act and very much centred on an individual interest in each child. This is the core commitment to care that allows teachers to make decisions about what, how and how often care practices will feature as part of the daily life. This is best summed up in these comments from a primary teacher and a second level teacher.

.... they were (teachers) interested in the welfare of the children and they were interested too about the happiness of the children and another thing you could say ... in their conversation, you could know that they actually cared about the children, you know it brought a smile to their faces when talking about x, y or z. There was a genuine concern for them. (*Bernard, primary*)

Where I'm coming from I think that caring is the key. Because if kids think that you don't care about them they're not going to learn anything. So I would say straight away that care is the key and I don't believe that what is important is the quality of the knowledge you present because I think that the most important thing is the relationship. (*Celine, VTOS*)

At second level, further comments below reflect the amount of time and commitment that teachers gave to the maintenance of such relationships and the efforts that a commitment to care involved. Whether they referred to it directly or implicitly, this commitment involved time as well an engagement with the students. The maths teacher below sees the teaching of her subject bound up intricately with routines of care.

When you have free classes at second level, you don't actually have any free time. I talk to the kids at this time. You're always dealing with problems. There is no way you can teach maths at second level without dealing with this issue (problem solving). When I go into class I have the same routine - homework, something new, school work and then homework again. So while keeping to the routine you are keeping an eye on them. *(Pamela, second-level)*

Teachers are giving themselves. They're being present for their students. They're forging relationships and that takes an awful lot of work, work that is unseen and unwritten. They're listening and aware. They're conscious of the fact that students in front of them may have difficulties and they're watching out for that. *(Fergus, second-level principal)*

At second level, respondents remarked on the additional task of taking an individual interest in pupils. For some this was integrated into teaching and for others they spent extra time on these activities. Overall, it signified a specific commitment to the students. As Sally (second level) pointed out, "I think here things don't go unnoticed".

Many referred to the fact that teachers go to the trouble of finding out more about their pupils so that they can make that extra connection with them. This is an important point as it shows an understanding of the significance of care practices and its effects on the pupils.

In a school like ours the teachers would notice if a student was tired or coming in late and question whether there was something going on at home ... so if it is very obvious that someone is doing badly in class you wouldn't automatically assume that they weren't doing any work but you might ask if there was something else? *(Pamela, second level)*

Such a response points to the question of who assumes the caring responsibilities in such situations. Issues relating to class and cultural

perspectives are also at play, but as this is another strong theme of the research findings, it will be explored in more depth in the next two chapters.

There was a sense from those who made specific comments about taking the time and effort to get to know students that teachers really went to the trouble of treating each on an individual basis. This may have been enabled by the fact that almost of all the schools (n=12) were designated disadvantaged (BAND 1 status)¹⁵ with relatively small class numbers. Smaller class sizes at both primary and second level allow a more intimate engagement between pupil and teacher. In the two other schools there was a strong ethos of care embedded in both and so the individual nature of the teacher student relationship was still very much to the fore. One junior primary school teacher stated:

With those numbers you don't have to be as formal with instructions like 'no talking' and 'get on with your work'. You're more relaxed in your attitude to discipline and you get more from them. You therefore have an onus on you when you know so much to translate that into a meaningful policy for the kids - like trying to translate the curriculum into their terms. (*Nikita, primary*)

Other teachers spoke of the time they spent discussing the students and their problems with one another. The same primary teacher, speaking of her professional journey from the time she was in college, saw a definite distinction between knowing the technical aspects of the job of teaching and knowledge of the school and the pupils.

¹⁵ Under the DEIS initiative, all designated disadvantaged schools, primary and second level, are categorised according to the severity of the disadvantage. Those in the Band 1 group are deemed to be the most disadvantaged and therefore receive the maximum available resources and support.

If you come cold from college with a huge *ideology* all you can do is take the time to get to know the curriculum but it will take years to get to know the school and the pupils which are two separate things as far as I can see. (*Nikita, primary*)

At second-level, some teachers were concerned about the danger of suicide and depression among students as some of the schools had experienced a number of suicides. This made teachers more aware of warning signs and the need to be on the look-out for them. One second-level principal spoke of her personal anguish in having to suspend a pupil who had become very violent but who was one of those 'at risk' students.

We had put in every support possible for him to get him to his Junior Cert but I couldn't leave him in the class setting so it was a terribly difficult scene ... I find those issues *terribly, terribly* difficult. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

We're a small school as well so you know everyone by name and so you'd know if they were having an off day. You know sometimes, somebody would tell you something like last year a girl told me that 'A' was suicidal. You know that is really serious. It gave us a chance to speak to 'A' and find out what was wrong. That contact alone was important. (*Fergus, second-level principal*)

Both these comments are from second level principals and indicate the personal interest taken in the lives of their pupils so that there is genuine concern about significant changes in behaviour, demeanour or personal circumstances. They also show that care practices are as strong at second level as they are in the primary school.

Emotional Labour

Of course, all care work involves emotional labour as the extensive literature in Chapter Two points out. While some of the responses referred indirectly to

the emotional labour in care practices or identified it as a positive energising force, others spoke directly about it and the toll it takes on them and their colleagues. These two comments, both from primary class teachers, reflect a somewhat contradictory view of emotional labour. In the first extract the teacher is speaking about the efforts that he has to make to maintain a positive atmosphere of discipline and working environment,

The interesting thing is that ... maybe it sounds as if this way is very time consuming but this actually is a way that allows me to teach. The problem was the other way I was spending all my time fighting with the kids and trying to get them to do what I wanted them to do. There's lots of time to teach now (*Tim, primary*).

This comment recognises the connection between the emotional labour involved in care and beneficial outcomes for both teaching and learning. Others also recognised that care labour resulted in positive classroom outcomes. Nonetheless, the comment below also reflects the toll that such emotional labour takes on some teachers.

I do think some of the older teachers are suffering burn out because of the things that we are talking about (care). If you have to give more than just the delivery of lessons, if you are putting emotional effort into anguishing over a child's predicament, which we do regularly, I suppose you are burning up more energy instead of relaxing at lunch hour and doing the crossword like everyone else. (*Nikita, primary*)

Throughout the interviews, participants referred to similar scenarios where teachers willingly accommodated the demands of students with a multiplicity of social, emotional and economic problems as well as the obligations of their teaching.

Although the lack of recognition of the emotional labour involved was implicit in some of the responses, one primary Home School Teacher (HSCL) spoke directly about this.

If I was to measure what I do, I think I'd prefer to go out and make sandwiches; at least I could see them made and know my work was done. You cannot write that work down in a weekly plan. It includes acceptance of them (students) in all their moods even though you mightn't be ready for that when you step out of the car in the morning. (*Gillian, primary HSCL*)

Another second level principal spoke about the lack of support for the principal when a difficult decision had to be made regarding student's behaviour, trying to balance individual care for the student with the examination programme of the rest of the school.

I would always want to give a child a chance but I have to make myself step back and see the bigger picture. Emotionally it is very difficult. So I have to try and reassure myself that I've deliberated and not made any hasty decisions. But it takes a huge emotional toll on me. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

On the other hand there were a small number of respondents who spoke about the absolute necessity to continue doing what they were doing despite the emotional toll on them. This comment from a second level teacher is indicative of this view.

So then the teachers are taking on some of the worries of the parent and it's quite draining. You couldn't survive teaching in a disadvantaged area if you didn't because by caring you can understand a bit more where they're coming from. (*Pamela, second level*)

There is no doubt that these extra demands take their emotional toll on teachers. It is clear that teachers themselves recognise such demands as an intricate part of working in educationally disadvantaged schools.

Care as Preparation for Learning

A variety of examples were given to show the types of care practices that are necessary for some pupils to facilitate their learning both in the classroom and in the larger school environment. Almost everyone referred in some way or other to the structure that school provided for some students whose lives are chaotic and disorganised and were proud of the fact that their care practices were able to contribute to the 'oasis' that school was for some pupils.

Well I just think that an awful lot of our time in areas like ours, are spent on 'housekeeping', on routines and the care that is needed to bring them to a kind of level where they can receive information. So for example at a recent Science for Fun morning an awful lot of time had to be spent in preparation, getting them sitting down, preparing the language to be used at the session. An awful lot of time has to be spent before anything else is done. People think we are starting at the same point but we are not at all. *(Gillian primary HSCL)*

We need to look after the kids. We need to do more for them. If we sat back and waited for them to come in to school and then taught them when they were in front of us we're not going to be successful. It's looking at the kid in the whole picture. It's also a practical thing so if they don't have pens in front of them. *(Brenda, second-level principal)*

There is a significant difference between the lives of the students and the common routines of school. These differences or gaps are managed by care as the above comments clearly show. One primary class teacher pointed out

that the efforts to create a positive and stimulating learning environment was onerous work for the teacher. While she did this without question she knew that the teacher of her own children did not have to spend time on such activities.

There's an attendance chart on the wall so that things that are taken for granted in other schools are actually hard work for us. We have to call the roll four times. There's the Attendance Monitor's roll, our own official register, the chart on the wall and the figures for the office. This is an imposition but is a small price to pay if you see the attendance improving. (*Nikita, primary*)

Another primary teacher outlined the demands that he makes of his class so that they can participate fully in the learning process. For him, it was important that the children sat upright, with their feet on the floor and the backs on the chairs, although this comment seems somewhat at odds with the notion of a pleasant learning environment.

"That's what I expect and that's what they do". (*Tim, primary*)

This comment is open to a more negative interpretation as the literature indicates that power care and control can veer into *paternalism* and *parochialism* which Tronto (1993) warned about.

Several noted the fact that in order to learn effectively the pupils had to be imbued with a sense of confidence in their own ability.

For children to believe in themselves it is so important that they could trust that they can learn. (*Annette, primary principal*)

It's very important not to put them down but always to say to them that 'you are capable of doing what you like'. I'm here to teach you and to do the very best for you but you have to help me as well. So just give them as much encouragement as possible. (*Sally, second level*)

So besides this *liking* bit that you have to do before learning, I would also be aware of the importance of being positive. I think that kids can feel very frustrated because they feel they can't do it. So it is important for teachers to give the kids confidence to feel that they can do it so they don't have to feel that this is impossible. (*Celine, VTOS*)

The two responses below, one from a primary teacher and the other from a second-level home school teacher, reflected the view, implicit in many of the replies, that a lot of work needs to be done for some children whose self-esteem can be very damaged even at an early age.

Some children come to school very discouraged and beaten down even at the age of six. They've already had a bad experience of school, have suffered massive failure and have given up. I learned from her (the vice principal) that they had to be built up again. You had to let them experience success, build up their confidence. Before any learning could take place you had to do that. People in our school bought that notion and continue to buy into that idea. (*Tim, primary*)

You have to know where they are educationally as well. You need to know what targets are right for them so that you don't set tasks that are too easy or too difficult. I think it's important to have high expectations but realistic ones so that tasks are achievable. (*Eileen, second-level HSCL*)

Finding the correct balance between building the confidence of the individual student, pitching learning tasks at the correct level and trying to maintain high expectations for all was accepted by teachers regardless of the disadvantaged status of their schools. This seemed to be a constant 'walking the tightrope' between high expectations and realistic achievement targets. High expectations in a sense were determined outside of the school in the

form of test scores and examination results, whereas the realistic targets were set by teachers, knowing their pupils' capabilities and circumstances.

Provision of Essential Services and Equipment

The majority of respondents made reference to this theme both directly and indirectly and were able to identify clearly that the provision of materials, tools for learning or services was crucial for student well-being. Several referred to the fact that their school now provided a breakfast or lunch club and that was very important for the more vulnerable children. In some cases where only a number of pupils in the school could be considered disadvantaged, the breakfast club was offered in a discreet way to those pupils and was staffed by volunteer teachers. Another respondent said that they did not have a breakfast club as they felt this was removing the responsibility from parents, but the staff were sensitive to those who had not eaten before school and they were provided with something.

This comment from a second level principal charts the extensive framework of support that the school has set up to ensure that every student had access to a uniform, books and other essential classroom equipment.

We operate a book rental scheme which is major hassle for us. Some pay the subsidised annual fee of €75, some only pay a deposit and some pay nothing at all ... It means that when the kids come in they are handed all their books; all they have to do is open them and then take them home. It doesn't sound much but I can tell you that it so much work and so many headaches. So in terms of getting them ready for learning that is a huge task for us. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

This comment may also be compared with two other second-level respondents and a primary principal who also saw the provision of basic items as essential.

It was a good culture to work in. So things like when the kids came in, in the morning, it was important for me (the form teacher) to make sure that they had their full uniform. If they didn't have it then there was a box of ties and jumpers which the school made available. Every child was then in uniform because whatever they were missing they were provided with. It was for the few who had no other choice. (*Helena, VTT*)

Kids in the lower streams tend to absent themselves a bit more or might be late on a more regular basis. So there would be organisational problems and I would have had rulers, pencils, copies etc., and things that were needed in the class so that when they came in they got what they needed and were ready to start work. So there was no excuse! (*Pamela, second level*)

While Pamela's thoughts reflect a practical down-to-earth approach, there is no attempt to understand or explain the reasons for lower attendance figures among certain streams. Indeed, there is an inherent acceptance of streaming as completely unproblematic.

The provision of essential learning materials and books caused difficulties for some staff members. Some recorded that the topic was a regular one at staff meetings while others noted that decisions to make such materials available were made on an individual basis. The responsibility for these decisions often rests with the principal and usually involves staff making a decision about what they will do in particular situations.

The tension between the responsibilities of parents to provide for their children and the harsh reality of poverty is a real one for teachers. The

inequalities are economic but very often manifest themselves in social and educational issues. By taking on the responsibility of providing essential resources, teachers are being asked to intervene and provide a cushion for the state whose obligations to marginalised communities are not being carried out. The responses indicate that while resources are provided willingly, teachers are often asked to carry out tasks that are in direct conflict with their own middle class values. This in itself is a tension that must be accommodated in some way.

It is something that is often debated among the staff because it takes up so much time. Sometimes we debate are we doing too much for them and that there is a time when you have to make them take responsibility. So to counteract that we make them do research in assignments and they have to take personal responsibility for what they have to do themselves. But in terms of kids having access to whatever is going on in class then they are given every support. (Brenda, second-level principal)

Maybe we feel that giving them breakfast is taking that bit of responsibility from the parents. (Gillian primary HSCL)

I think that you can make a difference to these children although I don't believe that if you give them too much support they won't do anything for themselves. There are frustrations sometimes when you have done everything you can to support a home to get the kids up and out to school, to practically totally subsidising the book money and then the books are lost. That can be very frustrating. (Nikita, primary)

Views with respect to what a school needs to provide for children or where it needs to intervene are also quite broad. For some, it may be more about sensitivity to those students who might not be in a position to pay money for books, equipment, etc. Comparing the approach to such cases in her current school, one primary school teacher says:

So it might happen (in other schools) in insidious ways but probably not in an intentional manner, but the name could be called out and the child could be exposed publicly in that way. So instead of saying, 'have you brought your book money yet?' we have to positively discriminate and avoid those incidents. *(Carmel, primary)*

Alternative Pedagogies and Strategies and Particularities of Care

Both primary and secondary principals and class teachers spoke of the need to accommodate the pupil who was vulnerable, in an emotionally poor state or presenting with personal or behavioural difficulties. Many who made reference to this fact were also anxious to point out that such an accommodation or use of alternative strategies had to be carried out in the context of the whole class and within a framework of fairness and justice.

As all of the respondents in the sample are experienced teachers, none made any significant comments about the difficulty of having to do this, although at second level, two teachers expressed a frustration about how this accommodation did not really result in any significant change in the student's behaviour. By and large examples were presented as part of what had to be done with these pupils from time to time.

Yesterday a kid in my class was in a tizzy and was trying to do something else besides his maths. He had to do something for his tutor who was a very 'hands on' tutor. I left him to do what he had to do ... When he was finished I told him I would show him how to do the maths. He said 'I think I know how to do that'. So obviously he was listening to a certain extent and able to complete the task. I was pleased that letting him get on with the other work had paid off. *(Amy, second level)*

In so far as is possible within the class you make allowances without setting it off too much against the other kids. (*Eileen, second-level HSCL*)

You might see them coming in after a bad weekend and you have to say to those kids 'when you are ready to work' and then come back to them. You can't say to them 'now open to page 20' like everyone else, because it wouldn't work. (*Pamela, second-level*)

Another primary class teacher outlined the strategies he used with a pupil who had especially difficult home circumstances and had missed an awful lot of school.

I always sat with her and tried to bring her up to speed with whatever she had missed. I knew she was bright. I knew that her home background was difficult. I gave her as much leeway as possible. I mean if she wasn't able to do the regular work I prepared something a bit more for her. I sort of coaxed and cajoled and eventually brought her round. (*Bernard, primary*)

Very often this was done in a team work setting where other colleagues were able to step in if necessary and this is connected strongly with the sense of individual relationship that teachers felt they had with their pupils.

There are needy children and one child's need on a bad day colours the whole room and you know, any principal will tell you, there has to be others who will act as a safety valve for these children. In our case it is the SNAs (Special Needs Assistants) so the other teachers know that if things get bad they can be called on to take those children out, talk to them, calm them. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

In our school some of the senior teachers would watch out for a child who might be in trouble with every other teacher and they might say 'how's it going there J? You're doing great' even if he is not. That child might go back into the classroom and be more positive. However, it is only a random thing. (*Nikita, primary*)

It comes up alright (need for flexibility). I think we know when we need to do that for the students. Stuff is often done *on the quiet* and that is one thing but if you're seen to do things very consistently with people ... for example a child might not be suspended but you would send for the parent ... We try and deal with them all as similarly as possible.
(*Brenda, second-level principal*)

These comments resonate very closely with the concept of equality of condition (Baker *et al.* 2004; Lynch and Baker, 2005) and reflect an understanding of issues of equality among teachers even if they are unable to articulate their thoughts in such language. It is perhaps more suggestive of the length of experience that teachers and principals have and how that length of experience is translated into understandings of social justice and equality and how differentiated provision works in reality. The need to provide appropriate responses to the most vulnerable is the essence of care (Kittay, 1999).

While allowances were made and there was flexibility in approach, several respondents were quick to point out that this did not mean lowering academic standards or a toleration of poor behaviour. Overall, such flexibility was an adaptation of the procedures to accommodate some students who, from time to time, were unable to adhere to the rules or needed additional support in maintaining them. Appropriate responses have to be made for the most vulnerable students in order to be just and fair although the issue is one of care. These extracts show how strongly the respondents felt that care practices and flexible strategies should never mean the lowering of standards.

I think overall that it's a question of showering attention on these children. What stands out primarily from a teaching point of view is making allowance so that a child who comes in without any homework done ... I can't really be on their back. I know that there is no support at home and that this is a negative experience for them. While I still expect that the homework is done I can't in another way. (*Carmel, primary*)

They make allowances when it is the *correct* thing to do. It is most important that they are not teaching the children bad habits. 'It doesn't mean you can get off homework because of the things that you have told me but maybe we can tailor the homework'... So it is some kind of consideration. (*Annette, primary principal*)

Your academic level should not be brought down just because you live in a disadvantaged area. (*Sally, second level*)

There is no doubt that struggling to make targets or deal with lower performance figures causes a great deal of tension for teachers and educators and this will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter describes care as a practice. One of the more interesting aspects of the content of the interviews was that a surprising number of respondents had very clear views on care and its importance in the life of a disadvantaged school. While some respondents were more *au fait* with the language of care and more confident in their opinions about care practices, there was a remarkable similarity in the responses across each of the themes.

As stated at the beginning, the primary school structure and its curriculum lend themselves more readily to meeting the holistic needs of the child. Notwithstanding the demands of an exam orientated system at second-level and the pressure that it puts on both student and teacher, it is noteworthy to

record that, with one exception, the interview transcripts suggest that second-level teachers had a comprehensive understanding of the nature and significance of their care practices and the care practices of their colleagues.

There was a strong emphasis on the building of relationships and the forging of very personal and unique contacts with the students and, in some cases, their families. This was true for both primary and second level teachers. The provision of basic learning equipment such as books, copies, pencils and even Home Economics' ingredients was seen as necessary to maintaining a positive learning environment. Likewise, there was the acceptance that some students needed certain amounts of leeway from time to time to help them cope with particular personal, family or community situations.

Almost all the participants worked in schools that had some kind of food provision, whether it was a breakfast or lunch club or a more random system based on individual circumstances. In many cases school uniforms or items to complete a full uniform were made available so that some students need not face sanctions for such school rule breaches.

Interestingly, no one commented on the problematics of being obliged to wear a full school uniform nor the issue of students having to provide their own (often very expensive) texts, particularly at second level. The glaring inequalities within the system were not critiqued by participants, although teachers clearly strove to ensure that students were equipped or looked after in ways that allowed them to fit in with the system.

Whether commented on directly or understood as implicit, there was a strong sense of commitment to care and an understanding that for some pupils or students there would be no quality of education without it. Thus, there is a fairly significant awareness of the importance of care, in view of the fact that almost none of the participants had previously discussed their care work or had it acknowledged as important by anyone other than in their own school. In the next chapter care practices will be further examined in relation to the individual life experiences of the teachers and how their role in the school affects their understanding and valuing of care.

Chapter 6: Care as a Value

Introduction

Chapter One of this research discussed the concept of an ethic of care and paralleled its historical development with the ethic of justice or the universal ethic. An ethic of care demands that individuals reflect on relational interactions within the local and the particular. The ethic of justice, on the other hand, is shaped predominately through male, political and public power, and dominated by individualism and rationality. Care practices in the educational environment, especially the educationally disadvantaged environment, have been seen to be relational and reflective, but such reflection indicates that care is also a value and a moral position (Held, 1993; Nias, 1989; Noddings, 1984; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; and Tronto, 1993). In the Irish educational context care was traditionally understood more as a virtue, a characteristic of individuals and their religious beliefs. Unlike care as a practice where there are tangible and valid actions and sometimes identifiable processes, care as a value is a more nebulous and complex concept. This presents greater challenges in attempting to identify its significant dimensions. In a homogenous educational system which is staffed by teachers who are largely middle class, racially uniform and denominationally Christian, care, as a value may be hidden or implicit and certainly difficult to differentiate from the dominant norms.

Teacher identity, in terms of care, is a product of both the moral and practical realities of care (Furlong, *et al.* 2009, forthcoming). In their review of the literature, Day *et al.* (2006) indicate a number of factors to be considered in

the formation of teacher identity. These include biography, experience and context. Therefore, it is relevant to look briefly at how teachers in this study have negotiated these aspects of identity formation and how they classify themselves in terms of a caring identity.

This chapter will explore care as a value, how that value is constructed and supported, and how the accommodation of other value systems such as personal and school values can be causes of tension for teachers. Dealing with those tensions involves varying degrees of emotional labour, little of which is acknowledged or recognised, even in an informal way. Noddings' (1992) view that attitudes are an inherent part of the activities of care highlights the idea that as well as acting on behalf of others' interests, carers need to maintain their own capabilities. This is carried out on an individual and collegiate basis and is a central component of teacher reflection. The chapter has three main sections. The first part examines care as a value and how that is maintained and includes reflection, biography, professional experience and school ethos. The second section explores the fragmentation of care and sketches the tensions and emotional management that care as a value necessitates and which must be negotiated through the daily demands of school life. Lastly, the formation of teacher identity and care is discussed.

Care Maintenance

Teacher Biography and Experience

Table 1 in Chapter Four shows that all the respondents are experienced teachers. The majority of them have been working in educationally disadvantaged schools for most of their professional lives. While some have

been teaching for 36 years, the youngest teacher has eight years' experience and the average length of service is 26.25 years. This represents a considerable body of professional knowledge and skills as well as a depth of life experience. With the exception of three individuals, all the respondents began their teaching careers as soon as they left either university or the College of Education. The majority have been in the same school since that time. For some educationalists, such a restricted experience in a single school might be understood as limited or less informed; however, it can also be interpreted as a positive commitment to working in the area of educational disadvantage in general, and to their schools in particular.

Experienced teachers are also less likely to be reticent in expressing opinions and so were an ideal sample for this initial study on care (Hargreaves, 1998; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). The following quotations represent typically how strongly individuals feel about their career choices to teach.

I always wanted to be a teacher. I'm from the west of Ireland and would have had no teaching background in my family. I ended up here in my first school. (*Gillian primary HSCL*)

When I started work here I was doing my Dip¹⁶ and I thought I was going to end up in a nice convent type of school like the one I went to myself. I was just filling in a year here until I got my Dip but towards the end of the year I realised I was getting something out of it. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

I started teaching in 1992 ... I had heard that it was in a rough area but I found it difficult enough to get a job at the time. I thought I would stay for a year or two and then move on but it's the kind of place you get stuck in. (*Pamela, second level*)

¹⁶ The Higher Diploma for second-level teachers is generally taken after a basic degree and is the equivalent of a teacher training course.

These comments demonstrate a conscious decision to become teachers, but the decision to make a career of working in a disadvantaged area seems to be less direct and more of a situation that individuals drifted into. Many of the respondents referred to the fact that their own family and school backgrounds were very definitely middle class in character. The dichotomy between the values of school and home are an obvious source of tension and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Of the three who did not begin their school teaching careers directly after third level, two spent some time either as social workers or community workers while another began work as an educator in the prison service. These professions are associated in a parallel way with teaching, and may have had the added advantage of giving these participants a wider understanding of issues of social disadvantage and social justice.

I am currently the VTT. Prior to that I worked on an Early School Leavers¹⁷ project in Tobart and before that I worked with families who were out of home. I began my career in Knockville Community School and as well as that I worked in a number of schools in England. (*Helena, VTT*)

Teachers' Perspective on the Aims of Education

The length and depth of experience would appear to have a significant effect on the respondents' views about education and its purpose. Several expressed strong views about the holistic aims of education which were at odds with the type of education that the system demanded they impart. Others commented

¹⁷ The Early School Leavers project in this particular case is a Youthreach Project.

on the change in understanding that either they or their colleagues had experienced over the years.

What needs to happen is that those teachers, those educators who believe in the holistic development of the child and who accept that we have an obligation to develop holistically ourselves in order to do that, we need to find the confidence ourselves to be able to stand on equal ground with those who are critical, dismissive and judgemental in that way. (*Helena, VTT*)

I've seen a change over the thirty years. There were people here who were willing to do the programme, teach it well and be kind to children but felt imposed on if new things were coming in. I see a shift in that now among the new teachers. (*Annette, primary principal*)

This comment may be interpreted two different ways. Although it is assumed that the principal is attempting to show that younger or more newly qualified teachers are more flexible in their approach to pedagogies and methodologies, it could be seen as a shift away from care as more programmes and interventions come into the daily lives of schools. Another interviewee, a primary principal, spoke of how his school delivers an education that is considerably broader than a purely academic or even holistic one. His view of the school as significant in the lives of the parents and pupils, while not articulated so directly by other respondents, reflects an overall sense of the school as central in the local community.

I do feel that, for a lot of the families coming to our school, our school is a source of security for them. It's a source of care and advice... Our school has to be cognisant of the fact that some families need us to be caring, informative, need us to look after, even sometimes, medical and housing never mind educational issues. (*Fionn, primary principal*)

The need for school to provide something above and beyond the proscribed curriculum and to equip pupils with skills for life can be interpreted as an indication of the importance that teachers associate with their care practices. While all of the respondents mentioned that self esteem and a sense of independence was key, some did identify the type of social or emotional capital that individuals need for success and that may not necessarily be present in the experience of some families or the community at large. A large proportion of the respondents mentioned in some or other way how the official view of educational aims was often at odds with what the pupils and students needed; however, no one really questioned or critiqued the dominant reality of a single unified system for everyone.

Because I have twenty years experience this is what matters to me... It's (education) about that you matter and that you can contribute and that what you do has an impact. At least I hope to think that's what it means, be it through education as in the 3Rs or through the other things that are part of our daily lives in school. (*Nikita, primary*)

Teachers' Positions within the School

As indicated already, the systems at primary and second level are different in a number of ways. Primary teachers tend to have responsibility for a single class for a minimum of one school year. Primary support teachers work with individuals or small groups for indefinite periods of time but for at least a term and often for two or more years. At second level, class teachers are subject based and may have responsibility for a particular class or classes within year groups, as a class tutor. It could be argued that primary teachers are in a stronger position in terms of care practices because of the length of

time that they spend with their pupils. (Hargreaves *et al.* 1996; O'Brien, 2004)

The system of Pastoral Care at second level seems to be well established in the schools represented by the interviewees. It is fair to say however that in post-primary, care is more fragmented and dependent on a certain number of individuals who have a designated responsibility for Pastoral Care. Because of this, it might have been expected that religion teachers or support teachers would have been more open and positive towards care practices than those working as teachers of mathematics, science or similar subjects. This might have been readily explained by the greater amount of exam pressure in some subjects compared to others; however, this did not necessarily prove to be the case entirely as the following comments indicate.

If I were to think back to when I started teaching, I never would ever have seen¹⁶⁴ myself as a 'carer' in the middle of teaching science and maths. I wouldn't have though it is possible to be doing algebra and chatting about the weekend! I wouldn't be able to cope without doing it because the kids wouldn't have been able to cope or focus.
(*Pamela, second-level*)

I suppose the tutor system as well was good for me as I was lucky in that maths was a core subject...For me, I was teaching the whole group and you got to know them very well, good or bad. You would talk to them, not in the middle of class but as they were coming in and out or if you knew they were involved in something. (*Amy, second level*)

Of course, pointing out that care could be more usefully done by others or comments about colleagues being too task orientated were also made. Some noted that fellow staff members often questioned whether or not they were expected to be nurses or social workers, given the type of caring tasks they

were undertaking. In the experience of the researcher, those who were most committed to care values rarely expressed those views.

I also think that there are teachers who are too worried about task and about thinking 'I've got to get through that book by the end of the year and I've got to get these kids ready for their exams'. They get lost in the idea that these are all human beings in front of them with emotions and feelings. They forget that in the task. (*Celine, VTOS*)

Of course, the issue of whether teachers should be undertaking roles other than their teaching one is a wider issue and one that will continue to be debated. What is important to note is that because of the social and economic conditions of the school communities in which they work, teachers have to undertake care roles in order to carry out their educational obligations.

This seems to me to be the 'carer' role, making the child aware of the supports through SPHE and the various modules on the importance of health, physical mental and psychological. So that would be the carer role and then there would be maths, science, English, the education part of things. (*Matt, second-level HSCL*).

Matt's comment is a lone one in that he was the only respondent who felt that care should be carried out in specific circumstances and for specific reasons. In the traditional view of teaching, the rational and emotional aspects are completely separate and the production of knowledge is the dominant value.

The role of principal at both primary and second level is somewhat similar, especially in this sample, as none of the principals have formal teaching duties. Of the five principals in the sample (N=18), four were teachers in the school for the majority of their teaching careers before taking up the position

of principal. The other principal had a varied career, teaching in both a middle class school and in inner city London.

I'm principal here ... but have been in this school for over 30 years and I worked in mainstream, learning support, in special education and as a home school co-ordinator ... In that sense I know the school very well, the issues and concerns that we have around the school as well as all our strengths. (*Annette, primary principal*).

Taking on the role of principal after having been a teacher in the school has a number of advantages. The most obvious one is the familiarity with the staff, students and parent body. School leaders have the benefit of being able to observe more of the components and processes that make up the daily life of schools. They have responsibilities for leading the teaching and learning and how teaching and learning is integrated into the daily routines of school life. Having a long association with the school can facilitate that integration. They also have a significant and powerful role in the continuing development of the school ethos which will be discussed in the next section.

School Ethos and Values

The school cannot separate itself from the wider community it serves and the relationships, aspirations and attitudes of that community form part of the ethos and values of the school. Indeed, the school which best incorporates those community values into its own, is the school which has the greatest chance of experiencing a strong common sense of purpose (Pring, 2000). Making care the central value and organising other systems around that central value is what Fraser (2000) envisaged in the model of universal care giver.

The issue of care as part of the school climate or culture was a clearly identified theme in the interview responses. Almost all of the respondents believed their schools to be caring places (n=16). The remaining two who expressed more negative views about their schools as caring places located their comments in terms of relationships, specifically the relationship between the staff members. One believed that there was no such thing as a 'caring school' because of the difficulty in ensuring that teachers and other staff behaved in exactly the same respectful manner. For her, this school could not be considered caring unless all approached care in the same way.

While many schools have caring teachers and even management personnel who place significant value on care practices, all the policies, procedures and organisation can come to nothing if one teacher treated pupils in a way that is counter to the prevailing ethos.

I've come across it time and time again where the Principal is fantastic and the secretary is fantastic and you know the School Completion Co-ordinator (SCP) and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) are welcomed yet there might be one teacher in that school that is making the kids lives hell.
(*Helena, VTT*).

Although this view was a genuinely held one based on the teacher's own experience, it seems somewhat extreme as there will always be differences depending on how strongly the value of care is embedded in the teacher's individual and professional identity.

Matt, who as discussed above saw a difficulty in describing the school as caring, pointed out that staff development could be improved as not all of the teachers were understanding or sympathetic to the issue of educational

disadvantage or the social conditions and family background of some of the pupils. He believed that many of the teachers who had difficulty with the valuing of care tended to view their professional responsibilities in terms of examination preparation and adherence to the syllabus in each curricular area. This represents the more traditional view and understanding caring as something to be done by other people and in a specific and defined context.

Even though there has been a lot of work done through the home school liaison scheme, a number of teachers don't buy into it and still just follow the guidelines laid down by the Department ... the materials for doing examinations. Basically what they have in the classroom is a timetable and a syllabus and are confined to that and are very rigid in that sense. (*Matt, second-level HSCL*)

Some referred to particular individuals who were especially influential in setting out the framework of care within the school. These were very often the school principal or someone in a position of leadership or influence within the school. These individuals had made a significant and lasting impression on young teachers and in some cases, laid the foundations for the care practices that the respondents have described in their interviews.

I think that the Pastoral Care ethos in our school is strong and a lot of that had to do with Ms. O C who was the vice principal at the time. It is interesting for me to note that having spent more than thirty years in the school, how one or two people can make a real mark ... her influence was very strong. (*Tim, primary*).

Our original principal was brilliant. I don't think any of his successors have touched him. It all came from him ... care of the place ... care of the students. When he asked you to do something he knew you could do it. He believed in high standards. (*Amy, second level*).

Leadership is crucial to the valuing of care as a value of hope within the school. Leadership may be manifest in the formal roles of the school community or in individuals who possess such qualities as part of their personal or professional identities.

It comes as no real surprise that when asked to describe why they thought their schools were caring, a variety of explanations were given by the respondents. Many referred to the concerned, open and genuine ambience that seemed to permeate the school. Others noted that the sense of fairness and justice was the dominant interface of student teacher exchanges. The theme of fairness is one which was repeated throughout the interviews, although the terms justice and fairness seemed to be used inter-changeably. Interviewees stressed that it was extremely important to have a system that was openly fair but that was flexible enough to accommodate those whose needs demanded something extra. In that sense, the researcher believed that teachers understood justice, not in same way as the universal ethic that was described in Chapter One, but in a more egalitarian sense.

A radical view of equality might dismiss the norms of fairness but these teachers do not have that egalitarian language to articulate such concepts despite being able to identify their schools as caring places.

Without a doubt, every single teacher who has spent time here in the school has commented on the fact that when you walk through the door there is a nice atmosphere. (*Pamela, second-level*).

Some schools you go into and you feel they are pretending. You get the impression that things are being put on for a show ... that behind the closed doors there is a lot of shouting and humiliation going on. (*Celine, VTOS*)

I think students know who they can go to and talk to and who they can trust. I suppose I would be looking out for people that were falling by the wayside or not being looked after. I think that if they know that you are fair and consistent and that you treat everyone the same no matter what their background. (*Sally, second level*)

Another primary teacher attempted to define the sense of care in his school in terms of a prevailing attitude to the needs of the pupils, especially their emotional needs.

Yes well a lot would have to do with the attitude that people have. These things are hard to measure and hard to quantify. They are hard even to see sometimes. In the case of our school we have a very strong recognition of the fact that the children coming into school have emotional needs and that for some their life experiences have been poor. (*Tim, primary*)

The need for a central, coherent approach, while not referred directly to by everyone, was implicit in many of the responses. Where teachers felt that they had to negotiate their own approach in terms of care and emotional work, it was generally with the help of supportive colleagues and friends as this primary teacher notes:

You would have discussed a child or a particular problem with like-minded teachers but a lot didn't buy into it. I suppose teachers have their own difficulties and dealt with things in their own way ... In contrast with my school now there is a lot more of a formalisation of the expectation of care and the duty of care. Teachers are more aware themselves in their own work. (*Peter, primary*)

Fragmentation of Care as a Value

Side by side with the supportive dimensions of care in the daily life of the school are those aspects that contribute to the fragmentation of care. This fragmentation is explored through Bourdieu's (1997) concept of *habitus*, where individual actions are shaped by existing structures. Oppositional value systems have to operate side by side in the particular field despite their disparate aims. This section discusses the difference between parental care and teacher care and the difference in values systems between school, home and the local community.

Parental Care and Teacher Care

Towards the end of the interviews, the participants were asked what were the similarities or differences between the role of the parent and the role of the teacher in terms of caring. There was quite a variety in the responses. Some were able to answer quickly and confidently while others were more hesitant and needed time to formulate their answers, especially those who were parents themselves. The most obviously identified difference centred on the fact that teachers were not with their pupils twenty four hours per day. Therefore, participants believed that there was a lesser sphere of influence for teachers in comparison to parents. One second-level male teacher expressed the lone view that there were no similarities between the role of parent and teacher in terms of caring.

A parent is working on a different level. Obviously a parent will have a far closer bond with the kid than a teacher will ever have ... You're talking about two totally different types of involvement here. (*Matt, second level*)

A majority of replies referred in some way to the consistency and structure that the school environment placed on teachers' care roles. In one sense they had to be more professional and formal about their caring. On the other hand there was a continuous thread between the two contexts of care.

Our job is teaching and learning at school. That's our main focus. The parent's main focus is looking after the child, caring for the child and looking after their basic needs of food, love, shelter and belonging. The teacher's role is teaching and learning ... but within that atmosphere of love and belonging and caring ... it has to be so integrated. *(Annette, primary principal)*

At school you have to be more 'upbeat'. You only have the child for a limited part of the day and for a limited part of the year. You have to be more upbeat, organised and focused in order to develop the child's affection. You have to be a bit 'performative' ... good humoured and jolly. *(Fionn, primary principal)*

A number of other respondents saw very close similarities between the two aspects of parental and teacher care, and furthermore, they identified a level of frustration at not being able to act more like a parent when obviously some pupils needed their teacher to be in that role.

So then the teachers are taking on some of the worries of a parent and it's quite draining. You couldn't survive teaching in a disadvantaged area if you didn't because by caring you understand a bit more about where the kids are coming from. *(Pamela, second-level)*

I suppose I'm there primarily as an educator. I'm there to teach them a subject and impart knowledge to them. But in some ways I'm like their mothers sometimes when they come up to you and tell you their problems. Sometimes they even call you 'ma'. *(Sally, second level)*

I see more similarities than anything else. Actually, my daughter is the exact same age as the class that I teach so it's very similar and it's actually the differences that are harder, because at times I'd love to hug some of my pupils because they need it but in the current climate you cannot do that.
(*Carmel, primary*)

Other respondents believed that some parents were not in a position to care for their children or that there were discrepancies between what some parents needed to do for their children and what they were able to do. Most believed that the reasons for this were generally because of a difficulty in the parents' own lives. There was a certain recognition that for some parents it was a question of resources and for others it was a question of not being able to use the types of resources that would assist their children in the complex world of school (O'Brien, 2005).

I think that all parents care for their kids. I think that some parents don't know how to do it, particularly those who have had a poor educational experience and have been brutalised by life. They don't have their own needs met so they can't get past their own needs to look at their own kids. (*Celine, VTOS*)

The difference would be that one (teacher) has to provide for the educational needs. The parent does that as well but they also have the added thing of providing for the basic essentials. I'm not saying that happens all the time. Real life is different. Teachers often cross over in terms of real life.
(*Gillian, primary HSCL*)

There was a clear difference in the responses between primary and secondary participants and this distinction was evident in that many of the second-level respondents framed their answers around the idea of discipline and respect. It is to be expected that, in a more formal structure, discipline frameworks will be to the fore. Overall, participants were keen to point out that while

discipline and order were necessary, classroom and school discipline must be underpinned by flexibility and adaptability.

There are a lot of similarities anyway in that the 'carer' has to look after their welfare so that they are safe and happy. But respect is one of the main rules in our code ... respect ... respect. We don't itemise rule breaches as such we simply ask the children are you being respectful? (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

It should be noted that the male participants tended to speak less about love and affection and used terms more associated with discipline, consistency and order even though it was spoken in the spirit of care. These findings are consistent with the literature in Chapters One and Two which clearly indicates the gendered nature of care in western societies.

My initial reaction is very little. I believe that I can discipline more here and I can say things more here and can be more honest here. I can ask things of people. Not that I wouldn't ask my own kids, but they would argue with me and might not do it! (*Fergus, second-level principal*)

Further exploration of this theme showed that some believed the teacher was in a better position to look out for the pupil and make sure that there was an individual share of attention given to her. There was a strong sense that the commitment to care involved really looking out for the child in a professional as well as personal sense. These comments may be interpreted in other ways and, as the next sub-section shows in more detail, may indicate the dissonance between value systems that teachers operate under in disadvantaged schools.

Also the teacher has the chance to spot a depression or a bad mood more. (*Nikita, primary*)

You have to give an opportunity for some children who may not be accustomed to things in their home ... an opportunity for some child who may be in the middle in a family. When they're in your class they're not in the middle. You can be quite individual to that child. (*Fionn, primary principal*)

In this respect the different context of school can be advantageous for some children and the way that they are facilitated to interact within a different group dynamic can be beneficial.

Parental and School Values

In a number of the responses to the theme of parental and teacher care, there was a spill over into a discussion on the different values between home and school and the difficulties that such a dissonance caused. One primary teacher was disturbed at the homophobic and racist remarks of her 6th class male pupils but felt somewhat powerless to oppose it actively.

But if that happens in my class (remarks), I'm very conscious that that's what they are hearing at home and it's very hard to counter that ... but I feel that my own kids behaviour is unacceptable then I can say 'you are wrong to think that'. (*Carmel, primary*)

This is an interesting comment because although the teacher found such comments distasteful and wrong she did not feel in a position to challenge them.

Another second level teacher spoke about the wide gap between the experiences of her pupils and her own children. This also caused a degree of frustration when trying to impart values which were often at odds with the values of the community. In general, teachers see the cultural differences of their students in deficit terms. The dominant cultural capital of the class to

which teachers belong to (the middle class) is rarely challenged by teachers who are unable to recognise how economic context shapes these differences.

It's like bashing your head off a brick wall. Unfortunately, and that is another thing, there are big cultural differences. I suppose I would come from a middle class background and you have to be very careful not to impose your own cultural values on their cultural values. But I feel I'm never going to get through to them ... never going to change their ways. You can be as caring and supportive as possible but if a person has their mind made up? (*Sally, second level*)

There are ways of behaving in society that the children don't see anywhere so if they don't discover those ways of behaviour and buy into them then their future in education is going to be very precarious and very poor. They are going to find it very difficult do an interview, to find a job or get on with their work mates. (*Tim, primary*)

In some cases the challenge of different values or outlooks was connected to issues of behaviour but certainly for the second-level respondents, this frustration was expressed in terms of educational aspirations and how the different sets of values affected academic performance and standards. It was also a theme where the second-level responses appeared more negative than their primary school counterparts. This may be explained by the greater pressure on second-level teachers to prepare students for public examinations or the fact that primary school teachers have a closer relationship with the parent body in their schools. The frustration at the underachievement of pupils is somewhat at odds with an overall, if somewhat basic understanding of the issues that educationally disadvantaged and socially excluded pupils face; however, some did try to place poor performance in the wider context.

There's a lot of underachievement here. From my experience, especially as a maths teacher this is down to poor attendance, something that parents are not aware of. They don't have an awareness that if kids are to do well then they need to be in school *all day every day*. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

Two primary principals noted that, for some parents, the concern expressed by the school is sometimes seen as a complaint or interfering in the life of the family. This is particularly difficult for younger or less experienced teachers who don't know either the family circumstances that well or don't have the personal skills to deal with a 'delicate' situation. Of course, this is open to an interpretation that 'only the teacher' knows what is best for the child and may support the case that teachers have a superior view about the care they give in the educational context. This is a clear example of the paternalism that Tronto (1993) contends is one of the dangers with care. While this is a valid enough interpretation, it does not sit in overall harmony with the moral obligation to care that is evident in most of the interviews.

When teachers approach those parents (of children who may be challenging) ... it's not easy for a young teacher to do ... you know the parents see maybe she's only complaining again. They don't see that it's for the good of the child at the end of the day. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

But for our kids, it is vitally important that the teacher understand that there may not be anyone at home who is rooting for the kids to do well in school so what they are doing in school is so alien and so removed from their parent's world. The teacher and the school's position becomes completely meaningless ... a meaningless experience. (*Helena, VTT*).

The literature (O'Brien 2005) has clearly shown how difficult it is for parents in working class families to offer the kinds of support necessary to negotiate the complexities of the world of school. Nonetheless while the above

comment from Helena recognises some parents cannot offer that necessary support, there is little or no analysis as to why that is.

Teacher Identity and Care

As stated at the outset of this chapter, care as a value is multifaceted and somewhat intangible. Teacher identity is also an area of great complexity and the subject of a large body of educational scholarship. A significant part of being a teacher is the management of emotions. Chapter Two of this study discussed the emotional aspect of teaching and teacher identity in great detail. This section of the data analysis will look at a number of themes which have been identified as having a significant influence on teacher identity and care. These are: the ability to pursue individual goals, motivation and support, and the management of tension between conflicting aspects of teacher agency.

Performativity and the Value of Care

Understandably enough, the pressures on second-level teachers are considerably different to those at primary level. The literature has shown that at both levels there is a very real and definite increase in the pressures of a performance culture accompanied by a climate of assessment and accountability. Arguably, the change in climate to a type of performance culture has been more challenging for those in the primary sector as their traditional teaching role has been more closely aligned with that of a parent and the caring aspect of their professional identity has been understood implicitly. In addition, the teaching profession has become increasingly dominated by women and so the imposition of a more 'masculine culture of

managerialism' has become a site of struggle against the more feminine ethos of care. Dealing with conflicting obligations was a source of stress for all of those interviewed, but different approaches to the problem were recorded.

For some, the stress was dealt with by trying to infuse and incorporate their care practices into their professional obligations so that there was no obvious dichotomy between the two.

I would say that if care is part of the structures and that it is in-built, that care is an expectation, then it is not so difficult, Care is taken as part of your work so it is easier to carry out.
(*Peter, primary*)

One didn't suffer at the expense of the other ... I found that these were my values and it made the learning situation and the teaching situation more pleasant for the children. But it also made it more pleasant for me (*Bernard, primary*).

Others commented on the fact that at certain times, such as before or during a Whole School Evaluation (WSE)¹⁸ they moved more definitely into a 'work mode'. One primary teacher commenting on her school's recent WSE was frustrated at the lack of acknowledgment in the final report of the excellent care work that she and her colleagues did on a regular basis.

Deep down the Department acknowledge that there are immeasurable things going on and they pat us on the back to a certain extent about that ... But they still have to fill out their forms and tick their boxes. We got a favourable report but I feel there were a lot of unspoken things that weren't mentioned. 'Under the circumstances you did very well but let's not spend too much time talking about the circumstances'. (*Nikita, primary*)

¹⁸ Whole School Evaluations are carried out at both primary and second- levels approximately every five years. They involve the examination of the school's curricular, administrative and organisational planning and policies, as well as an assessment of the teaching and learning in the school.

Several participants used the word 'tightrope' when asked about the stress of dealing with performativity and care, and this comment below reflects the view that, for many teachers, there are daily decisions and balancing acts.

So it's like walking a tightrope between not putting them under pressure and not causing them any misery either. I don't feel I'm catering for the need of either set in the class. That is not to say I'm not getting support. I'm getting support within the range that's possible in the school but it just not enough. You're on the spot a lot of the time and you're challenged by this. No amount of planning or training will sort that out. I think reflection time would be amazing to have ... even an hour a month. (*Carmel, primary*)

School principals are often under additional emotional pressure as they are obliged to offer leadership in relation to teaching and learning as well as supporting the caring ethos of the school. At second level, the pressure of public examinations and their results, can have a significant effect on staff morale. The narrow focus on test scores which has become an increasing facet of the interventions to alleviate educational disadvantage has generated its own stress and a further marginalisation and misrecognition of the significance of care, as these comments below indicate.

It is difficult to cope at times. In our DEIS plan ... it was put out that one of our objectives might be to raise our MICRA T¹⁹ by one per cent. Now that made no sense to me at all because it is not the whole picture and it doesn't describe what the learning might be for a particular child ... If a leader ever came to this school and would insist on paper work, that would mean a loss of care for the children. I'm happy to say that this has never happened here. (*Annette, primary principal*)

¹⁹ Drumcondra Test, Micra T and Sigma T are standardised tests, based on Irish norms, which measure achievement in literacy and numeracy at primary level.

When the teachers here get the results from their Drumcondra tests and they get the MICRA T and all that, they're disappointed with them. They've worked really hard and the results show that we're really at the lower end of the national population²⁰. (*Hilary, primary principal*)

Another primary principal, commenting on the lack of high scoring results or test scores believed that teachers and principals must come to terms with new ways of defining one's sense of professional achievement and move away from the more traditional sources of professional satisfaction such as student performance.

You have to engage in projects and acknowledge that it may never be noticed by the parents or the children who are participating in them. In those kinds of things you have to be a lot more resourceful, more flexible and a lot less precious about your own sense of self esteem. (*Fionn, primary principal*)

At second level participants noted the same gap between what was expected of them by the system and what was needed by their students on a daily basis. Again, some dealt with the issue by continuing to value care by incorporating care into their teaching while others dealt with the pressure as it arose.

To be honest teaching the level that I was, like Junior Cert and foundation level, I would do the course five times within three years and you have the time to go over everything. But it's not that I suddenly went home and said to myself, 'Oh I better start caring now'. It just happened. I wouldn't have survived otherwise. (*Pamela, second-level*).

Another teacher, speaking about streaming, saw a difficulty for new or inexperienced teachers in having to deal with these pressures. It should be

²⁰ Current statistics indicate that achievement scores in some Band 1 educationally disadvantaged schools are up to 30% below the national average both in literacy and mathematical performance.

noted again that while almost all of the second level respondents referred to streaming in the interviews, no one saw it as particularly problematic. Indeed, the practice of giving the more competent students to more experienced or higher achieving colleagues seems to be widespread. While this teacher did comment on it, there seems to be little or no challenge to this practice.

The comments are indicative of a liberal view of equality where ability is traditionally understood and meritocratic values dominate. It further reflects the different class values of teachers and their students in the educationally disadvantaged school. Teachers are products of the system as it is currently organised and so need a language to challenge the values of that system.

On one side they do feel sad (teachers) that the kids are not getting the same as other kids. In some schools the weaker classes are given to the new or inexperienced teachers and those with more experience get the honours students. I think it should be the other way around. The honours classes almost teach themselves. You need your good teachers in the classes where the kids are having difficulty. (*Celine, VTOS*).

It doesn't matter, you can go in, cover the course and you might be the best teacher in the world but the frustration is that it doesn't matter what you do, you will never get the results that another school in a more middle class area will get. (*Amy, second level*)

There were very obvious stresses and strains for teachers in terms of performativity, but the majority were positive about maintaining their care practices as an integral part of their professional duties. They were pragmatic about the fact that although they worked hard, the traditional routes for job satisfaction and professional acknowledgment, normally associated with high student achievement, were closed to them - as this second-level principal and class teacher point out.

We don't get rewards in terms of results or anything like that. When it comes to the league tables we won't be dancing around the staffroom saying what number we're at. People do it because they get a lot out of it. (*Brenda, second-level principal*)

So I think certain teachers are suited to certain styles of education and so I think this style of education is the one that I am suited to. (*Sally, second level*)

Despite the drive for achievement that is such a fundamental part of the professional lives of teachers, these teachers held care as a significant value that guided their daily practice and gave them a sense of reward. The last comment is significant in that while other interviewees referred to this in a more subtle way, this statement overtly accepts that in disadvantaged schools a 'different' approach is needed. This could be interpreted as accepting an alternative system for those who are marginalised rather than a restructuring of an obviously unequal system.

Valuing Care and Continuing to Care

It is accepted that teaching is a relational activity, but by and large, teaching is also a solitary occupation. A team approach may be used in some schools and is certainly advocated as an approach in the new revised primary curriculum; nonetheless, the majority of teachers work in classrooms alone, and with little formal interaction with their colleagues during their daily teaching activities. Most of the respondents noted the fact that they were pleased that they were making some kind of difference in the lives of their pupils and students and that was sufficient for them to feel positive and motivated. This was true even of those who were less than positive about their schools as caring schools. Many were able to relate stories about

individual students who had responded positively despite difficult and challenging circumstances at home or in school.

You keep hoping that the number of times you can connect with this child will increase, and that the number of times you will lose him will decrease. When that happens you can say to yourself 'we did well' and then you feel good. *(Amy, second level)*

There was the old thing that teaching was a vocation so I believe that in that sense that good caring teachers believe that what they are doing is actually really important, because it is about learning and knowledge and the generation of knowledge and the transfer of learning ... Teachers have an important role in enabling children to understand so that their world becomes rich. I think a lot of teachers believe that. *(Celine, VTOS)*

Others found support and motivation from colleagues and friends. Those who were able to integrate aspects of their personality with what they needed professionally, or who were realistic about what they had to do, came across as the most positive. These two comments, both from the primary sector, sum up this view.

You have to have a mindset. I don't know if there is a module in training colleges for working in a disadvantaged school. You do want what is best for these kids and you want to ask the best from them, but you are in a situation where sometimes, something as basic as a good night's sleep is not a given at all. *(Nikita, primary)*

I think too that you have to become a different kind of teacher, a different kind of principal, a different kind of person working in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. You have to get your 'kicks', your affirmation in exceedingly different ways than when you teach in a middle class school. *(Fionn, primary principal)*

Interesting enough, the above comment was from a male principal but the idea that you have to be a different type of teacher in a disadvantaged setting

was one that was stated many times throughout the interviews and has a resonance with Gilligan's seminal work of care, *In a Different Voice* (1982).

For those at second level, there was a well-established institutionalised system of care and this provided both a framework of care for the pupils and a support for the teachers where there were well worked out protocols. One second-level principal commented on the fact that when an 'incident' occurred, such as a major breach of discipline, the teacher often had to continue on to the next class without any opportunity to debrief or get support. This added to the already considerable stress that the teacher may have endured.

Others at primary level had professional teams, such as the Special Education Team, who had a particular responsibility to look out for children who needed extra support. This is especially true of those in leadership roles who felt that as well as their own care practices, it was extremely important for them to recognize the contribution of staff members and to affirm such practices as important. One principal whose school had written some of these care objectives into the school plan felt very pleased about making the value of care explicit.

There's no point in setting out objectives that would not take into account the amount of work that was going on here in terms of caring for the children or that would not take into account the realities of some families where there is addiction or substance misuse, violence or terrible poverty. It is possible to write it into the plan (DEIS plan) and I'm very pleased about that. (*Annette, primary principal*)

For others, it was a question of falling back on their own personal resources, their personalities or their experience to get them over any challenges.

I suppose it's a great thing from a personal point of view to be still committed to it and still enthusiastic about it and to feel that caring for the children in the wider sense is still a priority for me ... The day I feel it's not worthwhile anymore then I'll be disappointed, but it'll be time to go then. *(Peter, primary)*

I believe it's a personality thing. I see some teachers are very driven in terms of curriculum and find it very difficult when they are not getting the curriculum covered. That doesn't bother me in the slightest because I know if the circumstances are right it'll be done. If I have the right ground sown, the seeds will be planted. *(Carmel, primary)*

Having to deal with these issues from one's own personal resources no doubt involves a lot of emotional labour, but it is surprising that those participants, who referred to coping in such terms, were remarkably upbeat, dwelling on the satisfaction of caring.

Educator or Educarer?

The interview schedule introduced the word educarer as a possible means of clarifying teacher identity and care. Only a small number of participants followed through on this discussion using the word educarer but one primary teacher had very strong views on the matter.

It's funny when you said that, I got a negative reaction to the term educarer even though I have just noted the similarities with the role of parents. Ultimately I see myself as their teacher. So, that term grated with me when you used it. However, the caring part of my role is huge because I cannot get to the education without the caring. But I wouldn't like to be seen as a pure carer and just that, without the role of an educator. It's both. *(Carmel, primary)*

Another primary teacher took the opposite view and thought that educator was an appropriate term to use, and that it helped both to define her role and blur the boundaries between both aspects of it.

Yes, that's a good word actually. We're all on first names with our pupils and I think that is significant, and we're all comfortable with it. For parents, it's easier. The children would often continue to call you 'teacher' when they're looking for attention but that has blurred the line between educator on the one side and parent or carer on the other.
(*Nikita, primary*)

The majority of the interviewees saw themselves primarily as educators but with a strong caring dimension. No one considered care to be a personal attribute despite the fact that, as indicated earlier, there were somewhat negative references from participants regarding colleagues who did not have such a dimension to their educator role.

So every school that I worked in had a number of teachers who believed that they weren't social workers. Regardless of how good or how caring the management was, there was always a percentage of staff who did not go along with that, and that's where the tension for me existed. (*Helena, VTT*)

This same second-level teacher felt that teacher behaviour was crucial to imparting the values that a caring education demanded. Preparing to work in schools in general needed much better preparation as discrepancies between what was taught and what actually happened were not acceptable.

So if you're talking about acting wisely and you've got teachers who are screeching and shouting about nothing or something that doesn't matter to the children then they see that this acting wisely isn't something that people really do. This is the problem with teacher training. It's so academic and not experiential. (*Helena, VTT*)

Many referred to the fact that without care practices or care values they couldn't function as teachers nor be expected to perform their work adequately. There was a sense of agreement, even if everyone didn't refer to it exactly, that different dynamics were at play in educationally disadvantaged schools and that care was an essential way of making those schools function. Moreover, these care dynamics gave teachers a sense of professional value in order to continue their work. As indicated already, the sample for the interviews is made up exclusively from educators working or having had experience of working in educationally disadvantaged schools. No attempt was made to compare the care practices of educators in more affluent or middle class environments. Many interviewees did make comparisons with colleagues, family or friends working in those contexts to show the difference between what they did and what they felt was true for the rest of the system. This rather ironic comment summarises this view quite succinctly.

Friends of mine are working in more up-market schools and they will come in and hear in their staffrooms 'Oh, I've had a dreadful day today!! Two students came in and didn't have their homework done. They told lies'. You'd be incredulous! I'd say it would be very strange to be working in a school like that ... boring I think. (*Pamela, second-level*)

Another second-level teacher described her work as a teacher in terms of the work of schools. In this comment, the relational nature of care and the interactive essence of teaching were identified.

The work of schools and the work of education is about people more so than any other career, even more so than those in human resource type of work. Schools are about people. It is a very intense job on human development.
(*Celine, VTOS*)

Conclusion

This chapter has explored care as a value, showing that care practices are attentive and responsive to the needs of the students. Relations of trust are most important for the healthy development of young people. While care is not the same as trust, caring relations are characterised by trust (Held, 1993, 2006).

This chapter has also shown that care as a value is also a deeply reflective component of a professional teacher identity. Biography, sense of purpose, motivation and commitment are significant elements of that caring identity. Continuing to care for students, often causing degrees of stress and tension for particular teachers, is a prime motivator in the individual's sense of themselves. Nevertheless, even where a teacher has placed a very high personal and professional significance on the value of care, teachers generally see themselves primarily as educators.

There is a clearly articulated collegiality in maintaining the value of care in teachers' daily work. It is a significant source of motivation. The responses have shown that the reflective aspect of care is something that is done on a widespread basis despite the lack of formalised recognition or structures for this approach.

The often conflicting values between the local community and those of the school, coupled with the dynamic tension that is at play between the caring and performing aspects of the teachers' role, all take an emotional toll on individuals. Despite the very obvious difficulties that teachers face in balancing the demands of the system and accommodating the gaps in achievement, the educators in this study have, by and large demonstrated a deep concern for their work, the issue of care and more importantly their pupils and students.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: The Significance of Care in Teaching

Introduction

The principles of justice firmly underpin the institutions and structures of western states and dominate the moral norms of those societies (Noddings, 1995; Tovey and Share, 2003). The concept of individuality, independent freedom and autonomy in decision making is so embedded in our way of thinking that it is seen to be synonymous with our mental and physical well-being (Halsey *et al.* 1997).

Egalitarian scholarship has argued and this thesis has substantiated the point that not all citizens enjoy the same levels of freedom and autonomy. In the liberal tradition, equality is conceived in individualistic terms, focused in the public sphere of economic and political rights and imbued with a sense that all should be able to compete fairly for status and resources, while maintaining that there will always be inequalities between people.

There are several dimensions of inequality and they exist in inter-related contexts (Baker *et al.*, 2004; Lynch *et al.*, 2009). This research has focused on the dimension of love, care and solidarity which has traditionally been largely of individual concern and confined to the private sphere of home and mothering. Feminist scholarship has shown that, contrary to the ethic of justice and the tenets of liberalism, we are not exclusively independent, individual and rational beings but are dialogical, relational and wholly dependent with life-long care needs.

Affective inequality, which is the aspect of inequality that this thesis is concerned with, is present on two levels - inequality for those who are involved in doing care work and inequality for those in receipt of care (Lynch *et al.*, 2009). This thesis set out to explore the practice and the ethic of care among primary and secondary school teachers in educationally disadvantaged settings where teachers are dealing with ongoing and consistent misrecognition of their care practices. All students of course have care needs but some students, who for a variety of social, economic and emotional reasons have greater un-met care needs.

A number of challenges were presented at the outset of this research. Care is still relatively unexplored in Irish education despite some significant studies (Lynch 1999, 2007; Lynch *et al.*, 2009; O'Brien, 2005; O'Brien and Flynn, 2007; Feeley, 2007). The European and international literature in the area has centred particularly on primary school teachers; none was focused on care in educationally disadvantaged settings. Chapters One and Two have shown that the concept of care continues to evolve, both as a moral theory and as a practical framework. Despite the prevalence and influence of feminist scholarship, care continues to be misrecognised, undervalued, marginalised and consigned to the private world of the family and the realm of motherhood (Kittay and Feder, 1999, 2002; Nussbaum, 1995; Tronto, 1993).

Some aspects of the literature have focused on an examination of the often opposing merits of justice and of care. Both justice and care have different, but arguably, complementary moral considerations. Unequal access to the

necessary relations of care is both an issue of equality and of justice (Lynch *et al.* 2009).

In the current educational context, which values a liberal view of equality, the data, in this thesis, indicate that care must be tempered with justice (understood as fairness). Similarly, the organisation of teaching, learning and the organisation of school life must be flexible to accommodate those whose unmet care needs deny students maximum participation in learning. The ethic of care is concerned especially with how the interests of the individual interconnect with the personal interests of others. Therefore, the teacher as an active agent must also be considered in the overall framework.

The findings show that teachers can identify pupils who, for a variety of interconnected reasons, do not have sufficient levels of economic, social or personal capital to maximise the benefits of formal education. Of course, such students are not exclusive to educationally disadvantaged schools, but significant numbers of those students are present in socially excluded communities to make the issue of affective inequality a primary focus for this study.

This final chapter draws together the most significant findings of the study. The first part reviews the structure of care in schools and outlines the significance of care and care practices, focusing on relationships, motivation, beliefs and values. The second part discusses the issue of teachers' identity. In particular, it explores neo-liberal aspects of professional teacher identity and discusses how teachers accommodate the dialogical nature of a caring

professional identity with the seemingly incompatible aspects of a formal professional teacher identity. Drawing on the literature and incorporating the narratives of those interviewed, the thesis argues that those aspects of a professional care identity can be interpreted as a resistance to the powerful liberal, professional identity discourse. The chapter concludes by discussing the policy implications of this research for educational disadvantage and care practices.

The Significance of Care in Schools

While the sample in this study is relatively small, there is a remarkable consistency in the teachers' responses. Clearly, care practices are a highly significant part of the daily lives of teachers in educationally disadvantaged schools despite its unacknowledged and unrecognised status. The overall picture presented is that care has a noteworthy function in assisting the daily teaching and learning in those schools. Without the value of care underpinning the work of teachers and principals, it is clear that schools would have great difficulty in successfully coping with the multitude of socially-related issues that affect the life of a school community in socially excluded areas.

It is also noteworthy that the respondents, with the exception of one or two, had high levels of awareness of the need to care and showed a deep commitment to their care practices. Significant aspects of care, such as attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness that were outlined in Chapter One, have been shown to be present in all aspects of the narratives. The responses also show that care and care practices are neither

casual nor incidental. It is clear that teachers take a great deal of effort to maintain the care aspects of their practice.

Principals and those with leadership responsibilities also go to considerable lengths to ensure that care is part of the daily experience of children in their schools. When particular situations arise, the care needs of the individual are very often prioritised. This is especially true in relation to school discipline. While there was no significant difference in the responses in terms of gender, male respondents spoke of care practices in more formal terms and were less likely to use terms such as 'love' or 'affection'. This finding is reflected in the literature which indicates that men associate care and care giving with the feminine and may not be comfortable with emotional terms to describe their care practices. Such perspectives are inherent in the dominant, cultural norms of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 1995; Hochschild, 1995).

In the educational context, caring is often mistaken for caretaking which, in some of the literature, has been dismissed as sentiment (Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996; Noddings, 1992). The findings from the interviews do not indicate that teachers, in general, have fallen into what Nias (1996) termed a *paternal* or *parochial* view of care, although some comments could have been interpreted in that way. Indeed, many went to the trouble of emphasising that although their work was underpinned by a strong attachment to care, there was no reduction in academic standards and that every effort was made to keep aspirations and expectations high. Teachers were at pains to comment on high educational expectations or achievement levels for their students. Nonetheless, clear evidence elsewhere suggests that

low teacher expectations is a feature of teaching and learning in educationally disadvantaged contexts, (Archer and Weir, 2004; Smyth, 1999).

Overall, the majority of interviewees felt that the aims of education were too narrow but they did not explicitly name care as an important dimension of curriculum. Second-level educators regularly commented on what seemed to them to be a lack of ambition among their students, or what they perceived as a lack of ability to grasp what was needed to achieve high standards in a particular subject. This suggests that, although teachers seemed to understand the issues for educationally disadvantaged students, there was a significant gap in their understanding as why performance did not match ability. Despite the lack of critical analysis it is understandable that second-level teachers were more likely to be concerned about this issue as their own performance as teachers is connected to examination results. Consequently, the pressure on second-level teachers to adhere to the obligations of a more formal professional discourse seems to be greater.

The overall picture that emerges from the analysis of the findings is one of care as an educational response to the particular learning situations of students in socially and educationally excluded communities. While there is a very definite continuum of care practices and care values among the participants at both levels, it is not necessarily true that care is more visible or less challenging for teachers at primary level. It is somewhat surprising that care values or care practices were not especially problematic for second level teachers or principals despite the greater formality of the structures and

protocols at second level. This is an area that would warrant more in-depth study and analysis in future research.

The Emotional Aspect of Care in Teaching

A number of general points may be made about care and the emotions. Drawing on the work of Hargreaves (1998), Nias (1989), Noddings, (1992), and Nussbaum, (1995) and incorporating the narratives of this study, it is clear that care is an emotional practice. It involves emotional understanding and emotional labour. Emotional understanding is both a personal and collegiate process. Learning which emotions are acceptable in teaching is part of the professional journey that teachers must undertake; however, admitting that other emotions such as anger, joy, excitement and frustration are part of the dialogical nature of teaching is also very important even if their expression is somewhat curtailed by a discourse of professional identity. Emotional understanding also involves developing the ability to recognise what others are feeling such empathy is the basis of care. As Hargreaves (2003) indicates, emotional understanding involves setting up the organisational conditions which sustain enduring relationships.

Care is also reflective and so the practices of care are indivisible from their moral purpose. Schön's (1983) work on the notion of reflective practitioner is valuable as a means of understanding that the reflective judgement, which is an inherent aspect of teaching, is not a casual contemplation but a measured and deliberate critical reflection. His *reflection-in-action*, essentially a kind of thinking on one's feet, can also be directly connected

with care practices as this kind of reflection involves looking at past experiences, connecting with feelings and reacting to the unique situation.

The data in this study has shown how teachers often respond to a child or a student with immediate needs. Teachers and principals, primary and secondary were very clear that if a student presented with needs that required intervention, this had to be addressed immediately. Care judgements are formed then as a result of integrating the realities of the teaching life with the experience and emotions of the teacher.

As Chapters One and Two have asserted and the data substantiated, care is an inherently relational activity. Held (2006, p.36) contends; “.... as we clarify care we need to see it in terms of *caring relations*.” (emphasis in original). The concept of *caring relations* is not merely a descriptive term but carries within it a focus not only on the efforts to meet the needs of others but also on the motivation that underpins the practice. Crucially, it is the motivation that defines care as a value and it is the motivation that connects the value with the practice. The narratives highlight this point very well in the description of the actual relationships formed with both students and staff.

Relationships of Care

The findings show that the focus of care practice is most definitely on relationships, underpinning the inherent inter-connectedness of care. It is the face-to-face interaction that distinguishes care and care practices from other types of concern (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Acker, 1999; Held, 1993, 2006). The research shows how care practices and care values interface in a variety

of relationships throughout the school. Teachers go to great lengths to form individual and meaningful relationships with their students which appear to be above and beyond the good teacher/student relations that must be present for a fruitful learning environment. Many of the respondents spoke of the ways which they undertook to initiate and maintain those relationships and how they were willing to give of themselves.

A significant amount of emotional commitment and labour goes into improving and maintaining those relationships. The literature has shown that vulnerability and openness are essential in forming relationships. As detailed in Chapter Five, several teachers referred to the efforts that they made to get to know the students and were aware that in getting to know their students their students had to get to know them too. This implied a giving of themselves or what Gilligan (1982) termed as *attentiveness*. A small number of respondents were a little concerned that their efforts to forge relationships might appear as manipulation or that there was a sense of falseness about it. Some spoke about trying to get a topic that the student might be interested in, in order to find some common ground for the relationship to develop, and two participants referred to letting the students get to know the teacher as a person so that the relationships would be a genuine one and not contrived.

Support and Motivation to Care

Teaching, as it is currently structured, is a solitary and individual activity. The organisation of our schools and the physical layout of classrooms make it very difficult for teachers to protect themselves from feelings of isolation that such a physical and intellectual environment generates. Nonetheless, the

majority of respondents in the interviews referred to the sense of team work and support that they received from their colleagues. Care practices seem to thrive in those school environments where the atmosphere is supportive and collegial in a very genuine way. As one primary school teacher indicated in his interview, the teachers must care genuinely for each other before they can be asked to care for the students for whom they have responsibility. Those respondents who related difficulties with other staff members or who had a sense that their care practices were more or less up to themselves, were not as positive about doing or valuing care as the other interviewees. There is no doubt that the ethos of the school and the leadership of the principals and other senior figures in the organisation are crucial to a supportive environment which is, in turn, fundamental to a culture of care (Dellar, 1998; Donnelly, 2000).

Although this thesis did not specifically examine how teachers understood themselves as emotional beings, there is no doubt that the alignment of the personal and the professional was unique to each of the participants. This was noted in the optimism or pessimism of their answers. As Ball (2003) and Jeffery (2002) have both noted, teaching implies an ethical relationship in which the individual is engaged as a person. There is much more to teaching than the technical aspect of the practice (Dunne 2005). Similarly, there is more to care than just the actions of care.

Those who displayed deep understandings of their own emotional natures as teachers were much more in tune with their care practices and more able to participate in networks of care throughout the school. They also understood

the implications of their care practices better and were more articulate about their own involvement. These were teachers who, as one primary principal succinctly remarked, “were on good speaking terms with the inner teacher in themselves”.

Values and Care

The literature clearly points out the tensions that exist between performativity and care, and the data also reflect this. Teachers must constantly battle between the professional demands of their work and the time and effort needed for their commitment to care. The data have also highlighted the tension that exists between, what might be termed as the opposing values of home and school.

Major theorists such as Bourdieu (1984, 1986) have challenged the deficit model of underachievement and clarified the differences between resources and their distribution within the social structure. The concept of *habitus* helps us explain how the values of a community are shaped by social class (class habitus) and how those values affect consumption and lifestyle. Moreover, feminists after Bourdieu (O’Brien, 2005, 2008a; Reay 1998a) have developed Bourdieu’s work on habitus and ‘capitals’ to understand how the lack of the necessary emotional capital for some groups, contribute to the inequality in educational participation.

As indicated already, the Irish educational system is somewhat unique, given the traditional denominational dimension of its structures and the conventional, Christian and middle class nature of the teaching profession.

The findings certainly show a tension between the conflicting values of the institutional school and the values of the local community as the interviewees struggled to deal with, what seemed to them to be a lack of support from parents. Many made reference to the difficulties that such differing values caused for their work. Some referred to the lack of attendance at parent teacher meetings (a traditional complaint of teachers and schools). Others commented on the fact that low active parental involvement in their children's progress and their low aspirations were contributing to difficulties in their teaching obligations. Some could not understand how children would choose either their own second level school without any parental input or make subject choices without any consideration of the long-term implications of such choices. (O'Brien, 2008a; Reay, 1998a).

Failing to understand the structural, cultural and social origins of different values adds to the significant levels of tension and stress that teachers encounter in their professional lives. It is clear that teachers do not have a language of critique in which to articulate the conflicting values that they encounter every day. While the passion of their care values is evident, they are unable to rationalise on the systemic reasons for their frustrations.

The findings from the research are clear in identifying that conflicting values are a significant issue for both schools and their local communities. To date, discussion about values in the Irish context has tended to be focussed on the denominational nature of schooling and has not specifically addressed class or cultural dissonances (Boldt, 2000a; Mulcahy, 2000).

Care and Educational Disadvantage

Analysis of the findings suggests that significant care actions are undertaken on a daily basis to enhance the learning of students. This is perhaps one of the more striking results from the interviews, not only because care is often situated in direct opposition to the performative aspect of teacher activity, but also because of the very obvious inequality or inequalities that exist for those students. Many aspects of the learning environment which are taken for granted in mainstream schools and in the design of curriculum have to be manufactured or adapted for some students in an educationally disadvantaged context. Teachers have to accommodate alternative programmes, often in conjunction with other non-educational agencies. Individual children may require high levels of support, emotional and pedagogical, simply to access minimum levels of learning.

As one second-level teacher indicated, students may also sometimes have to make significant educational decisions alone because their parents are unfamiliar with the system and unaware of the implications of such choices. Research by Allat (1993), Reay (1998) and O'Brien (2005) supports the view that parents in working class or socially excluded areas do not have sufficient resources of the type necessary to produce the care needed to steer their children through a complex, hierarchical and unequal educational system.

The interviews have also documented the pedagogies and approaches that are used on a daily basis. Time as well as emotional and intellectual energy goes into these strategies which are used either to engage pupils in the learning process, to make their learning more relevant or to mitigate the effects of

poverty. No recognition of such practices exists formally, yet they are planned, enacted and maintained on a daily basis with considerable effort. Such practices are entirely dependent on local or individual acknowledgement.

The Discourse of Professional Identity

In Chapter Two the literature presented showed that the professional identity of teachers is complex and fluid, changing with life experience, local context and contingent on personal attributes. Traditional views of identity and teaching have focused on a predominately cognitive interface, on technical knowledge and the shared service ethic of a self-regulated community, not unlike law or medicine (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). Additional research, (Kelchtermans, 1996; Hargreaves, 1998; O'Connor, 2008) has recently shown that emotions and the emotional aspect of teaching are core and just as significant as cognitive elements when exploring teacher identity. Indeed, it might be more appropriate to use the term *identities* in this discussion given the multiple components (i.e. personal, historical and emotional) that interact so that a teacher can make sense of her individual and professional world.

Chapters Five and Six demonstrate clearly that there are two dimensions that are of relevance to the discourse of professional identity. The first is what may be termed 'the discourse of professional neutrality' (Zembylas, 2005) and is mirrored in the values of the market and what Hochschild (1983) represents as a corporate identity. The second is what Taylor (1991) refers to as an *authentic self* and what Golby (1996) suggests is an *authentic presence*.

This thesis contends that care and care practices may be viewed as an authentic identity for teachers and one which is capable of contesting an assigned identity of performativity and technical rationality.

Professional Neutrality and Performativity Discourses

Taylor (1991) speaks of three aspects of modernity which one should worry about. They are: the supremacy of individuality and a consequential loss of meaning for persons; dominance of instrumental reason; and, the reduction of political activity. The current climate of school reform and the increasing emphasis on teacher competencies such as technical expertise, efficiency, accountability and rationality²¹, have contributed to what might be termed as a discourse of professional neutrality (Zembylas, 2005).

Ball (2003, p. 217) also deals with this topic which he refers to as the “interrelated policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity”. (See also Grummell *et al.*, 2008). It is this discourse that controls a culture of regulation, incentives and judgements. It ordains how teachers should behave, how they should feel and which emotions must be suppressed and controlled. The literature has indicated evidence suggesting that there are certain dominant or normalised ways of behaving for teachers (Hargreaves, 1998; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002; Alsup, 2005).

Forrester (2005) argues that framing how teachers should operate and designating pre-ordained standards and targets undermines teachers’

²¹ The DEIS plan (2005a) is particularly concerned with ensuring that teachers are up-skilled in the various strategies to improve literacy and numeracy.

professional autonomy and judgement. Teachers are then encouraged to think of themselves as individuals who calculate their own worth. In a sense, value for money replaces values, as the ethics of competition and performance replace traditional ethics of judgement and co-operation.

Throughout the interviews respondents indicated the emotional toil and burnout that was associated with trying to balance the various obligations of their work. Stories of meeting students in free periods to sort out difficulties or to offer support were numerous. This tension is best exemplified by the primary school teacher in Chapter Five (Gillian) articulating very clearly on the difficulties of measuring the hidden aspects of her work. Many referred to the frustrations of poor results and extra pressure of inspections. This gave teachers a sense that they were putting on a show and that they were not being authentic. The comment from another primary school respondent about the phrase in her school's Whole School Examination (WSE) 'under the circumstances your school is doing well' sums up very well this sense of frustration. Having to put on a show for an inspection or act differently for outsiders seemed to be a challenge to authentic teacher identity.

The analysis also shows that teachers very often have to get on with things even when an emotional situation occurs. One second-level principal related the anguish that she felt for teachers when an incident such as a violent outburst or a similar difficult encounter occurred in her school. While it is normally considered to be good practice to 'de-brief' after such an event, in general, teachers had little option but to hurry to their next class and continue teaching as if nothing at all had happened. While the student may have

expressed an emotion such as anger, it was entirely unacceptable for the teacher to display any such similar emotion. Learning to control one's emotions and to suppress unacceptable emotions are part of the professional identity discourse.

The corporate self, which Hochschild (1983) identifies, is one where the institution owns the emotions and feelings of its employees. Hochschild (1983, p.187) also notes how the market has commodified and controlled the most basic of human characteristics, one's emotions. She argues that the only feasible resistance is a return to the real, authentic self. She identified three different stances that workers might take in relation to their work.

- The worker who identifies too much with their work and runs the risk of total burnout
- The worker who makes a distinction between her professional and personal persona but who feels guilty because of the insincerity involved
- The worker who is completely removed from her job and sees her job in terms of acting out a role completely separate from her personality

Each of these three categories has a mirror in the data presented in the previous two chapters. There were comments from teachers who took the responsibility of their care practices very seriously and were operating under significant degrees of emotional stress. Others demonstrated that while carrying out their teaching duties in a caring and individual way, they were able to separate their teaching from their care. There were also those who

suffered from the strain of trying to balance the dual aspects of their work, caring and performing, and those who had great difficulty in accommodating the different values of the school population. Lastly, many were able to refer to colleagues or teachers that they knew who were able to ignore completely the care responsibilities of their role and were happy to pursue their teaching duties unencumbered by any additional worries. The tension between an authentic and a formal professional identity was clearly indicated in the responses.

Care and Authentic Identity

Taylor (1991) describes authenticity as being true to oneself and one's originality so that, in essence, a moral contract is constructed with the self. Identity is therefore constructed against a background of things that matter. In the context of this research, the teachers in the study have shown very strongly that care matters in an authentic way and that care practices are a core element of their teaching.

Nias (1989) found in her study of primary teachers, that linking the notion of 'being yourself' with notions of 'being a teacher' was quite a strong sentiment. Such integration, according to her findings, was likely to embed levels of commitment which in turn would permit teachers themselves to distinguish clearly between those who took their job seriously and those who did not. As Hargreaves (1994) and Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) have pointed out, this kind of accommodation, with the potentially conflicting aspects of an individual's identity, was more like to occur in the latter stages of a person's career. The findings reflect this view in that, with the exception

of two teachers, most of the sample could be said to be in the latter part of their careers. This would suggest then that integrated identities of experienced teachers were an important source of strength and commitment for teachers' care practices.

In similar research conducted at second level, Day *et al.* (2006) reported that while second-level teachers were more likely to identify their professional selves with the subjects that they taught, they did get significant job satisfaction from developing satisfying personal relationships with students. There are several references in both Chapter Five and Six where teachers have spoken about colleagues who did not seem to have a strong sense of care for their pupils and who seemed to think of their teaching as a 'mere job'.

It did not appear however that the second-level teachers in this research identified themselves very closely with their subjects as a defining part of their identity. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that this may have been because of their commitment to care. There are a number of significant contributions such as those from two second-level maths and science teachers where care was a noteworthy aspect of their teaching. On the other hand, it is possible that such a lack of identification with the status of their subjects may have been influenced by their working conditions in a disadvantaged school and low teacher expectations.

Research from both Sugrue (1997) and Woods and Jeffrey (2002) contend that teachers with a high value on a child-centred approach attach a good deal

of importance to feelings in teaching and learning, and on making emotional connections with both knowledge and pupils. The teachers in this study who had particularly strong views about care also made these connections and were able to harmonise their care practices with a focus on the individual learner. Those who were more in tune with care clearly displayed higher levels of self-knowledge. Those with more teaching experience or those who were more in tune with care and care practices, were likely to have a strong sense of self-belief and to see their caring as central to their professional identity.

Educator, Educarer, and Parent

Over the course of the interviews, teachers were asked to situate their care practices in terms of the interconnectedness with parental care. For many there were similarities between what they did for their pupils or students during school time and what a parent seemed to do as a matter of course. Indeed some care practices, such as physically looking after a child or helping older students make important decisions were most definitely in the realm of parental duties. The very genuine anxiety that one primary teacher felt for the welfare of some of her pupils when they would transfer to second level could be equated very easily with that of a concerned parent.

Others identified the fundamental differences that are present between parent and teacher. For those respondents, teachers were first and foremost educators and while they acted in a parental role from time to time, this did not dilute their fundamental understanding of their position as educators.

Of the small number who commented on the term *educarer*, the blurring of the boundaries between the term and that of educator was an advantage in that it described the alternative approach very well. Others disliked it or did not choose to comment on it because it seemed the term did not sit well with their view of their own professional identity. Overall, there did not seem to be any significant gender differences between those who aligned themselves with a parental role and those who prioritised their professional educator identity.

These three aspects of teachers' care practices may be aligned to the taxonomy proposed by Lynch (2007) discussed in some detail in Chapter Two. It is fair to say that although the sample for the case study for this research is small, the range of care practices described in this research can be located very easily in both secondary and tertiary care relations. It is also possible to say, and the data has borne this out, that some aspects of teachers' care practices can be identified as primary care relations. Given the nature of primary schooling and the increased dependency of younger pupils, it is more likely to happen at this level than at post-primary.

This thesis argues that care and care practices can be considered as an authentic identity for teachers. Given the liberal, cultural and moral norms of individualism and the emphasis on personal reward and advancement, care, because of its relational nature, seems to offer an inherent resistance to such discourses of performativity.

Policy Discourse

Within liberal discourses, education has long been expected to fulfil a number of functions in society (Ball, 1994; Giroux, 1992; Lynch, 1999; Noddings, 1995). Many sociologists and economists perceive it as a realistic resolution to the challenges that a modern, technological, knowledge-economy presents. It is seen as central to an agenda of mass democratic participation and the provision of the skills necessary for upward mobility. Indeed, from the time of Plato, schools were charged with the responsibility for preparing state officials for their bureaucratic functions. The strong link between economic policy and educational policy has generated, at times, unrealistic expectations of more productivity, stronger economic growth, greater social inclusion, increased political participation, decreased criminal behaviour and a lower dependence on welfare supports. A 'well educated' population is a desired goal in any capitalist society and is certainly marketed in Ireland as one of the aims of public policy (Mulcahy, 2008)

In Chapter Three the policy framework for education and educational disadvantage was laid out. The principles of reason, science, the importance of empiricism and the uniformity of human nature underpin the Irish educational system. Despite the ambitious aims of many recent documents and reports such as the Report of the Disadvantage Committee (Department of Education and Science, 2005), Intercultural Education in the Primary School (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2005) and the specific naming of disadvantage in the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), there is little official recognition of the structural

component of inequality in education. Despite several levels of reform, the curriculum is still heavily biased in favour of the more traditional academic subjects, and public written examinations are still the main form of assessment. Although the primary curriculum is more holistic and process orientated, an overloaded curriculum has ensured that the more creative subjects are marginalised. Overall, the system remains non-differentiated, meritocratic and highly competitive.

Teachers' care and care practices have a particular significance as a means of mediating the rational, competitive values of the marketplace for themselves and their students. Care recognises the multiplicity of human capacities and interests (Noddings, 1992). It is a way of opening opportunities to students from socially excluded communities and a means to helping them negotiate the sometimes alien world of school and school values. The shared time and experiences of a caring school experience are also an opportunity to prepare, in a supportive environment, for the world of work, parenting and participatory citizenship.

Many respondents, especially those at second-level, referred to the fact that their schools were small and so they knew all of the students. The trend to larger schools is a trend away from care (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1996). Belonging to the school community where one is valued and cared for is a very important lesson for young people in their own journey as citizens of a democratic society. As one primary school teacher noted in her interview, it is easy to get recognition from the boys on the street if you do not have other forms of recognition in your life. While fulfilling a need for recognition

within the community, alienation from school will do nothing to enhance the life prospects of the individual. A sense of belonging in school, even in a small way, will be of benefit to the individual student

Care and the care practices of teachers are also valuable means of incorporating the students' own experience into the learning process. Noddings (2003) has argued that good teachers do not give lessons on kindness, rather they show what it means to be kind. As indicated, the relational nature of care is a very real way of developing emotionally sustainable relationships which are fundamental to our happiness and well-being (O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien and Flynn, 2007). In schools, it is teachers who will organise such experiences for their students. Policy makers must be cognisant in recognising such practices so that they are validated in teachers' practice. As Hargreaves (2003, p.202) argues:

This means making teaching into a moral, visionary profession once more in which teachers know and care about their world as well as, and as part of, their work

Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Throughout the interviews teachers spoke of the divergence in performance between students in their schools and national figures and achievement levels. Having a unified measure of performance along with no real recognition of learning styles or perspectives of emotional intelligences will always produce inequalities in achievement. Although some second-level respondents referred to the issue of streaming, no participant really questioned its legitimacy. As Drudy and Lynch (1993) have shown, students from lower socio-economic groups are over-represented in lower streams for

a variety of complex reasons, very little of which is connected to the students' individual intelligence levels.

Reform has appeared to offer choices to students so that the differences can be accommodated. While it is not practical for every student to study courses in high-status third level programmes, real choices should be available. A practical example can be seen in the case of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which is offered as an alternative for some students, although it has no real value because the points may not be used for third level places. Theoretically an alternative is offered while in practical terms no such choice exists.

The interviews also documented the actions that teachers undertook to make learning experiences more realistic and relevant for children. Schools in socially excluded, disadvantaged areas have put in place a number of programmes designed to broaden the educational experience of their pupils. Working with alternative educational interventions requires a significant commitment on the part of teachers and one which is essentially guided by a care value where the educational and emotional well-being of pupils is prioritised.

The system as it is currently organised and underpinned morally, makes no accommodation for care or the practices of care that are needed on a daily basis. In a sense, at the level of policy it is a 'care-less' system. There is evidence from those who participated in the interviews that, were it not for the value of care and the care practices of educators, many students would

not be in a position to access any meaningful learning from schools and would disengage from schooling earlier and in much greater numbers.

Final Comments: Care and Transformation in Education

Care is fundamentally concerned with radical equality where the well-being of the other is to the fore and the response to the needs of the other is of central importance. Equality of outcome, to all intents and purposes, focuses on a similar result for everyone, which realistically is neither achievable nor desirable given the diversity of humankind. Sen (1995, p.2) argues, "Equality in terms of one variable may not coincide with equality in the scale of another". Those who are wealthy may not enjoy good health. Those who experience disadvantage in one area often experience it in multiple situations. Thus a female member of the Traveller community is very likely to have her life chances mediated by issues of gender, race and socio-economic status. Equality of condition on the other hand is concerned with realistically equal choices. Care is a way of maximising those choices.

In the post-modern world, the commodification of knowledge is a feature of globalised society. Consequently, the relationship between knowledge and learners is de-socialised (Ball 2003). Care in the educationally disadvantaged context is about re-socialising that relationship and opening up those situations to students, new possibilities to enable them to participate more fully in their own lives. All of this requires commitment on the part of teachers. This thesis has shown that such commitment clearly exists despite differences in class values. Further study is needed to critique this issue and other aspects of the systemic inequalities in the educational system.

Care may also be the mediator for those students who need assistance in negotiating the difficult terrain of school and learning. As care is a moral stance, it is about teachers taking responsibility for their students. Those who are nearest to the problem are those who must act. None of the respondents expressed their commitment in those terms, but there was a strong sense of communal responsibility expressed by the participants. As Etzioni (1995 p.89) argued, schools are the next line of 'defence' after the family unit. "If the moral infrastructure of our communities is to be restored, schools will have to step in where the family, neighbourhoods and religious institutions have been failing".

This aspect is also worthy of further investigation. This study was conducted with teachers to explore the concept of care from their points of view. The conditions under which teachers work are full of contradictions and opposing ideologies. Schools, as well as being places of learning for students, are also the workplaces for the adults. Hence, the mediating aspects of care are central to continuing to assist the functioning of an inequitable system. While teachers have a deep commitment to care, they have neither the language of social transformation nor any significant degree of solidarity with the values of their students to affect real social change.

Without radical overhaul of the entire system, care as a value on its own, is insufficient to create a fair and equitable educational system. Extensive and sweeping changes are required for the social structure in general and for education in particular before any transformative outcomes are realised. This research has shown that in an environment of care, students and adults do

benefit hugely from the transformative nature of caring relations. The most striking aspect is that the practice and value of care thrives despite its unrecognised and unacknowledged status in our education system. The current climate of performativity pulls teachers in opposing directions, between their beliefs and a new accountability.

The practice of care remains a hopeful and optimistic sign for the future. Taking steps to value and recognise care as an integral part of teaching and learning will go a long way to making education more meaningful to a sizeable portion of students and will help transform the nature and purpose of education. As one primary school principal (Annette) put it:

The business of relating at this level (the level of care), relating to children or parents or both is really hard work but really worth fighting for. Despite the tears and the struggle ... I can look back and say I wouldn't have had it any different.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of all Initiatives Funded by the Department of Education and Science to help Alleviate Educational Disadvantage.

Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care
Early Start
Rutland Street Project
Traveller Pre-School Education
Special Needs – Early Childhood Services

Primary

Giving Children an Even Break (incorporating Breaking the Cycle)
Breaking the Cycle
School Staffing
School Development Planning
Disadvantaged Areas Scheme
Curricular Reform
Support Teacher Project
Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)
Learning Support/Resource Teachers
Education of Non-Nationals
Book Grant Scheme
Traveller Education
Substance Misuse Prevention
Physical Education Grant
Special Needs

Second Level Education

Improvements in Staffing
School Development Planning Initiative (SDP)
Disadvantaged Areas Scheme
Support Teachers/Special Needs Assistants
Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)
Learning Support/Resource Teachers
Education of Non-Nationals
Curricular Reform
Remote Area Boarding Grant Scheme
Guidance Services and Career Guidance
Book Grant Scheme
Exam Fees Exemptions
Traveller Education
Substance Misuse Prevention
Special Needs
School Completion Programme (Primary and Post-Primary)
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Primary and Post-Primary)
Youth Services
Youth Information Centres
Senior Traveller Training Centres

Children at Risk
Youthreach
Further Education/Second Chance
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs)
Access to Third Level
Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage
Non-Completion in Undergraduate University Courses
Certification
Adult Guidance
Adult Literacy
Education Equality Initiative
Community Education
Back to Education Initiative
Community Education
Back to Education Initiative
Other Initiatives
National Educational Welfare Board
Educational Disadvantage Committee/Forum to address Educational
Disadvantage
Primary Pupil database
Advisory Committee on the Education of the Hearing Impaired
Dyslexia
National Centre for the Visually Impaired
Cyber Campus Pilot Programme
Refugee Language Support
National Council for Special Education
ICT

Appendix B: Research Statement for Interviewees

This research is concerned with the ethic of care, care practices and their significance for teachers working in areas of educational disadvantage. Personal experience and anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers in schools and communities which experience educational disadvantage spend a considerable amount of time on care practices. The literature suggests that these care practices cause considerable professional and personal tensions for teachers on the one hand, but this is also evidence of the strong commitment that teachers have to their students.

The research is attempting to identify the actual care practices that teachers are involved in on a daily basis and that form an intricate part of the learning environment. These practices may be overt or teachers may only marginally conscious of them. In the process of identification the issues questions will also attempt to:

- Identify the conditions in a school that facilitate / hinder care practices of teachers towards students
- Identify the values that particular individual teachers hold and determine how much these influence the nature of care practices
- Attempt to document how teacher identity influences care practices and how care practices in turn develop teacher identity in a particular way
- Examine how teachers feel about those practices in relation to the other professional demands

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Dealing with the four issues outlined in the Research Statement for Interviewees (Appendix B), the interview will explore:

- Relationships within the school context
- The difficulty of balancing the professional demands of teaching with care practices and the emotional labour that this involves
- Teachers' own professional identity

The literature defines four distinct elements of the concept of care and these are:

- Caring about, noticing the need to care in the first place (Values)
- Taking care of, assuming the responsibility for care
- Care giving, the actual work of care (Care Practices)
- Care receiving, the response of that which is cared for.

The questions that follow will focus on the first three categories as the subject of this research is the teacher.

Interview Questions

Can you begin by telling a little about yourself, your background and how long you have been teaching in this school and/or an educationally disadvantaged school? What motivates you in your job etc?

Area 1: Values and Philosophical Perspectives / Teacher Identity

(Identification of the values that particular individual teachers hold and determine how much these influence the nature of care practices)

1. How do you see the aims of education in your own terms?
2. How would you describe your own approach to teaching?
3. What significance have care practices for you in your day to day work
4. How do you see care as an issue for educational disadvantage?
5. Why do you do what you do (in relation to care practices) and what would make you stop doing what you do?

Area 2: Identification of Care Practices

1. Is your school is a caring place? What are the key factors that make it so and what do you think could be improved to make it more caring?
2. Research shows that the relationship between student and teacher is central to the learning process. What do you consider to be the important ingredients for a good relationship between pupil and teacher?
3. In your own work what are the kinds of the kinds of things you do on a daily basis; physical care, emotional care, etc. (the parent as primary care giver... how are you different from this?)
4. Can you describe a situation that you experienced that may have involved a significant amount of effort on your part?
5. Supplementary questions to encourage an examination of the tension involved.

Area 3: Significance of those Care Practices (tension between performativity and care)

1. What resources are available to you to support your care practices (colleagues, school values, principal, etc.) What could be done to improve those resources?
2. As Teachers are often thought of as 'in loco parentis' what are the differences between your care practices and those of a parent?
3. What do significance do you attach to your care practices and how do you balance that with the other professional obligations of your work?
(professional educator / carer)

Appendix D: Profile of Schools

The information provided here is a general guide to the reader who may not be familiar with the particular challenges of educationally disadvantaged schools. While a more detailed profile would certainly provide an in-depth picture of those challenges, it is ethically important that the schools themselves are not identified in any way. Many of these schools, both primary and second level, have significant numbers of pupils from the Traveller community who because of their cultural exclusion, suffer additional levels of educational disadvantage.

Primary Schools

The nine primary educationalists are working in seven different primary schools. With one exception, all are urban, designated DEIS Band 1 schools. This means that they are considered to be among the most educationally disadvantaged schools in the country. The schools are located in a number of different urban communities which are characterised by histories of unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, substance misuse and lack of public amenities. Many of the students in these schools have lower than average literacy and numeracy scores, high levels of absenteeism. Resources are thinly stretched and, unlike more advantaged areas, where substantial fundraising can make up the shortfall, often inadequate to deliver the curriculum in full.

Second-level Schools

Eight of the second-level participants worked in four separate second level schools while the VTT (Visiting Teacher for Travellers) worked in these four schools along with another in the same geographical area. Like their primary counterparts they deal, on a daily basis with the challenges of high levels of absenteeism and poor punctuality. Early school drop-out is a particular difficulty for second level schools. Two of these schools are single sex schools. While second-level schools are not normally banded in terms of their levels of disadvantaged, these schools could all be considered to be at the same levels of educational disadvantage as the primary schools in this study.

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