

Dublin City University
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**TEACHERS' LIVES WITHIN THE
CONTEXTS OF POLICY, CHANGE AND
REFORM IN
IRISH PRIMARY EDUCATION**

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**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD)**

**Thesis Supervised by
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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate in Education (EdD) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Foreword	1
1.2 Reforming schools	2
1.3 Teachers' professional identity	4
1.4 Teachers' role in restructuring and reform	6
1.5 Teachers' professional and personal identities	9
1.6 Research on change in the Irish context	11
1.7 General overview and aims of the research	12
1.8 Theoretical framework and methodology	14
1.9 Personal framework and assumptions	16
1.10 Thesis outline	21
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1 Introduction	22
SECTION 1: POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION	24
2.2 Policy and policy development	24
2.3 Policy implementation	26

2.4	Policy ambiguity and overload	28
2.5	Teachers' role in policy implementation	29
2.6	Change without difference	32
2.7	Periods of educational change	34
2.8	Impact of reform on teachers' roles and identities	39
2.9	Teachers' emotions and educational change and reform	42
2.10	Teachers' career phases	45
2.11	Strategies to ensure change and implementation	51
2.12	Conclusion	55
 SECTION 2: CHANGE AND REFORM IN IRISH PRIMARY EDUCATION		57
2.13	Introduction	57
2.14	The National System of Education – Origins, structure and policy making	59
2.15	The role of the Department of Education in policy making	63
2.16	Curriculum change at primary level	67
2.17	The trajectory of policy making in the Irish State 1987 - 2008	69
2.18	Educational policy texts and legislation	72
2.19	Local curriculum reform initiatives - Paving the way for national reform	77
2.20	Implementation of the curriculum	80
2.21	Governance of schools	83
2.22	Teachers and primary education	87
2.23	Conclusion	92

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	94
3.1 Theoretical framework and perspective	95
3.2 Teachers' personal and professional lives	98
3.3 Life history – The methodology underpinning this research	100
3.4 Limitations of life history as a methodology	104
3.5 Selection of participants for the research	106
3.6 The participants	108
3.7 Data collection	109
3.8 Data analysis	113
3.9 Ethical issues	116
3.10 Presenting the data	118
3.11 Trustworthiness of the research	119
3.12 Conclusion	120
 CHAPTER 4: TEACHING IN THE 1970s AND 1980s – DECADES OF STABILITY AND CONTINUITY	 122
4.1 Rationale for entering teaching	122
4.2 Experiences of teacher-education courses	127
4.3 Early experiences of teaching	131
4.4 Resources	133
4.5 Development of craft knowledge	134
4.6 Professional development	136
4.7 School culture	137
4.8 Involvement in decision making	140

4.9	Micro-politics of schools	142
4.10	Satisfaction with teaching	143
4.11	Status of teachers in society	144
4.12	Conclusion	146
 CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCES OF POLICY, CHANGE AND REFORM 1985 - 2008		149
5.1	Introduction	149
 SECTION 1: CHANGE AND REFORM 1985 - 1995		150
5.2	Traveller education	150
5.3	Forging closer relationships between schools and parents	155
5.4	Teaching in a multi-denominational setting	157
5.5	Supporting pupils with learning difficulties	159
5.6	Engagement in professional development and further studies	161
5.7	Conclusion	163
 SECTION 2: LARGE-SCALE NATIONAL REFORM 1996 - 2008		165
5.8	Introduction	165
5.9	Special education	166
5.10	Middle management	170
5.11	Curriculum change and reform	172
5.12	Principals' perspectives on leading the change process	178
5.13	Characteristics of teachers who change	181
5.14	Views on policy	184

5.15	Maintaining a balance between teaching and personal life	190
5.16	Teaching as a career	191
5.17	Future roles in education	194
5.18	Conclusion	195

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION **201**

6.1	Introduction	201
6.2	Teachers' experiences of change and reform	202
6.3	Teachers' perspectives of policy and policy making	215
6.4	Teachers' position within the life cycle	217
6.5	Broad movements of educational change	220
6.6	Implications of the research for policy, change and reform	223
6.7	Limitations and recommendations for further research	228
6.8	Conclusion	231

REFERENCES **236**

APPENDIXES **254**

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which teachers' lives and practices are influenced and shaped by policy and reform. The data draw on life history interviews with eight primary school teachers who have extensive practical experience working as classroom teachers, principals, and advisors. Most of the participants work in schools serving areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

The participants have taken part in a range of initiatives aimed to combat educational disadvantage and to improve children's participation in schools. The findings of this research suggest that teachers who work in disadvantaged schools have more opportunities to vary their teaching roles and to experience change and reform than their colleagues working in middle-class settings.

Change is a constant motif in many of the participants' careers. They emerge as change agents, leading reforms as school principals or through their involvement in school-based change initiatives. All of the participants have experienced externally generated reforms, many of which provide opportunities for professional development and personal growth. Their engagement in locally-based professional networks maintains their enthusiasm and their receptivity to change.

The research finds that policy texts have little significance for teachers' lives and work. While most of the participants have attained Master's or other post-graduate qualifications, their engagement with policy texts is extremely limited. Principal teachers and others working in advisory services were more aware of policy and its implications for their work than classroom teachers.

The pace of educational reform in Ireland in the last decade has led to change overload. For many of the participants there is insufficient time, support or opportunity for them to implement the full extent of the reforms and to embed them in their practice. However, the participants continue to exercise their professional discretion concerning their level of involvement with different reforms and they interact with reforms that resonate with their personal values and missions.

The participants make a significant emotional investment into their work and while entering the later stages of their career, they remain enthusiastic and committed and are open to change and innovation. The desire of this group of teachers to continuously broaden their horizons and to experience new challenges is unique. The study concludes that the participants' career trajectories are individual and are formed by personal biography and by their previous experiences of change and role diversification in their schools. Their successful engagement with reforms is enhanced through their ongoing engagement in further studies and their participation in professional networks.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Profile of the participants

page 110

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Foreword

Teachers' work has become increasingly intensive and is influenced by persistent national policy interventions. Central policies that aim to raise standards of teaching, learning and achievement and to improve the effectiveness of schools reverberate in the education systems in most developed countries. These reforms are transforming teachers' work, their sense of professional identity and their relationships with students and parents.

This research is concerned with exploring primary teachers' responses to educational reforms within the Irish context. In particular, it examines teachers' experiences of change initiatives, it probes teachers' responses to policy and it considers their roles in policy evolution and implementation.

This chapter begins by providing a general overview of education reform and restructuring and it considers the impact of change on primary teachers' identity and careers. The argument for viewing both teachers' personal and professional identities as an integrated concept is presented. The theoretical framework and the methodology employed in the research are outlined. The personal framework and assumptions of the researcher are documented and these provide a background to the research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the chapters that follow.

1.2 Reforming Schools

Most governments are engaged in the process of educational reform. Improving the efficiency of schools is perceived as the vehicle for addressing the problems of the state and the ills of society. From the 1960s onwards, governments invested in education with a view to reducing poverty, contributing to human capital, improving the national capacity and the governance of states. Developing a highly-skilled workforce and maintaining a competitive edge in a global economy are also strong drivers of educational reform. The impetus for educational reform reflects the wider change movements in society. Education systems are influenced by larger political, economic and social forces and Hargreaves (2000) warns that in this context of unremitting reforms, teachers' work is becoming increasingly intensified and teachers are expected to respond to greater pressures and competing demands from numerous innovations.

Government policy has the power to effect fundamental change in classroom practice. Throughout the last twenty five years, the United States and England have exerted tighter controls over education and policy instruments such as curriculum frameworks, different methods of assessment, and teacher-certification requirements are employed to directly influence both the content and instructional practices of schools. This change movement is called "systemic reform" and it falls under the rubric of a policy and governance strategy to bring about restructuring (Goodson & Norrie, 2005). Systemic change calls for the development of a common set of standards or principles around which schools should operate. It also sets down the development of curriculum goals, methodologies and assessment practices that will

deliver these standards. Teacher evaluation procedures form a central component of the systemic reform agenda. These highly regulated surveillance systems often result in “existential anxiety and dread” in teachers (Troman, 2000, p.349).

Education reform is becoming a global feature. Levin (1998) characterises this reform movement in terms of a “policy epidemic” which unleashes a flood of closely inter-related reform ideas into diverse education systems which have different histories and social and political locations. The reform agenda is championed by powerful change agents such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Ball (2003) contends that the policy elements which underpin the process of reform include the philosophy of performativity and managerialism and these forces prove appealing to central governments as they provide a “politically attractive alternative to the state-centred, public welfare tradition of educational provision” (p.216). Cultures of performativity refer to systems of target-setting, school league tables based on pupils’ test scores, performance-related pay, performance management and the identification of varying performance levels among teachers. Ball (2003) argues that efforts to restructure and reform schools serve to align the education sector with the methods, culture and ethical systems of the private sector.

Teachers’ work contexts are specific sites where the struggles with change are often highly personal. Change and reform have led to unintended and sometimes negative consequences for teachers’ identities and professional cultures and Ball (2003) argues that reforms require teachers to develop new identities, new forms of interaction and new values (pp. 217-218).

1.3 Teachers' Professional Identity

Teachers' sense of professional identity is continuously moulded and affected positively or negatively by different experiences in their work. It is formed by the tension between teachers' own educational ideals and aspirations, by personal life experiences, the leadership and cultures in their schools, students' behaviours and relationships and the impact of external policies on their work. The way in which teachers view the 'self' is a crucial element in how teachers interpret and construct the nature of their work (Kelchtermans & Vanderberghe, 1994). Motivation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction and commitment are closely linked with teachers' identities. Teachers' personal levels of energy, knowledge and skill are critical determinants of effective teaching and learning (Van den Berg, 2002, p.588). Gergen (1988) found that teachers are motivated predominantly by their contacts with students and this provides a personal or internal motivation for particular acts. The motivation of teachers also depends on the way the school provides them with variation in their work or in active participation in decision making. Van den Berg (2002) argues that teachers' meanings, beliefs, attitudes and emotions directly influence the quality of the education they provide.

The development of professional knowledge is an important aspect of teachers' professional identity. Writers such as Van den Berg (2002) view the development of professional knowledge primarily through the cognitive perspective. This approach recognises the teacher as someone who actively seeks and processes information and knowledge. Schon (1983) introduced the concept that teachers develop professional

knowledge through reflection-in-action during the process of teaching and learning. Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of situated learning introduces the theory that people learn by belonging to communities of practice, that is, from people who do the same work. Learning comes through social participation, by experience and practice. Kelchtermans (1999) examines the professional development of teachers through the biographical perspective. This view sees the professional behaviour of teachers as inextricably linked with their earlier life experiences and their life histories. Teachers' professional identity is influenced by the existential meanings of teachers, their previous early experiences, the opportunities they receive to participate in learning communities and to reflect on their work.

There is some evidence to suggest that teachers' identities become less stable when they experience periods of instability and shifting contexts. Over a decade ago, MacLure (1993) suggested that teachers may be undergoing a particularly acute crisis of identity as the old models and exemplars of teacherhood disintegrated under contemporary social and economic pressures. Writers such as Apple (1982), Goodson and Hargreaves (1996), Day (2006, 2008) and Hall (2004) argue that restructuring and systemic reform are influencing teachers' work and professional identities and they identify de-professionalisation and de-skilling of teachers as some of the destructive outcomes of these reforms. They suggest that policies that introduce incessant reform and change have a negative influence on teachers' work and their lives such as reduced commitment, burnout, loss of self-esteem and early departure from the teaching profession. In this reform environment teachers' decision-making skills are not valued, schools and teachers compete for improved outcomes (Ball, 1984, 2003) and control is wrested from teachers through the production of 'teacher proof' teaching materials. There is increased bureaucratic

control and teachers are more closely supervised and evaluated than before. Promotional opportunities and financial rewards are provided for those teachers who attain leadership positions or other positions of influence within teaching.

Harris (1994, p.5) asserts that the identity of teachers is socially constructed. In industrialised countries, the effects of restructuring and systemic reform mean that teachers have experienced a sense of decreased status and control of their work. They are experiencing a loss of autonomy, declining work conditions, loss of purpose, increased anxiety and depression, lowering morale and a changing work environment that is increasingly controlled by central government. The spectre of performativity (Ball, 2003) in teachers' work, which is evidenced by teachers spending longer hours on school-related tasks and undertaking broader roles and responsibilities, is part of what Aronowitz (1998) refers to as the "dark times of education".

1.4 Teachers' Role in Restructuring and Reform

Teachers are required to play a pivotal role in school restructuring and reform. They are charged with responding to new curricula, textbooks, methodologies and changing practices such as providing for pupils with special education needs and pupils for whom English is a second language in more diverse school environments. Teachers are required to work collaboratively, to invest their energies in whole-school planning processes, to mentor beginning teachers and work with psychologists and social workers. Though the reforms differ in their approaches to change, common threads running through the various initiatives include an interest

in changing whole-school practice, the improvement of student achievement and early intervention rather than remediation. The success of these initiatives depends on teachers and principals accepting change and working as change agents. Teachers are also expected to recognise the need for change in their own practice and in the school as an organisation. They are urged to constantly improve their teaching and improve pupils' outcomes. Ball (2003) argues that education reform has changed what it means to teach and what it means to be a teacher, stating:

New roles and subjectivities are produced as teachers are re-worked as producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs and managers and are subject to regular appraisal and review and performance comparisons. ... The act of teaching and subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly changed within the new management panopticism (of quality and excellence) and the new forms of entrepreneurial control (through marketing and competition). (pp. 218 – 219)

Research on the implementation of large-scale innovations indicates that teachers' experiences of change are accompanied by a range of emotions, worries, concerns, uncertainties and resistance (Fullan, 1991; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). Many researchers contend that teachers resist change as a result of their past unsuccessful experiences of change. As a result, teachers might be extremely wary about involvement in further reforms. Fullan (2001a) argues that teachers develop a sense of security from doing things in familiar ways and that reforms disrupt teachers' well-established professional and instructional patterns. As a result, many teachers fear the unknown elements which change brings. Change can also be threatening for teachers as it challenges their abilities and skills (Fullan, 2001a). Changes in the structure and organisation of the school can present threats to the social relations of teachers (Greenberg & Baron, 2000) and changes that introduce new decision-making processes may threaten power relationships among the members of staff. Teachers also resist reforms when the rhetoric of the changes does not match the

realities of their experiences (Bailey, 2000) or when change is imposed from outside.

There is a growing trend to blame teachers for the failure of reform initiatives. Thrupp (1998) argues that the “politics of blame” is in evidence wherever neoliberal and neoconservative school reforms and school restructuring are in place. He argues that this is particularly evident in the work of OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) which is charged with the inspection of schools and education services in England. He claims that OFSTED attempts to ascribe school failure and low student achievement to school policies and performances, without referencing the broader socio-political factors or the context of schools. He argues that the politics of blame supports the ideology of the market which legitimates the government’s support for ‘good’ schools and the withdrawal of resources from ‘bad’ schools. In England, the school effectiveness movement provides research support for central government’s school improvement agenda. Particularly, the work of Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll et al. (1988) stresses the difference which schools can make in improving pupils’ outcomes and emphasises the agency of teachers in improving pupils’ learning, irrespective of contextual factors. In this managerialist environment of external accountability, writers such as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) caution that schooling and school reform efforts need to be grounded in an understanding of teachers’ professional lives and development.

Fullan (1991) suggests that policy makers repeatedly ignore or exclude teachers in the reform process and fail to make reform meaningful to them. Developing an understanding of teachers’ views of the reforms that they are implementing becomes

increasingly more important in a period of systemic reform. For this reason, researchers have been calling for greater attention to be given to teachers' personal experiences and subjective perceptions of innovations because educational change involves "profound and lasting ...changes in teacher's personal identity" (Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999, p.269).

1.5 Teachers' Personal and Professional Identities

Teachers' personal and professional identities are integrated and interwoven. Kelchtermans and Vanderberghe (1994) argue that teachers' substantive identity or knowledge of the self is a highly influential determinant of the way teachers think about and shape their work. Ball and Goodson (1985) developed this argument further. They noted that teachers' identities are shaped and constructed both from technical and emotional aspects of teaching such as subject knowledge, ability to interact and communicate with their students and classroom management skills. They argue that they are also highly influenced by their personal lives:

The ways in which teachers achieve, maintain, and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through a career, are of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work. (p.18)

Teaching demands a significant personal investment. Kelchtermans (1993) suggests that the personal self and the professional self evolve over time, each influencing the other. Therefore, a positive sense of identity is influenced by the self-perceptions of teachers on the efficacy of their work together with the judgement of others on their work. Day (2004) extends this argument and claims that a positive sense of identity with teaching roles, relationships within schools and with students is important in maintaining teachers' self-esteem or self-efficacy, commitment and passion for teaching.

Nias (1989) argues for the recognition of teachers' personal lives as a critical factor in understanding teachers in their working lives. She found, from her study of primary school teachers in the 1980s, that personal and professional identities were united and intertwined and that teachers were unable to separate life events and experiences from events and experiences in school. Teachers' work experiences and their working lives provide them with personal and emotional satisfaction and teachers invest personal resources and commitment and energy into their working lives.

Following from Nias' work, this research recognises that the personal and professional elements of teachers' lives, experiences, beliefs and practices are central to one another. The research investigates reforms and their impact on teachers' work and lives. The teachers in this research defined themselves through their past and current identities as they related their personal and social histories and described their changing social, personal and professional circumstances. Much of the participants' personal identities are illustrated in Chapter 4. In this chapter the participants' early experiences, values and beginning careers are charted. Chapter 5 focuses primarily on the participants' professional experiences but also traces the impact of reform on personal values, emotional well-being, commitment and motivation. The research, while at times foregrounding teachers' professional experiences, acknowledges that teachers' personal and professional identities are subject to change as teachers manage the emotional and personal investment in their teaching as well as dealing with continuous changes in their work.

1.6 Research on Change in the Irish Context

Teachers are at the centre of policy change, reform and implementation in Ireland as in other countries. Hargreaves (1996a) argues that teachers' perspectives of their work or of the policies that they are expected to implement were ignored or suppressed in the past. Casey (1992) argues that the literature on education reform silences teachers by systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers. Consequently, researchers, policymakers and others speculate on teachers' motivations and teachers are frequently cited as the principal impediment to successful reform implementation. Casey (1992) argues:

Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects that can be manipulated for particular ends. Politically, the results are educational policies constructed around institutionally convenient systems of rewards and punishments, rather than in congruence with teachers' desires to create significance in their lives. (p.188)

Research on the effects of change on Irish teachers has not received much attention. The absence of research in the Irish context may be attributable to the relatively stable educational policy environment which was extant until the late 1990s together with the paucity of resources available to fund research. While the pace of reform has accelerated dramatically during the last ten years, the impact of this changed landscape on Irish teachers' work and lives has not been interrogated. Some implementation studies such as those conducted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005, 2008) include teachers' perspectives of the implementation of various subject areas in the curriculum. However, the impact of change on teachers' lives requires additional attention. It is not clear whether research findings from other countries regarding the reform process and the

introduction of successive change initiatives over several decades have relevance for Irish primary school teachers, policy makers and schools.

Teachers in primary education in Ireland inherit specific cultural, professional and historical values and attitudes. Consequently, their views of change and policy and the impact these have on their professional lives may differ significantly to those narrated by teachers in other jurisdictions. By studying teachers' lives and their interaction with reform and change through collaborative dialogues, this research contributes to our understanding of the contexts in which teachers live and work. The data will illuminate teachers' roles within the educational policy process and it will expand our understanding of teachers' roles as authors, implementers or rejecters of reform initiatives. As Rosenholtz (1989, p.3) recommends "To understand schools, we must understand them as teachers do, that is, we must attempt to construe how schools appear to teachers who inhabit them."

1.7 General Overview and Aims of the Research

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the extent to which teachers' lives and practices are influenced and shaped by educational policy and change. While the daily work of teachers is politically and socially constructed (Goodson & Numan, 2002), policymakers and reformers pay little attention to teachers and the immense complexity of the contexts in which teachers live and work is largely ignored (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Through this research, the importance of knowing what change looks like from the point of view of teachers is emphasised. This research seeks to situate teachers' life-histories within an historical and social

landscape and to illuminate teachers' experiences of planned and unplanned change against broader social movements.

Research into the impact and effects of policy, change and reform on teachers' lives and careers in primary schools is significant for a number of reasons. Educational policy in the Irish context has been situated in the rational-linear model of policy making and major national reforms of curriculum, school structure and organisation have been introduced during the last decade. Therefore it is important to document the impact of systemic reforms on teachers' professional and personal lives.

This study attempts to redress the imbalance in the research literature. It aims to extend our knowledge of the complexities of teachers' work in schools and seeks to recognise teachers as active agents in school processes, procedures and practices. The research aims to connect the localised narratives of teachers with the 'grand narratives' of educational and social change (Hargreaves, 1999).

The aims of the research are to:

- document teachers' perspectives of their experiences of policy change and reform and examine teachers' perception of their role in policy making;
- examine how teachers' professional experiences and position within the life cycle impact on their attitude to policy change;
- explore how critical incidents in teachers' lives, and specifically in their work, can affect their perception of policy and their practice;

- examine teachers' experiences of the manner in which reforms are refracted through the varied micro-climates and micro-politics of individual schools and through teachers' personal beliefs and missions;
- detail how teachers' lives and work can provide us with a contextual and theoretical understanding of broad movements of educational change;
- examine teachers' perceptions of the policy making role of the Department of Education and Science.

1.8 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This research is based on the social constructionist perspective which emphasises the process by which people create, interpret and give meaning to their social worlds and identities. The social constructionist perspective, derived largely from the work of Mannheim (1893–1947) and from Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), recognises the social, relational and situated nature of meanings and identities. Within this theoretical framework, individual identity or 'self' is the by-product of social forces and is established and understood as a "product of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1994, p.49). A social constructionist perspective asserts that the realities we construct are subjective and anchored in the language we use and are shaped by our conversations and social interactions. It considers that people are sense-making and are constantly creating meanings in interaction with others.

This research employs life history as the methodology most appropriate to explore the lived experiences of teachers, to inquire into the meanings teachers attach to

different policy changes and reforms and to delve into the significance which teachers attach to the different roles and initiatives in which they have engaged. It investigates teachers' lives and careers during periods of change and reform. It seeks to understand the dynamic interaction between teachers' responses to changes in their work lives and identities and the changing political, economic and social landscape of primary education. The location of this research within the social constructionist perspective is particularly appropriate. It foregrounds teachers' perceptions, beliefs and the meanings which they associate with their experiences of change and reform. It acknowledges that the world teachers experience is interpreted differently by each individual teacher depending on their experiences, location, identities and social interactions. It also recognises the possibility of teachers experiencing multiple realities and holding different perspectives of reforms and change.

This broad theoretical orientation, along with research on policy and change and the impact of reform on teachers' work and identities, guided the research design, questions and data collection methods. The life-history methodology is employed to gain insight into the forces and influences shaping the lives and work of eight primary teachers. This methodology values the individual's 'own story' and the interpretation that the participants placed on their own experiences and the behaviour of others. Life history allows the researcher to generate thick descriptions of teachers' authentic experiences of change and reform. Life history facilitates the participants' identities and sense of self to come to the surface, and it enables these individual experiences to be located within socio-historical contexts.

The participants

Life stories from eight participants were generated in this research. The participants are in the later stages of their careers and have 27 – 35 years experience of working in primary schools. The research focuses on the participants' experiences of change and reform as primary school teachers within their classrooms, schools and in the wider school context. This study illuminates some of the significance which policy and change have for the way in which teachers work, how they perceive themselves and their role in policy development and implementation. It provides a window into each participant's social history and their different stages of life, while providing a more in-depth account of their professional lives.

1.9 Personal Framework and Assumptions

The social constructionist approach emphasises the importance of researchers recognising that their own background, identity and beliefs shape the research process. Specifically, by adopting a social constructionist perspective, the researcher acknowledges that her interpretation of the interactions with the participants, the interrogation of the data and of the interviews are shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background (Cresswell, 2003, pp.8 – 9). Therefore there is a need for the researcher to give a public account of the self, to acknowledge biases, values and personal interests about the research topic and to be sensitive to how her personal biography shapes the study. The researcher's perceptions and knowledge of policy, reform and change stem from her personal experiences. Consequently, it is important that her personal and professional interests in the area of teachers' responses to policy and reform are articulated and that the beliefs and assumptions that she brings to the research process are outlined.

It is important to recognise at the outset that the researcher and the participants are united by similar life experiences. They are in the same age group, and share similar educational experiences in terms of primary education, post-primary education and initial teacher education. As a result, the researcher and the participants share a similar experiential base of schooling and are drawn from a homogenous group of teachers who received their initial teacher education in colleges of education during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Consequently, the researcher's early experiences in the classroom mirror many of the experiences narrated by the participants.

The researcher's professional career commenced when she started teaching in a primary school in an urban area in 1982. As a beginning teacher she experienced the challenges of establishing herself as a 'teacher' and found success and personal fulfilment through her various teaching roles. She was invited to work on several curriculum development projects from 1984-1988. Later, she worked with twenty schools in developing approaches to the introduction of science as part of the curriculum from 1988-1992. At this time the researcher commenced work on her Master's in Education which looked at science as a curriculum initiative to bring about change in teachers' practice. This provided a theoretical basis for her work as a change agent and practitioner.

Following completion of the local science project, the researcher was invited to represent the teachers' union (INTO) on the national committees convened by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to develop the national curriculum for history, geography and science. Subsequently she was appointed

education officer with the NCCA with responsibilities for devising curriculum statements and guidelines in several areas of the curriculum including social, environmental and scientific education, as well as the social, personal and health education curriculum and the relationships and sexuality education curriculum from 1992-1998.

These insights into the researcher's personal biography illustrate that for most of her professional life she have been deeply involved in curriculum reform and change and this experience shapes her interest in the research topic under investigation. Her personal experience of designing curricula and professional development courses to prepare teachers for the implementation of programmes provides the researcher with an awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to the many of the decisions and issues encountered during the curriculum design and planning phases. This experience has also shaped her enthusiasm for reform and change as a cognitive process and provides the basis for her belief that involvement in the change process is predominantly a positive experience which can bring significant personal and professional benefits for teachers as individuals and for schools as learning organisations. Her previous role in the NCCA means that the researcher has knowledge of policy development at national level as an "insider" to the policy process.

For the last eleven years the researcher has worked as an inspector in the Department of Education and Science. During this time she was involved in training the science trainers for the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP). Additionally, she worked on research projects which charted the extent of the

implementation of the curriculum in schools and classrooms. She also contributed to the design of these implementation studies and has written many of the reports documenting the effectiveness of approaches. These activities were conducted following the rational-linear model of policy making and reform. This professional experience has significant implications for the research undertaken.

Due to the researcher's previous experiences she brings certain biases and values to this research. Although every effort is made to ensure objectivity, it is important to acknowledge these biases so that these can be addressed at the outset. Firstly, her experience of educational change has been very positive both at local and national levels. However, as a change agent, who was involved in the development of policy documents, she has a sense of ownership of the change and a commitment to the implementation of the change as intended. These positive experiences of change may not resonate with the experiences of teachers who are charged with the implementation of significant systemic changes and is not supported by research on teachers' experiences of dealing and managing change in other jurisdictions.

During the researcher's teaching career, her experiences as a change agent were not internal to her school or to her practice in the classroom. Rather, she assumed the role of architect of policy texts through her position as change agent in a local curriculum development project which was based in a college of education and she spent an extended period as a key writer of the external large-scale national reforms planned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Therefore, the researcher has not been the recipient of change efforts devised externally. As a result, during the interviews the researcher had to ensure that she listened intently to

the teachers' experiences of change and ensured that they were enabled to give voice to their reactions to change.

Secondly, during the interviews the researcher set aside her professional role as an inspector and evaluator of the implementation of curriculum and other policy changes so that the participants were able to engage with her openly and honestly. This required the researcher to relinquish her evaluative functions with regard to the research participants and to engage in a collaborative and interactive relationship with them so that participants were assured that power and control were equalised in the relationship.

Thirdly, the researcher's professional role with its inherent assumptions that reform is an uncomplicated process was also relinquished during the research process. Undertaking doctoral studies and engaging with a diverse cohort of fellow students from a variety of educational and social contexts over a four-year period was a valuable and rich period in the researcher's own personal and intellectual development. The opportunity to view issues in education from outside the frame of a government agent and to perceive the complexities of educational policy from the perspective of teachers who live in an era of unprecedented change was an invaluable learning process. While participation in the Doctorate in Education programme broadened and deepened her perspectives, undertaking qualitative research that centred on teachers' stories and life-histories further challenged her "to perceive the change process as a highly complex and subtle social process" (Fullan, 2007). It also facilitated the researcher to shift paradigms, to understand teachers' actions, their unique individual settings and to understand that the variations in

teachers' and schools' capacity to make successful change are influenced and shaped by teachers' personal histories.

1.10 Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter is followed by a review of the relevant literature regarding policy, change and reform in Chapter 2. This chapter also provides an historical backdrop to the policy-making context in the Irish setting. The research design and the methodology employed are discussed in Chapter 3. The findings of this study regarding the participants' experiences of change and reform and their views on policy are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 provides a final discussion of these findings and provides a summary of the main conclusions. It also addresses the study's limitations, the implications of its findings for the education community and possible areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Schools and teachers are increasingly influenced by changing patterns of globalisation. In many countries the content of what is taught, when it is taught and the outcomes that should be achieved are issues that are decided by politicians and acted upon by teachers. Therefore it is necessary to analyse the prevailing patterns of educational policies and the role of teachers in the change and reform process. The pace of education change has increased dramatically in the last two decades and reform is now a continuous motif in the lives of teachers. Large-scale national curricular reforms are initiated during a period when other structural reforms of education such as increasing legislation, and a growing number of additional agents delivering goods and services are introduced. The role and work of teachers are changing. While central governments seek to control major education reforms through top-down regulation on the one hand, they assign greater roles and responsibilities to schools and teachers to implement external reforms in the local contexts of their classrooms and schools. As Riley (2000) comments “Improving the micro-efficiency of the school has come to be seen as a vehicle for addressing some of the macro-problems of the state and society” (p.29).

The literature framing this study has been drawn from two distinct areas. Firstly, studies concerning the impact of educational policies that introduce change and reform on teachers’ work in England and the United States, where the rate of change and magnitude of change has been extensive, are charted. Secondly, research on

educational policy, change and reform in Irish primary education is mapped. A small number of studies examine the implementation of policy changes in the Irish context, the majority of which emanate from government-funded sources. There is a dearth of literature in the Irish context examining the influence of policy, change and reform on teachers with long histories of working within primary education.

The literature review will be presented in two separate strands. The first section commences with an examination of the policy-making process. Teachers' role in policy implementation, policy cognition and their emotional responses to policy are explored. The second section of the literature traces the historical backdrop to the educational reforms and policies that have dominated Irish primary education since 1831. Positioning these reforms against an historical backdrop outlines the unique context within which Irish primary teachers work. The major structural and curricular reforms that are shaping primary education are reviewed. Finally, the research literature focuses on current findings about teachers, change and policy in the Irish context. The literature review will set the landscape for the research: it will outline trends in other countries and it will outline some weaknesses and inconsistencies in our knowledge of how change and policy influence teachers' lives and work in Ireland.

SECTION 1: POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

2.2 Policy and Policy Development

The formation of educational policy is a complex, intricate and ongoing process. Government or centralised policy making stems from the rational-technical field of social science (Stone, 2002). The policy-making process involves a diverse group of actors in an elaborate interplay of government departments, politicians, media, public opinion and semi-state agencies. Government agents (policy advisors, civil servants and researchers) establish policy goals, select the various strategies to achieve these goals and choose from a range of policy instruments such as legislation, regulations and funding to facilitate the implementation of the policy. The instruments which policymakers select to put policy into practice, such as regulations, incentives, technical assistance and sanctions are described by Cuban (2006, p.9) as ‘blunt-edged tools’ and are usually determined by the resources available to frame the solutions, by national circumstances and historical arrangements.

The selection of the policy goals, and the strategies for their implementation, is contested terrain and involves policy makers, politicians and coalitions of interest groups in agreeing compromises, trade-offs and settlements (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard et al., 1997). Ball (1994) argues that policies are “representations” that reflect compromise, ambiguity, and political struggle. Policy implementation involves another set of policy actors such as school advisors, trade unions, management groups and teachers. The intended audience of the policy involves other stakeholders

in the policy process such as parents and students. Bowe and Ball (1992) argue that policy making is a cyclical process made up of three contexts – the context of influence, the context of text production and the context of practice. Within this policy process there are competing conflicts as various policy actors attempt to influence the policy text.

The rational-technical model of policymaking presents policy development and implementation as a linear, predictable and uncomplicated process. Hollingsworth and Sockett (1994) characterise this approach to reform as a ‘control paradigm’ that posits a generalised view of the context in which reform will be implemented rather than recognising the multiple contexts in which schools operate. The rational-technical model is based on a hierarchical view of theory and theorists and ascribes a subordinate role for practice and practitioners, thus diminishing the role of teachers and supporting the view that theory can shape school practice. It is also based on a belief which sees the reform agenda as driven by central bureaucracy rather than by teaching professionals.

Ball (1994) questions the dominance of the rational-technical perspective and he argues that policy texts, as designed by central government, are subject to a diverse range of meaning and interpretations and are changed at the various stages of the policy process. Consequently policies are not fixed but are altered, interpreted and contextualised as they are read and implemented. According to Edwards and Boreham (2003) the interpretation of policy suggests that both policy goals are unstable and complex. As a result, policy actors take policy meanings and reformulate them within a dynamic context of economic, political and cultural

practices. Consequently, policy makers cannot control the meaning of policy texts (Bowe & Ball, 1992).

2.3 Policy Implementation

The formation of policy and the implementation of policy are two separate processes with their own norms, values, and relationships. Nonetheless, they are interdependent and interconnected in a series of local, political and social contexts. Policies are decoded in a variety of ways by policy actors, such as teachers, as they interpret the policies in relation to their own personal histories, life experiences, personal skills, and the context in which they work. Policies do not tell implementers, whether state or local, what to do; rather, “they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set” (Ball, 1994, p. 17). Policy implementation is not an inert process by which top-down directives are responded to in a rational, logical manner. Rather, it is a process of mutual adaptation where at every point in the policy chain, from central government to the classroom, “everyone’s thumbprints are on educational policies as they wend their way into classrooms” (Cuban, 2006, p.10).

Policies that are devised centrally and are implemented locally have significant space for creative responses. The variation in responses is attributable to the meaning policy actors such as teachers, principals, boards of management, pupils and parents attach to the policy based on their motivations, capacities and collectively held values and beliefs (Lipsky, 1980; Lin, 2000; Lurie, Meyers & Riccucci, 2001). As a result, individual teachers determine if they will accept, reject

or modify mandates from central government and consequently, teachers are both “gatekeepers” and “policy brokers” in the policy implementation process (Cuban, 2006, p.11).

The implementation of policy will vary from school to school depending on specific school contexts factors such as school size, its capacity to finance initiatives, children’s ethnicities and home languages, race and social classes and teachers’ qualifications and effectiveness. Therefore each school will respond differently to policies aimed at their classrooms and implementation will vary greatly across schools and within schools, thus supporting Majone and Wildavsky’s (1978) view that policies evolve as they are implemented. McLaughlin (2006, p.6) notes that each level through which a policy must pass “...makes policy in a fundamental way as it translates and filters intent and regulatory language and so serves as an implementation site in its own right.”

Even when policies appear straightforward, they are implemented very differently across classrooms and schools (Datnow, 2002). Berman and McLaughlin (1978) coined the phrase “mutual adaptation” to characterise the dynamic interplay of context and policy. They argue that teachers and schools adapt the goals and methods of the innovation over time to suit the specific context of the school and that mutual adaptation is central to successful reform. This finding provides support for Cuban’s thesis that “schools change reforms as much as reform change schools” (Cuban, 1998, p.455).

2.4 Policy Ambiguity and Overload

The delivery of policies is not straightforward. Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002, p. 388) argue that implementation failure occurs when policy makers fail to craft clear and consistent policies that outline the desired behaviours required from implementing agents. At times, policy makers fail to anticipate or ignore circumstances which may impede the implementation of policy. Many policies are stated in ambiguous terms thus leaving significant room for policy actors to dilute the policy's main goals and intentions. Policy ambiguity can be advantageous as it reduces conflict in the implementation by allowing a wide spectrum of political players to be involved and by facilitating a variety of ways of implementing the reform (Matland, 1995). Policies may also be unclear about the roles of the main actors that are required to implement the change. Ambiguity allows individuals or groups at opposing ends of the political spectrum to support a particular policy and it may facilitate the development of coalitions and consensus building during the policy development process (Spillane et al., 2002).

The introduction of large-scale change creates new situations and working conditions for teachers. When several large-scale changes are introduced at the same time, this can result in conflicting expectations of teachers which can lead to feelings of uncertainty, teacher discouragement and role ambiguity (Van den Berg, 2002). However, one of the fundamental flaws in policy making is the introduction of too many new policies and initiatives at the same time. This can create policy congestion, which results in policy overload and confusion regarding the policies which are priorities. In this context, policies are often poorly implemented and

policy actors' energies may be diverted into secondary activities such as managing paperwork and maintaining records.

Policies that seek incremental change or that attempt to address a clearly stated goal are more likely to be implemented. Some policies will fail at the implementation phase if the magnitude of the change required from teachers is considered too great. In many instances policies fail because policymakers have not given enough thought to the implications of the policy for the contexts in which they will be enacted (Cuban, 2006).

2.5 Teachers' Role in Policy Implementation

The implementation of a policy depends on the will, capacity and actions of many different players in the education system. Teachers are key actors in education policy implementation within the school context. Essentially, how policy is understood and experienced only becomes real when teachers attempt to implement policy. In the rational-technical model of policy making, policymakers assume that teachers and schools will make the necessary adjustments to implement the policy as intended. However, policymakers cannot predict how policies will be acted upon or what their immediate effect will be in every context (Ozga, 2000).

Lipsky (1980) argues that the complex interactions between different actors at 'street level' such as teachers and implementation organisations can undermine the central aims of policies. He contends that 'street-level bureaucrats' are *de facto* policy makers enacting the only policies that really matter as they shape the services that clients receive.

Teachers as ‘street-level bureaucrats’ have considerable discretion and relative autonomy in how they apply policy (Lipsky, 1980). This implies that policy implementation may result in outcomes which are different to those intended or desired by the policy makers. As a result of the vagueness of policies and the unpredictable nature of street-level activity, teachers have a high level of discretion and are relatively free to follow the best course of action in the interest of their pupils. This high level of discretion, which underpins the concept of professional autonomy, and the accompanying lack of direct managerial control over teachers and their work, facilitates teachers to make policy as well as to implement it:

The routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the policies they carry out. (Lipsky, 1980, xii)

Policy directly affects people at the micro-level (Matland, 1995) and the importance of understanding local policy actors’ activities, motivations, aspirations and contexts is central to the successful implementation of the innovation.

Teachers’ cognition of policy

Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) suggest that the most significant aspect in the implementation process is how the teacher understands the policy message. They support the view that the cognitive component of the implementation process is the most crucial determinant in securing implementation. The successful delivery of a policy wins public support when there is a clear understanding of the links between implementation, targets and outcomes. They argue that:

Policy ideas work as levers for change only if policymakers convince implementing agents to think differently about their behaviour, prompting them to raise questions about their existing behaviour and encouraging them to construct alternative ways of doing business. (Spillane et al., 2002, p.420)

However, policy actors perceive reform proposals through their own experience and as a result may not understand policy intent or strategies. Individual teacher's beliefs, understandings and practices may interfere with their ability to interpret and implement the intended reform in ways which are consistent with the policymakers' intent. Variations in teachers' implementation of policies are primarily concerned with how they make sense of the policy based on their knowledge base, prior understanding, norms, values and beliefs. While teachers may receive the same policy message, they may subsequently interpret it and respond to it in very different ways. The way in which teachers understand the policy is closely associated with how the policy is implemented. Teachers shape policy-makers' proposals to match with their local contexts and work. This implies that:

Teachers respond to the ideas they construe from policy, rather than some uniform, fixed vision of policy. In this view, relations between policy and practice are not uni-directional: while policy may shape practice, practice in turn may shape policy in that it influences what local teachers make of policy-makers' proposals. (Spillane, Peterson and Prawat, 1996, p.431)

Teachers respond to change and reform in variety of ways. Some teachers resist reforms and protest at innovations that require them to assume additional roles or fulfil tasks which are perceived as not central to the core work of teaching and learning. Spillane et al. (2002) argue that teachers will implement change if it connects with their classroom practice or if they understand the benefit the change will have for them in their classrooms. In a study of Dutch teachers, Geijsel, Slegers, Van den Berg and Kelchtermans (2001) found that even when teachers

understood the underlying principles of an innovation, they were unlikely to implement these principles into their actual teaching. The research affirmed that the personal meaning which teachers attach to the perceived importance of an innovation is significant for the implementation of these innovations.

Teachers' understanding of the range of changes involved in an innovation is also a critical factor in whether the change will be implemented as intended. Reforms that require teachers to change or adapt their teaching methods may not be fully understood by the teacher as being different in critically important ways to their current practice. This occurs because the learning of new ideas may require a restructuring of a complex set of existing schema, but the proposed nature of the change may not be understood. This frequently results in the adoption of the content of new curricula at individual class level, but teachers may not engage with the implementation of new teaching and learning approaches that are central to the implementation of that content. As Spillane et al. (2002) contend, when teachers perceive an instructional idea in policy, they may over-interpret it as being essentially the same as the practice that they already hold, resulting in new ideas being understood as familiar ones.

2.6 Change without Difference

Many commentators believe that fundamental shifts in educational practices have been ineffective and difficult to accomplish and sustain. Woodbury and Gess-Newsome (2002) argue that "Many reform efforts that have sought to significantly alter accepted patterns of schooling have emerged in practice as shadows of their original intent" (p.763). Reforms are rarely implemented as intended, or fail to gain

the long-term commitment from teachers. Historically, most reform efforts that have sought to significantly change fundamental aspects of schooling have been adapted by teachers to fit into their current practice, allowing the system to remain essentially untouched, thus preserving the “grammar of schooling” (Cuban, 1988).

The experience of American researchers suggests that changes in curricula usually fail to achieve their intended consequences, which are to raise learning outcomes and improve standardised test scores. According to Waks (2007) “The field of educational change appeared to be failing in its primary missions: to achieve real and lasting change” (p.278). Fullan (1991) claims that educators appear to know how to create pockets of change which are dependent on the support of effective leadership, the provision of adequate resources and strong internal and external advisory and professional development supports. However, few innovations reach the stage where they become institutionalised and are a routine part of teachers’ practice. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) pronounce that producing deep improvement that lasts and spreads remains an elusive goal of most educational change efforts.

Teachers become deeply resistant to change when it is imposed on them from an external source (Huberman, 1993). Policymakers fail to make reform meaningful to teachers and ignore them in the policymaking process (Fullan, 1991). As a result, teachers do not experience a sense of ownership of change and do not internalise the goals of policies attempting to introduce change. When teachers experience reforms that have failed, Hargreaves (2002) claims they feel cynical and unenthusiastic about future proposal to bring about change:

In the minds and the memories of teachers, the failure of change becomes a cumulative phenomenon. The maturing memory of each failed change deepens teachers' cynicism about the prospects of future changes. Disinvestment and disappointment follow early enthusiasm as surely as night follows day. (Hargreaves, 2002, p.190)

However, teachers have not always played the role of passive receivers of policy and reform. During the 1960s and 1970s teachers played a central role as change agents in devising innovations and in bringing about educational reform. Two distinct periods of educational change are explored in the next section.

2.7 Periods of Educational Change

Economic factors and demographics are two major societal forces that drive periods of educational change over time. Economic prosperity channels social policy movements that facilitate public investment and innovation in education. Conversely, periods of economic downturn and long recessions lead to the erosion of state infrastructure. Since the 1960s there were two distinct phases of educational change: an era of teacher-led reform followed by a longer phase of central-government driven reform.

Teacher led reform and professional autonomy

The period extending up to the mid-1970s was an age of optimism and economic expansion leading to large scale reforms that emphasised teacher-generated innovation and student-centred forms of learning. Hargreaves (2000) characterises this period as an age of professional autonomy. Elmore (1996) describes this as a phase when reformers believed that good ideas would “travel of their own volition” into schools and classrooms:

What is most interesting about the progressive period, as compared with other periods of educational reform, is that its aims included explicit attempts to change pedagogy, coupled with a relatively strong intellectual and practical base. Noted intellectuals – John Dewey, in particular, developed ideas about how schools might be different. (Elmore, 1996, p.7)

During the 1960s and 1970s the professional standing of teachers and their status within society improved significantly. Teaching became an all-graduate profession, and in England, teachers enjoyed pedagogical freedom and exercised control over the curriculum. Teacher-led reform dominated and teacher-led educational innovations mushroomed in areas such as science, mathematics, personal and student-centred learning. Teachers, together with researchers in colleges and universities, were involved in curriculum development projects to develop new teaching approaches. This growth in the capacity of teachers to act as internal change agents was facilitated by expansionist, economic conditions and their associated policies which viewed investment in education as an investment both in human capital and in economic prosperity (Hargreaves, 2002).

The implementation of change and reform was a matter for teachers' individual professional judgements and teachers decided to engage in reforms and implement changes as individuals. There was little whole-school interaction about curriculum goals, teaching or classroom learning (Little, 1990). Continuing professional development was also an individual activity undertaken by teachers as a personal pursuit in teachers' centres or in colleges of education and the benefits of these courses were seldom incorporated into classroom practice. Little (1993) argues that teachers were unable to integrate what they had learned in these courses with their classroom practice.

Few innovations moved beyond adoption to successful implementation and only a small number of changes became institutionalised throughout the education system during this period (Fullan, 2001). The publication of implementation studies provided evidence that educators' expectations of change and innovation had not been realised (Fullan, 1993). By the mid-1980s, the pace of social and economic change had escalated and teachers were required to adapt their practices and to modify their teaching practice. Hargreaves (2000) notes:

The age of professional autonomy provided teachers with poor preparation for coping with the dramatic changes that were headed their way and against which their classroom doors would offer little protection. (Hargreaves, 2000, p.162)

Large-scale reform, collegial professionalism and the postmodern teacher

The second period of change extends from the 1980s and witnessed a growing intensity in the introduction of large-scale education reform. The reform agenda was dominated by a 'top down' approach emphasising central control and uniformity by governments in many western countries. In England and the United States curricula were specified, competencies for students and teachers were detailed, teachers' salaries were improved and there was an increased focus on developing teachers' and principals' leadership competencies. Additional autonomy and responsibility were allocated to school-based management and enhanced roles for principals and teachers were outlined. Educational legislation was introduced to bolster change initiatives. Accountability for student performance and the measurement of outcomes became a feature of these education systems and league tables of schools which measure outcomes of student and teacher performance were published.

Strain and Simkins (2008) argue that in England, the *Education Reform Act 1988* heralded an era where education policy was built on the concepts of the strong state and free economy principles. This resulted in a radical restructuring of power in the educational system. Education was controlled by the 'New Right' with its emphasis on marketisation, value for money, public accountability and performativity. Matters concerning teaching and learning and teachers' work were decided by central government who prescribed national curricula, teaching methods, teacher appraisal, testing and accountability measures, and introduced a strong system of school inspection. Woods, Jeffrey and Troman, (1997, p.151) claim that the teacher unions were disempowered and displaced "Teachers lost a long and bitter struggle with the Thatcher Government over pay in the 1980s. They were blamed for an alleged decline in educational standards, and had a National Curriculum and national assessment forced upon them without consultation." As Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) observe:

In education, this has led to new global orthodoxies of educational change promoted by international financial organisation, where markets and standardisation, accountability and performance targets, high-stakes testing and intrusive intervention are at the heart of almost all reform efforts. (p.30)

The principles of 'new public management' have a significant effect on the leadership of schools. According to Woods et al. (1997) the principal has effectively become an agent of central government, assigned with the task of ensuring that governmental priorities are implemented in accordance with legislation and with other mandates. While Camburn, Rowan and Taylor (2003) view distributed leadership as creating contexts for learning and developing leadership capacity among a large cohort of teachers in the school, the discretion to develop these roles is limited by the presence of outside organisations. Scott and Dinham (2002, p.15)

argue that the involvement of government advisors and inspectors in the monitoring of activities has “facilitated a shift in trust from operatives, the performance of activities, to auditors, those who police performance.” Teachers experience a range of negative consequences such as reduction in job satisfaction, reduced commitment, burnout, loss of self-esteem and early departure from the profession when their work becomes tightly regulated.

Developments in education follow the pattern of changes in the postmodern, global society. Postmodernism celebrates plurality and a more global and fragmented world characterised by racial, gender and ethnic differences. The postmodernist society requires educated citizens who can learn and change continuously and who can work with diversity locally and internationally. Schools now enrol students with special educational needs into mainstream classes and this demands teachers to have the expertise to manage a variety of needs than heretofore. The knowledge base of the various subject areas has widened and the knowledge of how students learn and the methodologies which can bring about effective learning have expanded. Consequently, teachers are required to constantly develop their knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Teachers’ work is now more focused on pastoral care and social work responsibilities. Changing family structures and concepts of childhood mean that teachers are undertaking work that was the preserve of the family in previous decades (Elkind, 1994). In this diverse context, teachers’ work has become more complex as they strive to respond to the needs of a diverse student population. Teachers also are more accountable to parents, politicians and the media who

clamour for higher standards and the creation of schools as centres of excellence. This demand for increased performativity occurs when the achievement gap between students from affluent backgrounds and from those from areas of disadvantage continues to widen.

The demands of an ever-changing context of educational change and reform required teachers to embrace new ways of working and of interacting with their colleagues. Hargreaves (2000) describes this phase as an 'age of the collegial professional' where teachers pool resources, make shared sense of policies and devise solutions to the new demands for changes in their practice. Hargreaves (2000) declares that working in an environment of accelerated change demands "new skills and dispositions, and for more commitments of time and effort, as teachers rework their roles and identities as professionals in a more consciously collegial workplace" (p.162).

2.8 Impact of Reform on Teachers' Roles and Identities

Education reform, particularly in the United States and England, has been accompanied by significant change in the role and status of teachers in state education systems. The main impact of these reforms has been to cast teachers in the role of technician rather than professional, following orders established centrally with their traditional professional discretion eroded (Helsby, 1999). This theme of disempowerment of teachers is echoed by Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) when they talk about the 'crisis of reform', acknowledging that most of the restructuring and reformist initiatives are imported into the classroom, but developed as political imperatives elsewhere. As a result, teachers are required to teach a skills-

based, narrow curriculum which is determined by the requirements of the economy and labour market. Teachers are evaluated on specific, measurable outcomes in relation to their students' scores on literacy and numeracy tests. The linking of teachers' pay to performance reinforces the emphasis on achieving specific targets which aligns with the techno-rational policy approach. National policies which prioritise performativity, efficiency and effectiveness undermine teachers' professionalism and teachers report feeling less competent and confident and their sense of motivation, efficacy and commitment are challenged in this environment (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk and Hoy, 1998).

The impact of these reforms has been to fracture teachers' sense of their occupational identity, leaving teachers with a sense of *anomie* (Mac an Ghaill, 1992). Hargreaves (2004), in a study of Canadian teachers, found that the majority of teachers perceived government-imposed reform as remote, devised by bureaucrats who are associated with reducing resources, increasing pupil-teacher ratios and using schools and teachers as pawns in a political game. His research indicates that teachers opposed mandated changes for three reasons: firstly, teachers felt they had not been consulted about the changes; secondly, the changes were often not well-devised, did not have clear purposes and teachers could not implement them in their classrooms; thirdly, teachers felt they worked in an overloaded change environment, they described their school life as pressurised and they complained about insufficient supports to help them in their work. Teachers associated mandated change with negative emotions of frustration, disappointment, confusion, shame, anger and annoyance (pp.296 – 298). Hargreaves (2004) suggests that:

Large-scale change grinds most teachers into the dust; they suspect its motives, resent how it is forced upon them without consultation and criticise the excessive pressure and weak support that accompanies it. Micromanagement and excessively pressurised change lead teachers to direct their emotional energies away from their students through anger and hate towards the architects and administrators of change and through the upset and anxiety that is associated with their own sense of inflicted security. Frustration marks the overwhelming emotional response of teachers to mandated change, due to their inability to achieve their own purposes, to fulfil their own missions and to have them heard and respected. (p.304)

Goodson (2002) argues that the conflict between externally imposed change and teachers' lack of involvement in the change process results in teachers becoming conservative respondents to externally initiated change. He states:

Internal change agents find themselves responding to, not initiating, changes. Often then, instead of being progressive change agents, they take up the role of reluctant, even conservative respondents to external initiated change. Since change is not their own defined mission, it is often seen as unwelcome and alien.... This is the crisis of positionality for internal change exponents. The desires and drives, which make for change, have been taken from the internal agent's hands. (Goodson, 2002, p.8)

Van den Berg and Ros (1999) argue that teachers' responses to an innovation are dependent on the significance which the change has for the teacher's specific life and work context. Teachers' reactions to change can be shaped by a range of biographical and personal factors such as the stability of their home life, illness in the family, financial security, personal feelings of self-esteem, confidence and feeling of self-efficacy. Consequently, teachers' personal concerns and motivations are crucial to the successful realisation of an innovation. Gitlin and Margonis (1995, p.380) argue that the engagement of teachers in school change is often marginal because the reforms do not consider the significance of the innovation for the teachers, their role-identity and how they interact with each other. Teachers' emotional responses to change have been overlooked by policy makers. This is an

area which requires further recognition if policy makers are to fully appreciate the complexity of the policy making process.

2.9 Teachers' Emotions and Educational Change and Reform

Teachers are crucial to the process of educational change. Teachers construct, filter, mediate and shape their educational practice and interpret and recreate policy from their personal and subjective frames of reference. Bowe and Ball (1992) refined this point:

Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers: they come from histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of policy. Policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests which make up the arena differ. (p.22)

Recent research explores the impact of current reforms on the emotional lives of teachers. Nias (1981) and Hargreaves (2001) and others emphasise the importance of teachers' emotions as inseparable from their cognitions. Nias (1996) argues that teaching is an emotional-laden activity with teachers investing their 'selves' in their work, which means that the classroom and the school become important sites for the teachers' personal and professional development and where they can experience a sense of self-fulfilment or vulnerability. Hargreaves (1994) argues that teachers have deep feelings about their work because they invest so heavily in it and the values they believe their work represents.

Hargreaves (1993) contends that many educational change efforts have failed because they have neglected the teacher as a person. Traditionally reforms have concentrated on the technical skills that teachers required to implement the reform while ignoring the commitments embedded in the teachers' life. He reiterates this

point again in later writings when he emphasises that the issue of teachers' emotions is absent from the literature, as if "teachers think and act; but never really feel" (Hargreaves, 1998, p.559).

Most changes affect teachers' sense of professional identity and their self-perception as individuals. When policy feels threatening, particularly when it conflicts with the personal experiences and professional judgements of teachers, it may result in teachers' resistance to policy (Van den Berg, 2002, p.583). Specifically, when teachers think that policies introduce new methods of working that are not consistent with their views of 'good teaching', policy will be rejected. Hargreaves (2004, p.288) argues that poorly conceived and badly managed change can inflict "excessive and unnecessary emotional suffering" on teachers. Quoting Abrahamson (2004), Hargreaves contends that continuous reform and waves of initiatives result in teachers not knowing what reform they are implementing or why they are changing their practice. In these contexts reform results in chaos and in change that is "organisationally disruptive and personally demoralising" (p.288).

Other researchers such as Sikes et al. (1985) and Huberman et al. (1993) suggest that biographical factors such as teachers' age and gender can influence whether teachers will accept and implement change or whether they will resist the reform effort. Sikes (1992) notes that younger teachers tend to show more enthusiasm and commitment to change than older teachers, who may lack the skills and expertise necessary to engage with the reform. She found that older teachers are more resistant to change and tend to believe that change will not work. Huberman's (1993) work supports

this view. He also found that teachers, particularly men, disinvest professionally in their teaching and in the school as an organisation over the course of their career.

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) studied the impact of long-term educational change over three decades through the lens of teachers. Their findings highlight the importance of examining the cumulative effects of reforms. They elaborated on the view that age is an influential determinant in teachers' responses to change. They found that teachers with long careers experience change and reform as swings of a pendulum. Teachers did not embrace reforms unless they aligned with their own values, interests and identities. They note "Cycles of change for policy makers last no more than the 5 years defined by electoral cycles. For teachers, they last almost a lifetime" (p.17).

Personal missions

Hargreaves (2004) found that primary teachers in Canada viewed change positively when it was perceived by teachers as "self driven, connected to teaching and learning and professionally current" (p.293). Change, even when rooted in externally-driven reforms, provided opportunities for a significant minority of teachers in his study to grow professionally, to engage in professional learning experiences and to participate in changes that were relevant to society and to schools. The positive emotions associated with self-initiated change arose from feelings of accomplishment, from improved relationships and interactions with others and from achieving challenging goals and purposes. Hargreaves (2004) argues that the source of change is unimportant. Rather the most important variable in reform efforts is whether change is implemented "in a way that is professionally

inclusive and supportive and demonstrably beneficial for students or not” (Hargreaves, 2004, p.303).

Goodson, Moore and Hargreaves (2006) extend this argument and they suggest that teachers’ resistance to change is more than just a reflection of their age and stage of life and career. They argue that resistance is related to teachers’ generational experiences, their memories and the social missions formed and developed as these teachers matured:

Resistance to change, that is, is as much about generation as degeneration – the first being concerned with the construction, protection and reconstruction of professional and life missions; the second being about the deconstruction and erosion of physical and professional commitments. (pp.43 – 44)

Teachers in the later stages of their careers, strive to maintain the structures and cultures that had inspired them at the beginning of their work life. Goodson et al. (2006, p.25) suggest that teachers are increasingly antagonistic towards, and embittered about, external and internal changes that threaten their personal and professional missions in teaching. They argue that teachers feel social nostalgia for the broader purposes that inspired them during their early days in the classroom and they are also aggrieved at the loss of their professional autonomy, and as a result resist change.

2.10 Teachers’ Career Phases

Several researchers have studied the trajectories of teachers’ careers. The most authoritative studies include Huberman, Grounauer and Marti’s (1993) study of Swiss secondary school teachers, Sikes, Measor and Woods’ (1985) study of English and Canadian teachers and by Day et al. (2006) of English teachers. An

underlying reason for this interest in the career phases of teachers is the increased recognition that teachers' personal levels of energy, knowledge and skill as well as their perception and knowledge of policies and reforms, are determinants of effective teaching and learning. How teachers develop their careers is crucial to the future of schools and to the quality of education provided.

Huberman et al. (1993) and Sikes et al. (1985) in their study of post-primary teachers' careers identified five career stages for teachers that were age-based and were influenced by teachers' stages of life and by critical incidents in their personal and professional lives. The results of both research studies are similar and consistent. The main contribution of the research on teachers' career cycle is that it highlights how career and other life experiences at each stage may foster or stymie the development of professional expertise. Both research studies view change and development in the teaching career as a succession of events.

In particular, Huberman et al. (1993) define a series of successive themes of the teachers' career cycle and these relate to the number of years spent within the teaching profession. The themes are: survival, discovery, stabilisation, experimentation/activism, self-doubt, serenity, conservatism and disengagement. Their work suggests that teachers pass through five broad career phases, though these are not linear. The different professional life phases of teachers are moderating influences upon their effectiveness, their motivation to become involved in change efforts and their response to educational policies.

The first stage of teachers career spans seven to eight years and is described as a period of survival and coping with what Sikes et al. (1985) describe as 'the reality shock' of the classroom. The initial phase of launching a teaching career and its accompanying commitment in terms of physical and professional energy is characterised as a period of survival and discovery, of easy or of painful beginnings. The novice teacher also experiences a culture shock which varies in accordance with the values and perspectives of the other members of the staff in their school. Huberman et al. (1993) suggest that experiences at this stage are perceived by some beginning teachers as 'easy' and by others as 'painful'. Those beginning teachers who experience success have a sense of instructional mastery and enthusiasm for their teaching assignments. On the other hand, those novice teachers who have painful beginnings usually experience anxiety, have difficulties with discipline matters and feel isolated within their schools.

The teacher progresses to the second phase of stabilisation or commitment, during which they master or consolidate their pedagogical skills, experience success and establish their professional identity. This stage is characterised by teachers feeling at ease in the classroom, developing mastery of a range of instructional techniques and responding to students' abilities and interests. Huberman et al. (1993) note that the commitment generated in this period may sustain the teacher for a period of approximately eight to ten years. At this stage, teachers' professional identity is formed and this is highly influenced by their subject discipline. Teachers feel more independent and also more integrated into their staffs. Sikes et al. (1985) found significant gender differences in teachers' career paths at this stage. Male teachers

pursue promotion and advancement while female teachers with young families, are more consumed by domestic responsibilities.

The third stage is characterised by experimentation or activism. Teachers tend to be between the ages of 30 and 40. Sikes et al. (1985) highlight that teachers' professional experience is significant at this stage, as is their physical and intellectual energy. Some teachers actively seek new challenges and they diversify roles and experiment with new teaching methods and approaches. They become highly motivated and dynamic, working with other teachers in projects introducing reform and change. Teachers' interest and energy peak and they display an interest in undertaking new roles as advisors, managers, and curriculum co-ordinators. Teachers invest considerably in their careers. Those teachers who remain with full-time teaching commitments value the relationships with their pupils. Another group of teachers identified by Sikes et al. (1985) reduce their professional commitments during this phase and they sometimes experience difficult students who achieve poor results. Some teachers may leave the profession at this point.

During the fourth stage, when teachers enter their mid-career they experience a professional plateau which usually occurs between the ages of approximately 40 and 50 – 55. This can be an extremely distressing period for many teachers who feel a greater sense of mortality as they are surrounded by young students and an increasing number of fellow teachers who may be the same age as their own children. Many of those who remain in teaching are found in administrative and managerial positions. Teachers who are classroom-based begin to assess their careers, engage in self-doubt and self-questioning. One sub-group of these teachers

may no longer seek promotional posts and concentrate on specific areas of their work where they can experience success. They may enjoy renewed commitment to their school and their students. Other teachers who have missed out on promotional chances may be bitter and disenchanted and they disinvest in their teaching. They are unlikely to engage in further professional development.

Teachers in the final stage of their careers behave in different ways, depending on the responses adopted at the fourth stage. The fifth phase may be characterised by serenity or bitterness. After about thirty years in their profession, many teachers experience a loss of energy and enthusiasm but also a sense of confidence and self acceptance. They disinvest in relational closeness with their pupils. Others feel disenchanted or bitter towards their school and profession. In their last ten years of teaching, teachers enter the conservative phase. They resist innovations and feel nostalgia for the past. Sikes *et al.* (1985) found that teachers in the final stage of the teaching career is (age 55+) are more committed to pupils' holistic development and learning than to the subject disciplines which defined them as a teacher in the early stages of their careers. For some teachers, the enjoyment and satisfaction which they derived from teaching in earlier years have dissipated and teachers are preparing for their retirement. Generally, the more committed and idealistic teachers continue to implement reforms during this phase. However, the more disillusioned teachers tend to revert to more traditional methodologies, focusing on the concerns of their own teaching and their own classroom (Huberman *et al.* 1993).

Day, Stobart, Sammons *et al.* (2006), in a study of teachers' professional life phases, did not establish a link between relative effectiveness and age, professional life

phase or gender. However, they assert that teachers' capacities to adapt to change are linked closely to teacher commitment. Teachers' sense of positive professional identity is associated with well-being and job satisfaction and is a key factor in their effectiveness. Their research also draws a link between teacher effectiveness and pupils' learning asserting that pupils who are taught by committed and resilient teachers, who are successful in balancing their work-life commitments, are likely to attain more than pupils whose teachers do not possess these skills. Teachers working in areas of disadvantage were more at risk of losing their motivation and their commitment as they experienced more challenges from parents and pupils and had to manage more government-originated reforms.

Day et al. (2006) report that teachers do not become more effective over time, but the majority maintain their effectiveness as they progress into the final phases of their careers. He states that threats to teacher effectiveness arise during the fourth phase of teachers' professional lives (16– 23 years) when competing tensions between work and personal life or dissatisfaction with career stagnation result in a minority of teachers becoming de-motivated and feeling a lack of commitment.

The findings of Day's research (2006) relating to the last phase of the teachers' professional life (31+ years of teaching) contrast significantly with the findings of Huberman, Grounauer and Marti (1993). They found that this final phase was a period of high commitment and motivation where teachers derived satisfaction from their relationships with their pupils. Day et al. (2006) suggest that teachers need support to sustain their commitment, energy and skill over the course of their career. This support is necessary to enable teachers to deal with the emotional, social and

intellectual demands that are required by the continuous reforms introduced by central government. This research indicates that the successful introduction of reforms in the education system requires teachers that are resilient, effective and have a strong sense of self-efficacy. Reforms also require principals to give strong, purposeful leadership and to focus on nurturing teachers' commitment throughout their professional lives.

The work on teachers' career stages draws attention to the fact that teachers respond differently to change experiences depending on their biographical factors such as teachers' identities, age and career stages, gender and personal attributes. These researchers perceive the success of reforms as depending on critical incidents in teachers' lives, variability in school settings, and the availability of professional opportunities for teachers during their careers to be promoted or to become involved in various initiatives. Their research highlights that teachers at different stages of the careers will have different responses to policies and to change. These responses are contingent on teachers' level of motivation and commitment, their well-being and their level of efficacy and self-fulfilment.

2.11 Strategies to Ensure Change and Implementation

Centrally-sponsored research into educational change has focused on the strategies for ensuring the implementation of reforms leading to sustainability and eventually to the institutionalisation of innovations. The strategies identified to enhance innovation include the nature of the policy-making process, professional development, a focus on leadership, whole-school improvement and the development of teaching and learning communities in schools. Educational change

theorists and change agents have been concerned with assisting schools to move to sustainable educational change where new practices are integrated effortlessly into teachers' practice and into the organisation and structure of schools.

The most important determinant of successful implementation is the quality of the policy introduced. Schwille, Porter, Belli et al. (1988) found that policies vary in their specificity, consistency, authority, power and stability. They argue that there is a greater chance of successful implementation if policies have a high level of one or all of these attributes. Policies that are persuasive to teachers and resonate with their personal missions are more likely to become institutionalised than policies that are based on mandates, incentives or rewards. This theory also suggests that if a policy is stated in clear terms and requires little interpretation by the various policy actors, it is more likely that it will be implemented as intended. Also, the implementation of a policy is easier when it is consistent with other reform efforts as reforms that build on and complement each other serve to reinforce each other.

McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) contend that specificity of policies is not sufficient for successful implementation. Rather, teachers need to know the theoretical principles that underlie the innovation and "enact the first principles that constitute the grammar for the reform" (p.306). Without an understanding of the underlying theory, teachers will be unable to analyse their own work and will not be able to work collaboratively with colleagues or provide feedback as a member of a professional community. Consequently, their practice will stagnate and the reform will be short-lived.

Professional development and training opportunities are recognised as critical components of change initiatives (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001). Teachers need examples of specific practices that will assist them to translate the reform into classroom practice. They prefer professional development that is tailored to their individual school and its specific context and they are more likely to support a reform effort when there is consensus about the need to introduce the reform in the school. McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) argue that reforms that embrace the whole school and foster teacher learning and 'buy-in' from the whole staff are more likely to succeed. They note "Sustaining practice also requires a community of practice to provide support, deflect challenges from the broader environment and furnish the feedback and encouragement essential to going deeper" (p.309). Additionally, the opportunity for teachers to participate in local and national networks that facilitate them to interact with other colleagues around aspects of their practice facilitates the success of an initiative.

The successful implementation of a reform requires leadership. Reforms flourish when teacher leaders emerge as members of the school community who can facilitate the learning of their peers. These teachers, while leading training and in-class support, are seen as collaborating equals who are essential to the successful dissemination of the reform within the school. Principals play an influential role in the success of school change efforts (Anderson & Shirley, 1995) through their awareness of the change process, and their encouragement and support of staff. Principals are the single most important predictor of change in the school as they offer moral authority to the reform. They play a key role in the leadership of instructional change in the school, they obtain resources to support the

implementation of the reform and they support the continuing professional development of teachers (Desimone, 2002).

McKinsey and Company (2007) undertook an international review of the education systems that have been most successful in bringing about sustainable change in a period of large-scale reform. They found that the most successful educational changes occurred in countries which had a highly-qualified teacher workforce, that valued creativity and innovation among its teachers and that had well-developed professional development systems in place. The quality of education was not determined by the availability of financial resources or the pupil-teacher ratio. Rather the McKinsey report asserts that the quality of the teacher recruited is the single most important factor in achieving improved learning outcomes.

The recognition and involvement of teachers as central actors in the policy process is highlighted by McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) who emphasise the importance of reformers and practitioners working together to co-construct the change:

Invention also requires much practical and theoretical learning on the part of reformers. ...Reformers need to learn about teachers' workplace contexts, the rhythm of their day, and the norms that inform practice and routines. They need to learn about the contexts outside of inventing sites that compete for teachers' time and attention, or that conflict with reform principles – accountability systems, other reform initiatives, community pressures, the broader policy context. Working with teachers in real-life classroom settings affords reformers opportunity to learn more about the reform itself and build a repertoire of context-sensitive theory-into-practice that can inform implementation and future invention. (p.306)

Fullan (2001a) asserts that teachers need to 'own' the process of change, and reform efforts need to be grounded in an understanding of teachers' professional lives. Therefore, teachers need to be empowered to become central agents in the reform

process. Goodson (2000, p.16) argues that if educational policy is to bring about substantive changes in schools, rather than remain in the “realm of triumphalist symbolic action” a new balance between the teachers’ personal lives, the internal context of the school and the external demands for change will need to be achieved.

Policy makers therefore need to involve teachers in change efforts, in their design and in their development so that reforms are inclusive of teachers’ meanings, missions and memories (Goodson et al., 2006, p.56).

2.12 Conclusion

Policymaking and the implementation of policy are complex processes. Teachers and schools remain resilient and resistant to policy makers’ efforts to introduce change and reforms which focus on reducing teachers to technicians, teaching to the test and following a formulaic lesson plan. The origin of the change initiative is not the critical factor in the acceptance of reform. Teachers respond most positively to reforms when they are clear and unambiguous and when they are provided with scope to exercise their professionalism and autonomy as teachers.

Since the 1980s, the environment in which teachers work has changed irreversibly. The large-scale reforms introduced into education by successive governments in England and the United States have been unrelenting and teachers’ roles and work have expanded in different ways. The epidemic of educational reform process and government approaches to teachers and teaching have a significant impact on teachers’ morale, commitment to teaching and their retention within the education sector. The McKinsey group report highlights the centrality of the teacher in the

reform process. Their research stresses that successful change can only occur in school systems that target the most qualified people into the teaching profession, that provide high-quality professional development focused on the improvement of instructional practices and that build instructional leadership capacities (McKinsey, 2007).

The work on teachers' career trajectories suggests that teachers' progress through different life stages and that they need a variety of supports to enable them to remain engaged and committed to their pupils' learning and to manage different cycle of change. The research on teachers' lives draws attention to how teachers respond differently to change experiences depending on their identities, age and career stages, gender and work contexts. The contribution of this research to the understanding of educational change rests with its foregrounding of teachers' motivations, personal missions and meanings that they ascribe to different policy reforms. Research on teachers' career trajectories illustrates that if sustainable change is to be secured, then policy makers must include scope within change initiatives for teachers to engage in reforms and to exercise professional judgement about the reforms that they are implementing. The challenge of reform is to connect the various policies with the personal missions and professional meanings they may have for teachers, each at their own stage of development.

The next section focuses on the Irish context. It traces the development of policy from the establishment of the primary system of education through to current events. It focuses on the policy motifs that have dominated the educational discourse in this

context and it reviews the major changes and policies that are shaping modern Irish primary education.

SECTION 2: CHANGE AND REFORM IN IRISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

2.13 Introduction

This section provides an historical overview of policy motifs in Irish primary education, with a specific focus on changes and reforms at primary level. Policies regarding national education have been fundamental in the nation-state building role and an analysis of these policies provides an understanding of the knowledge, social values and specific national and cultural identities which have been transmitted and developed over the course of two centuries. Changes in policies in primary education reflect the dominant social movements during particular phases of the nation's development and are reflected in the policy texts and decisions taken by institutions such as the Department of Education and Science.¹

By placing contemporary developments in historical perspective and by considering a wide variety of policy texts, it will be argued that the trajectory of policy has evolved from the centralised and highly protected arena of church and state to a more democratic and inclusive process. In the early days of the state, educational policy was concerned with the creation of national and cultural identity and the revival of the Irish language, culture and the promotion of traditional church values. The main policy texts drafted during this period comprised Department of Education

¹ The Department of Education was established in 1921. The Department was known as the Department of Education from 1921 until 1997. It was subsequently re-titled the Department of Education and Science.

circulars, rules and curricula. The shifts in educational policy were largely confined to changes and adaptations to the curriculum which reflected shifting ideologies from British to nationalist influences.

Primary education was the main experience of education for the majority of the population until the mid-1960s when the OECD's review of education acted as a catalyst for a significant change in policy. During the 1970s policy makers introduced a range of reforms aimed at increasing participation in education, combating educational and social inequality and assisting students to derive benefit from participation in education. The professional autonomy of the teacher and the discretion which they exercised over educational matters in the schools remained unchanged.

During the 1990s the processes of globalisation and European integration aligned Irish education more closely with patterns of educational change in other Western countries. This period was dominated by the partnership approach to policy making which emphasised consensualism among the education partners. Irish primary education experienced a period of unprecedented change in the 1990s. It is within this context of social, economic and educational change that this research is undertaken. The historical developments in primary education are traced and the influences which have shaped policy in education are examined. While educational policy reflects many aspects of international reform agendas, the Irish education system remains unique in many respects.

2.14 The National System of Education – Origins, Structure and Policy Making

The establishment of a national system of education in 1831 occurred during a period when Ireland was a predominantly pre-modern, pre-industrial, agrarian society marked by denominational, political and nationalist strife. Ireland was under direct British rule from London and a part of the United Kingdom since the Act of Union in 1800. The forces which brought about the state's involvement in education in several continental countries such as the industrial revolution and growing urbanisation, were not relevant issues in the Irish context. The establishment of the national school system of education in 1831 had its origins in paternalistic colonialism and the system continued, largely unmodified, until the 1960s.

Prior to the establishment of a 'national' system of education, a number of separate school systems had developed without official state involvement or monitoring. Among these educational pioneers were hedge school masters, the Kildare Place Society and individuals and organisations. Many of the schools established in cities and large urban areas were the result of the work of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Nuns and Edmund Rice and the Irish Christian Brothers who focused their efforts on the education of poor children. These schools were characterised by a strong Catholic ethos and had nationalist roots (Coolahan, 1981). The National Board of Education, the precursor of the Department of Education, was established to run a state-supported primary school system that sought to anglicise the Irish people by constraining the language and culture transmitted through the curriculum. Ireland, as

a colony, was frequently used as a “social laboratory where various policy initiatives were tried out which might be less acceptable in England” (Coolahan, 1981, p. 3).

The national system of education was intended to link Ireland more closely with England through a process of cultural assimilation. Consequently, the teaching materials in use did not make any specific reference to the Irish context, language or culture and weakened the sense of cultural identity (Coolahan, 1981). Curry (1998, p.74) points out that the Irish national school system was very important in the development of mass literacy and the replacement of the Irish language by English, thus sowing the seeds of modernity.

Ireland achieved political independence in 1921 and the state institutions and the social policies, which were inherited from the British system, were largely retained. Smith (2006) argues that in many aspects of social policy, the Irish state played an auxiliary role to other institutions such as the churches. The various churches had secured a dominant position in the provision of primary education since the 1850s and this position was further strengthened with the establishment of the Free State. Primary education had evolved into a largely state-financed but church-controlled and managed system. The various churches dominated the management of national schools, including the employment of teachers, and the local funding for schools until 1973. Lodge and Lynch (2004, p.4) note that the influence of the churches on the structure and control of the education system is unequalled in comparable state-funded systems.

The central role of formulating national educational policy was undertaken specifically by the Minister for Education and the administrative and professional civil servants in the Department of Education. The 1920s was a deeply conservative period when the Catholic Church dominated the social, moral and political landscape. The new government administration viewed education as the vehicle by which to create a homogenous society underpinned by the values of church, family, tradition, and imbued with a love for the Irish language and history. Policy making was binary in nature, controlled primarily by the dominant church with the Department of Education playing a subsidiary role (Ó Buachalla, 1988).

In the 1920s, changes in education, as exemplified in curriculum policy, were inspired by patriotic fervour and the ideology of cultural nationalism (Clancy, 1995). In these decades, the education system was harnessed for a cultural revolution based on schools (Coolahan, 1981). The Irish Free State introduced a new programme for primary schools that concentrated on a small number of subjects. Irish was made an obligatory subject and its promotion was considered the most important function of the national school. During the 1920s and 1930s successive governments forged even closer links between the curriculum and the values and beliefs which they wished to transmit. Incentives such as increased capitation grants were provided to schools using only Irish as the medium of instruction.

O'Connor (1986), a former Secretary of the Department of Education, notes that this policy to revive Irish was successful initially but that by the 1950s, internal policy makers in the Department of Education were aware that efforts to revive the Irish

language had failed. Despite this awareness, policies on the Irish language form a constant motif in primary education.

The advent of the Second World War accelerated the processes of modernisation in other western European countries. Education was viewed by parents and policy makers as critical to the vibrancy of the post-war industrial society in producing students who could take advantage of the growing technological and scientific discoveries. Education was a major component of the competition for supremacy with the Soviet Union during the 'cold war' years. Schools and the curriculum were placed under significant pressure to meet the demands to bolster a burgeoning world economy and to counteract inequalities that existed in housing, employment and civil rights.

These international trends in educational change did not influence Irish education policy making. Throughout the 1930–1960s primary schools followed a core curriculum based on the '3Rs' and the promotion of Irish remained the focus of their work. The introduction of the Primary Certificate examination in 1943 further restricted the scope and range of the primary curriculum and until its abolition in 1967 it confined experiment, limited choice and hampered the treatment of subjects within the primary school curriculum (Coolahan, 1981).

From the 1920s onwards schools were harsh environments where corporal punishment prevailed until its abolition in 1981. Class sizes were large and in inner-city schools classes of fifty to seventy children were common. For over one century, textbooks framed the meaning and experiences provided to children and pupils were

desk-bound during periods of instruction. Almost 70% of schools were one-teacher or two-teacher schools and there were 4,869 schools nationally. The pupil enrolment nationally in 1957 was 503, 381 and instruction was provided by 13, 402 teachers, almost a quarter of whom were untrained (O'Connor, 1986, p.13).

Hogan (2003) argues that the role of teachers in society was constrained by the religious, moral and cultural restrictions that characterised this historical era. Reflecting on the writings of Francis McManus and Bryan McMahon, whose work gives voice to the experiences of teachers during the 1940s, Hogan (2003) found that teachers' identity was shaped by "a bureaucratically-minded inspectorate and a suffocating form of Catholicism" (p.4). MacMahon's recollections give an account of an active and culturally rich life where teaching was experienced as a source of fulfilment and creativity. By contrast, McManus' work, in particular, paints a picture of the primary school teacher as one whose:

...real talents remained largely unacknowledged, whose good-will was routinely presumed upon, whose sensibilities were incarcerated, whose artistic possibilities were silenced if not extinguished, whose legitimate expectations of promoted were denied, or else granted only to be pressed into servile compliance. (p.6)

2.15 The Role of the Department of Education in Policy Making

During the 1930s and 1940s, Irish policy-makers, in contrast to their European counterparts, remained committed to the principles of non-interventionism and were relatively inactive in major areas of policy such as education and health (Smith, 2006, p.524). The one area where successive Departments of Education exercised control was the content and format of the curriculum. Irish primary teachers, unlike their colleagues in other countries, did not have a tradition of teacher-involvement in

curriculum development. Therefore they implemented the curriculum devised by central government as intended.

Consecutive ministers of education viewed the role of the state in education matters as a subsidiary one and concentrated on the provision of financial supports to the churches in the provision of educational facilities (Clancy, 1995). Therefore education policy making was short-term in nature, and was characterised by introspection and proceeded on an “*ad hoc* basis with little attention given to longer-term considerations” (Smith, 2006, p.524).

General Mulcahy, Minister for Education in 1956, in a speech to Dáil Éireann cited in O'Connor (1986), outlined the central position of the churches in Irish education. This speech emphasised the fact that Ministers for Education did not perceive their role as one concerned with policy formation. Rather, they played a secondary role to the churches in educational matters:

Deputy Moylan has asked me to philosophise, to give my views on educational technique or educational practice. I do not regard that as my function in the Department of Education in the circumstances of the educational set-up in this country. You have your teachers, your managers and your churches, and I regard the position as Minister in the Department of Education as that of a kind of dungaree man, the plumber who will make the satisfactory communications and streamline the forces and potentialities of the educational workers and educational management in this country. He will take the knock out of the pipes and will link up everything. I would be blind to my responsibility if I insisted on pontificating or lapsed into an easy acceptance of an imagined duty to philosophise here on educational matters. (O'Connor, 1986, p.1)

A decisive shift in the state's approach to policy making occurred in 1958 when the White Paper, *The Programme for Economic Expansion* (Government of Ireland, 1958) was published. This identified trade liberalisation and state interventionism as the two pillars of economic policy (Smith, 2006). The associated economic and trade developments included an application to the European Union (formerly known as European Economic Community) for membership, incentives to attract industries to Ireland and the opening up of the Irish economy through the extension of exports' tax relief. In 1973 Ireland finally gained entry into the EEC. This era marked the change in focus in policy making and Ireland became outward-looking in terms of industrial policy.

The second pillar, state interventionism, was particularly evident in the active role which the state began to pursue in education in the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of the *Investment in Education Report* (Department of Education, 1966) marks a distinct reorientation in Irish education policy and signposted the direction for educational reform (Clancy, 1995). The public interest in education was aroused and debate focused on social inequality and increasing rates of access and participation in education. The report helped to shape the future of Irish education and its most immediate impact in terms of structural changes was the expansion of the educational system with the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967 and increased access to third-level education in the 1970s. The state assumed an increasingly interventionist role in funding the building of second-level schools and it facilitated the employment of an expanding teacher workforce.

The Irish government and the OECD funded the *Investment in Education* (Department of Education, 1966) report. The reformulation of policy making and the objectives of education were deeply influenced by the report and it succeeded in establishing the concept of investment in education for economic growth and social development as the education's system chief objective. According to Gibbons (1996) the *Investment in Education* report was a key element in the transformation of Irish society and it moved the discourse on educational change into the wider context. This also served to "remove the school from the sacristy and place it in line with the need for greater technological change in Irish society" (Gibbons, 1996, p.83).

The report explicitly linked education and economic utility and set the groundwork for the development of modernity (Clancy, 1995). Commentators such as Tovey and Share (2000) and Clancy (1995) argue that this discourse has continued to permeate and shape Irish education, and policy documents since the 1960s have oriented the system to make it more responsive to the needs of the economy. In particular, educational knowledge at post-primary level was been largely defined by the business and scientific sectors and the numbers of students taking science, business and technical subjects have grown significantly reflecting the changing values of society (Clancy, 1995).

The close relationship between social class position and educational attainment were recognised in the *Investment in Education* (Department of Education, 1966). Schools, in the 1980s and 1990s, became significant areas for intervention through government programmes to combat social and economic disadvantage. Schools were

given the task of addressing broader patterns of inequality in society including those of class and gender. Lodge and Lynch (2004) observe that the debate on socio-economic status and equality of educational opportunity overshadowed broader educational debate and served to narrow educational research and policy making.

2.16 Curriculum Change at Primary Level

Other changes were occurring at primary level during the 1960s and 1970s. The abolition of the Primary Certificate Examination in 1967 meant that there was greater autonomy for teachers at the senior level in national school. Prior to 1967 the primary curriculum was the only educational experience for 73% of pupils who left school to join the labour force at the age of fourteen years (Tovey et al., 2000).

A change in curriculum was required to reflect the changing emphases in primary education and *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (Department of Education, 1971) for national schools was prepared by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and launched for primary schools in 1971. This 'new curriculum' was a landmark in the development of primary education as it marked a radical shift of ideological position and methodological approach to primary education. Teachers were accorded a greater degree of freedom, the curriculum was expanded to include an increased range of subjects, and teachers were encouraged to adapt their programme to suit the needs of the child and the educational environment in which the school was situated. The philosophy of the curriculum was imbued with the spirit of the scientific method and a heuristic teaching methodology was encouraged. Group and individual teaching were promoted. Coolahan (1981) maintains that the 1971 curriculum has been the:

... single greatest factor in changing the life-experience of both teachers and pupils within the schools. Its philosophy, content and methodology have helped to make schools more interesting varied and satisfying places for those who spend a significant portion of their lifetimes in school... The more humane concern for the child's welfare which underpins the curricular approaches, as well as the abolition of corporal punishment, have made school attractive and pleasant to many children. (p.60)

The implementation of the 'new' curriculum was curtailed by several factors including large pupil-teacher ratios, under-resourced schools, poor school buildings and limited in-service provision. Coolahan (1981) asserts that these factors were exacerbated by the large number of small schools, the strong tradition of individuality and autonomy within the teaching profession and the lack of a whole-school approach to curriculum delivery (pp. 66-69). Programmes of continuing professional development did not accompany the introduction of the curriculum.

From a policy perspective, the Department of Education did not conduct large-scale studies of the implementation of the curriculum. Inspectors' reports from the period were relied upon to provide evidence of change and reform. Inspectors reported that the more successful implementation of the curriculum in the infant and the junior classrooms and the continuing domination of the textbooks to guide curriculum content and methodology in the middle and senior classes (Department of Education, 1987).

The introduction of the 'new' curriculum occurred contemporaneously with the announcement by the Department of Education of its support for the restructuring of school management and its proposals to provide improved funding for schools that introduced boards of management in 1973. This policy contributed to an increase in

the democratisation of school management and resulted in a modification of church control on education.

2.17 The Trajectory of Policy Making in the Irish State 1987 - 2008

From the 1980s onwards the educational policy making process experienced some fundamental changes in Ireland. A new model of centralised collective bargaining, known as social partnership, became the working model for the policy process. Smith (2006) describes the negotiation of the first centralised agreement as “the start of a new era in Irish politics, with social partnership forming a central pillar of macroeconomic policy ever since” (p. 528). Policy making groups, external to the education process, such as farming organisations, trade unions, community and voluntary organisations and employer and business organisations form the four pillars of the social partnership mechanism (Rush, 1999, p.163). The adoption of this new model of centralised collective bargaining at the end of the 1980s is described by Kiely, O'Donnell, Kennedy et al. (1999) as a watershed in Irish social policy. While the number of participant and interest groups increased during this period, all of these groups did not enjoy equality of involvement in the policy process; policy making was still dominated by the churches and the state with the teacher unions emerging as key power-brokers (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 384). At a national level, Lynch and Lodge (2004) observe that in policy making terms, “much of education decision making is a closed shop” (p.4). The concept of partnership continues to permeate all policy initiatives introduced in the education system. Partnership is enshrined in the *Education Act, 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) and is reflected in all decision-making structures in the policy making process.

Centralised nature of the management and administration of primary education

Many of the aspects of the administration of the primary system of education are managed centrally in the Department of Education and Science. Unlike other countries where intermediary structures are in place at local level, the Department deals with individual schools on applications for furniture, school building projects, replacement of essential equipment, issues teachers' salaries, and establishes regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools. The Department's staff deals with queries from parents, teachers and school managers on the management of their schools and accords recognition to new schools and oversees the quality of education provided through its Inspectorate.

Until the establishment of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 1987, the Inspectorate of the Department devised curricula for schools. In recent years, the Department has established various units within its professional and administrative sections to provide policy advice and devise policy documents for schools and for the system. It also finances the Education Research Centre to carry out reviews of provision on various aspects of the system and to generate data for comparative international surveys on student achievement. It has created a range of policy advice agencies to formulate policy and to advise the Minister on various aspects of education, for example, the Education Disadvantage Committee and the Centre for Early Childhood and Development, both of which operated until 2008.

Prior to the introduction of the educational legislation in 1998, the Department issued its policies through revisions to the *Rules for National Schools* (DES, 1965) or through circulars. The Inspectorate monitored the implementation of policy

changes and advised the Minister on the progress achieved. Consequently, knowledge about developments in schools was local and there were few national reports or reviews of the implementation of policies. In this climate, teachers had discretion over the way they managed schools and the way in which they taught the curriculum.

Commenting in 1991, the OECD observers, in its *Review of Irish Education* (OECD, 1991, p.36), noted that educational change was slow and policy makers behaved reactively rather than proactively. The quality of education policy making was sharply criticised and the Department of Education, in particular, was censured for its lack of 'purposeful central authority', its 'innate conservatism' and absence of political will and administrative capacity. They noted that the Department of Education had insufficient funding and expertise to advise systematically on policy (OECD, 1991, p.39). However, the policy making process in the social and economic spheres was already undergoing radical change and the new 'partnership' approach to policy making would encompass education also.

2.18 Educational Policy Texts and Legislation

During the last quarter of the twentieth century Ireland as a society experienced extraordinary changes and every aspect of social, economic, educational and political life was transformed.

The most profound changes were economic. Standards of living increased and Gross National Product rose steadily. The high rates of unemployment and emigration which beleaguered Irish society from the 1920 – 1980 were reversed and skill shortages became apparent in many areas. International software companies established outlets in Ireland thus creating job opportunities and government agencies invested heavily in information technologies. The country benefited in terms of funding for structural projects, developments in agriculture and in education from the European Union. During the 1990s there was accelerated socio-economic change within a brief time-span. The availability of migrant workers to achieve economic capacity became central to economic growth and success. Thus Ireland became more multicultural and multi-ethnic than formerly.

Other societal changes have a significant impact on education. The population is becoming increasingly urbanised with 60% urban-based in 2002. The family as a social institution is evolving and the Census (2006) recorded that 30% of children are born to lone mothers (CSO, 2006). There is an increasing proportion of single-parent families, marital breakdown and cohabiting couples. The participation of women in the labour force, especially those with children, has expanded significantly and this has implications for traditional child-rearing practices and the

pattern of family life. The wide-scale publicity of cases of child abuse in society generally, and specifically within the churches and educational institutions, has highlighted the need for the greater care and protection of children and has challenged the churches' role in society.

Participation in education has increased dramatically and 84% of students completed the senior cycle and the transfer rate to third level also increased dramatically (CSO, 2006). The number of programmes and initiatives to retain students in school and to combat educational disadvantage multiplied during this period. Programmes such as Youthreach which was aimed at students who were disaffected with the traditional second-level curriculum were introduced. The Breaking the Cycle scheme was introduced into disadvantaged urban and rural schools and it introduced a favourable pupil-teacher ratio and the introduction of specialist teachers such as home/school/community liaison officers. A variety of new programmes was introduced to offset social needs. These included the introduction of programmes such as Relationship and Sexuality Education; Stay Safe, and Social, Personal and Health Education in both primary and post-primary schools. Additional programmes such as Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme were provided to ensure that students were leaving school certified and prepared to enter further training with Fás, the institutes of technology or third level courses.

Although the principles of equity and equality have been central to government educational policy (Government of Ireland 1992, 1995), patterns of inequality in education persist and commentators such as Lynch (1999) and Drudy (2001) argue

that the greatest beneficiaries of educational change since the 1960s have been the middle and upper classes, arguing that “Education thus would appear to have played the role of consolidating social class differences rather than removing or radically reducing them” (Drudy, 2001, p.8). The rhetoric of educational reforms, particularly those designed to eliminate social-class related inequalities, has not been matched by the impact of the reforms themselves.

The Irish education system operated without a legislative framework until the 1990s. Despite the standardisation of curricula, teachers retained a considerable degree of local discretion and autonomy in the implementation of policy on curriculum and related matters. There was a general lack of coherence and direction to the policy-making process. Programmes were introduced in response to crises rather than as part of a strategic plan. Efforts to introduce legislation into the Irish system occurred over a prolonged period leading John Walshe (1999), a journalist to comment:

The length of time the process took – almost a decade – is an indication of just how difficult it is to bring about major reform in an education system. (p.209)

Mr. Séamus Brennan, Minister for Education in 1992, who had previous experience in the business sector found the decision-making process in the Department of Education slow and cumbersome, in comparison with the previous departments he had served in as minister. He comments:

I came from departments where decisions were taken every day of the week, often involving spending millions of pounds. In Education, I found a department that was the biggest property holder in the country. Too much time was spent on decisions about fixing slate roofs. I felt all that should be contracted out and that the department should concentrate on deciding policy. (Walshe, 1999, p.26)

Successive Ministers for Education influenced the shape of the legislation which emerged during the 1990s. The publication of the Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland, 1992) and the *Programme for a Partnership Government, 1993/1997* (Government of Ireland, 1993) provided a set of proposals for educational change. A National Education Convention was convened in 1993, at the penultimate stage before policy was formulated in the *Charting our Education Future - White Paper on Education* (Government of Ireland, 1995). This convention is described by the organisers “an unprecedented, democratic event in the history of Irish education” (Coolahan, 1995) as it provided the first forum for a wide range of organisations within and outside the educational process to “engage in structured and sustained discussion on key issues of educational policy in Ireland” (p.1). The convention’s report highlighted the lack of a defined and adequate philosophy of education and it prioritised the need for clear aims and rationale for the education system.

The consultation process which was engaged in the 1992-1993 period marks a shift from a top-down model of government to horizontal governance, which is the process of governing by public policy networks including public, private and voluntary sector actors. Whereas a traditional top-down model emphasises control and uniformity, horizontal governance recognises that governments alone may not have the capacity, knowledge or legitimacy to solve complex public policy problems in a diverse society. Therefore, horizontal governance emphasises collaboration and co-ordination with relevant agencies, private and voluntary sectors and independent experts in the field (Phillips & Orsini, 2002, p.4). The process of drafting legislation and the consultations with the wider society about education embedded the

partnership approach to policy making within the educational landscape. Thus, the debate began to shift from issues of structure and control of schools to discussion about educational aims and the quality of education.

The subsequent publication of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) outlined the purposes, rights and responsibilities of all the stakeholders in education, based on five underlying principles of pluralism, partnership, quality, equality and accountability. This was followed by the publication of the *Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004* (Government of Ireland, 2000, 2004) which strengthened the rights of minority groups to participate in education and served to propel schools to plan for the diversity of the population. Other core developments in relation to children and the changing perspectives of children and childhood in Ireland are reflected in the Irish ratification of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNHCHR, 1989) in 1992, the establishment of the National Children's Office in 2000 and the appointment of a Children's Ombudsman in 2003. Current developments include the debate on early childhood education and care, assessment and the teaching of English as an additional language to newcomer pupils which are at the centre of the current policy developments within the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Hogan (2003, p.11) questions the progress that has been achieved in education since 1998 and maintains that the programme of legislative change has brought about "the dismantling of an old order rather than in any decisive advances in consolidating a new one." However, one of the immediate effects of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the issuing of Circular 8/99 (DES, 1999) on

resources for children with special educational needs (SEN) was the creation of resource teaching posts to integrate pupils with SEN into primary schools (DES, 2008). Since 1999 approximately 6000 teaching posts were created in this area.

During this period a large number of teachers, some of whom had been educated in Ireland but who completed their teacher training qualifications abroad, returned to teach in Ireland. Teachers, from different countries, also sought recognition for their teaching qualifications so that they could teach in Irish primary schools. As a result, a more diversified teaching population is emerging which contrasts markedly with the more homogenous cohorts of teachers who had entered primary teaching prior to the late 1990s. Data on this issue are largely anecdotal and are based on the researcher's personal experiences of working with schools as an inspector. The Department of Education and Science, while retaining data about teachers in respects of their registration as teachers and for payment purposes, does not currently have the resources to analyse the trends in the teacher population.

2.19 Local Curriculum Reform Initiatives–Paving the Way for National Reform

Following the introduction of the 1971 curriculum, teachers were accorded considerable freedom in their classrooms to innovate and to create exciting learning environments. Small scale innovation at local level became a feature of curriculum reform and development in the 1980s and 1990s. Colleges of education, teacher education centres and local groups of teachers introduced change initiatives such as creative writing initiatives, environmental education projects, development education projects and health education projects in response to the diverse needs of their pupils. A growing number of teachers completed post-graduate courses in

education and knowledge of developments in other countries stimulated the development of teachers as local change agents. The experience developed at local levels was harnessed by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and during this period it published several documents on issues in primary education. Teachers were to exert considerable influence on the Quinlan committee that reviewed primary education in the 1980s. The *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (NCCA, 1990) issued by this group defined the parameters for an extensive curricular review under the auspices of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

In periods of significant social and economic change, major curriculum review is undertaken and revised curricula are produced in response to new needs and developments in the wider social fabric. The *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) was developed during a period when Ireland was at the juncture of the two cultures – modernism and postmodernism. These factors increased pressure for the development of a curriculum which reflected the needs of a more diverse school population. As Sugrue (2004) points out, education and curriculum in particular play a pivotal role in shaping this new world:

Classrooms, schools, regional and national education structures, policies and curricula are another canvas on which these competing and conflicting forces play out to shape the minds, hearts and hands of the rising generation as they begin to shape and are shaped by an emerging world order. (p.5)

The revised curriculum was designed to reflect the needs of a changing cultural, social and economic landscape and to take “cognisance of the changing nature of knowledge and society and caters for the needs of individual children in adjusting to such change” (DES, 1999, Introduction, p.3).

From May 1992 to September 1999 the NCCA involved a small number of influential policy actors, most notably the teacher unions, the churches through their respective management bodies, the Department of Education and Science and the National Parents Council in a process of curriculum revision. Policy research shows that social corporatism, whereby councils, composed of professionals and interest groups determine the direction of educational reforms, enables the country to act in a consensual manner (Hall, 2000, p.96) and this in turn is likely to support continuity between policy and practice. The publication of the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) is a significant policy document reflecting the application of the partnership model to curriculum development and reflects an increasing democratisation of the policy making process. It also reflects the education system's willingness to respond to the new needs and developments in the wider social fabric.

While acknowledging that the partnership approach has served to widen the debate on educational matters, commentators such as Hall (2000) and Sugrue (2004) are critical of this approach arguing that the partnership approach limited the discussion of education goals and values of education. Sugrue (2004) asserts that the partnership approach stymied the debate on the purposes, content and structure of the curriculum. He argues that sectoral interests in the policy process leads to fragmentation and discontinuity in policy and that some policy actors have more agency and power in the partnership process than others. Hall (2000) is equally critical of the NCCA committees, arguing that they were dominated by the teacher unions and that the members of the committees did not have sufficient expertise to

make decisions and advise government. She argues that the curriculum statements and guidelines are inadequately informed by contemporary research (pp. 95-96).

2.20 Implementation of the Curriculum

The Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and the School Development Planning Support (SDPS)² were the main agencies charged with supporting teachers in the implementation of the curriculum. Both groups were established in 1999 and teacher-advisors have been seconded from their schools to work as curriculum leaders and school planning advisors with schools. Additional supports were established for principals through the Leadership Development Support network. In parallel to these developments, several advisory groups have been established to support the implementation of the *Education for Persons with Special Needs (EPSEN) Act* (Government of Ireland, 2004) and the *Education Welfare Act* (Government of Ireland, 2000). Within a short period, schools were interacting on a daily basis with a range of implementation agencies that, as policy actors, assisted in the interpretation and implementation of policy at classroom and school level. According to Sugrue (2004), the establishment of support agencies has created career opportunities for hundreds of teachers, who work in these national agencies and progress to other careers as lecturers, inspectors, education centre directors and in other agencies established under legislation.

² The Primary Curriculum Support Programme and the School Development Planning Support were subsumed into the Primary Professional Development Service in September 2008.

Reviews of curriculum implementation

Two reviews of curriculum implementation have been undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2005; 2008) and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2005). The NCCA's review, *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1: English, Visual Arts and Mathematics* (NCCA, 2005) concerned itself with teachers' views of implementation and explored the extent to which the curriculum enabled teachers to bring about quality learning experiences for children. The Inspectorate report, *An evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools* (DES, 2005) focused on inspectors' judgements of curriculum implementation. Both reviews found that teachers had difficulties in planning for pupils' learning at whole-school level. There was some evidence to suggest that whole-school plans were devised because they were required by legislation rather than as a response by the schools to contextualise the curriculum to meet their specific needs. Specifically, the two reviews conclude that teachers found the structure of the English curriculum difficult to understand and some teachers had abandoned the curriculum and had reverted to their previous practice of planning from textbooks (NCCA, 2005; DES, 2005).

The NCCA study (2005) found that teachers reported feeling strong ownership of the principles underpinning the curriculum. However, findings from the review indicate that teachers had limited ownership of the child-centred teaching and learning methods and needed greater support and examples of how to implement these changes in their classrooms. The Inspectorate report found that curriculum provision for mathematics was good in 61% of classrooms and the curriculum was implemented successfully in these settings (DES, 2005). While 74% of teachers

were implementing the English curriculum there was an overdependence on textbooks (DES, 2005). Weaknesses were found in the implementation of new approaches to process writing, oral language and the development of higher-order thinking skills. Most teachers expressed difficulties in assessing pupils' learning and in differentiating the curriculum (NCCA, 2005). The reports indicate that there was a lack of professional knowledge and skills regarding many aspects of teaching and learning. They also point to the fact that teachers do not necessarily change their teaching style or their practice in the classroom as a result of a policy change. Both reports pointed to the need for additional supports for teachers, greater clarification on the approaches required by the curriculum and the provision of additional materials to support curriculum implementation.

While the vast majority of teachers were unaware of the outcomes of the evaluations, the implementation studies generated a range of further policy actions. Initially, additional policies in literacy and numeracy were instigated in schools serving areas of disadvantage as part of the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DES, 2005) and an alternate design of the English curriculum was circulated to schools to assist teachers in its implementation. The NCCA produced information for parents in multi-media format to assist them in supporting their children's learning in primary schools. They also issued guidelines for schools on assessment practices to support teaching and learning (NCCA, 2007). However, specific in-school supports to change and develop teaching and learning strategies and to enhance teachers' professional knowledge were not provided in the areas where weaknesses in curriculum implementation were noted. Rather, the roll-out of

the remaining eight curriculum subjects on the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) continued unabated.

In 2005, the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) policy for schools in disadvantaged areas was published. Its work was influenced by the Education Disadvantage Committee, research on literacy standards published by the Education Research Centre and the outcomes of evaluation studies conducted by the Inspectorate. The DEIS strategy allocated resources to schools that agreed to implement policy and participate in initiatives decided by the DES. Initially schools had to agree to undertake strategic school planning, participate in literacy and numeracy initiatives and focus on improving standards. The rational-technical policy paradigm is central to the DEIS strategy. The evaluation of schools' implementation of these initiatives was undertaken in 2008 by a private research company. Additionally, the literacy and numeracy advisors under PCSP conducted an evaluation of implementation in schools. Disadvantaged schools have therefore become the site of more intensive and accountability driven policies in primary education.

2.21 Governance of Schools

The majority of primary schools (92%) in Ireland are denominational and most of these schools are under the direct patronage of the Catholic Church (DES, 2008). The remainder of these denominational schools are controlled by various Protestant denominations. In recent years, a small number of Muslim schools has been established. In the 1980s two patron bodies emerged – Foras Patrúnachta which manages Gaelscoileanna and Educate Together which manages multi-

denominational schools. In September 2008 both of these patron bodies managed fifty seven and fifty six schools respectively.

While the state controls the curriculum of primary schools and monitors the quality of the education provided, the ownership and management of denominational schools is under church control. Coolahan (2008) has cited Whyte (1984) who noted that for most of the twentieth century educational policy was controlled by the church:

Over most of the period since Independence, the remarkable feature of educational policy in Ireland has been the reluctance of the state to touch on the entrenched positions of the church. This is not because the church's claims have been moderate; on the contrary, it has carved out for itself a more extensive control over education in Ireland than in any other country in the world. It is because the church has insisted on its claim with such force that the state has been extremely cautious in entering its domain. (Cited in Professor Coolahan's presentation to the *Conference on The Governance Challenge for Future Primary School Needs*, 27 June 2008. Retrieved from www.education.gov.ie.)

The establishment of boards of management in 1973 brought an element of democratisation into the running of schools. However patrons of schools, usually the local bishop, retain control of the board through his nominated representatives, which comprise half of the board. The patron and the board also determine the appointment of new teachers and exercise considerable control over selections boards. The *Equality Acts* (Government of Ireland, 2000, 2004) protect boards of management in their freedom to select teachers who will preserve and promote their ethos to work in their schools.

During the period 1922 – 1975 parents were not directly consulted by the state about their wishes regarding the education of their children. The first efforts by the

Department of Education to communicate with parents occurred in 1969 when a booklet, *Ár nDaltaí Úile* (Department of Education, 1969), was published to inform parents about the education provision available at second level. Hyland (1993) notes that it was assumed that parents' voice and wishes were adequately and satisfactorily mediated through the churches. Negotiations which took place in relation to the development of schooling took place between the state and the churches.

Church control of primary education was challenged in the mid-1970s when a group of parents who wanted to have their children educated in a more liberal and open environment, formed an organisation called the Dalkey School project (Hyland, 1993). The patron body of Educate Together was established and multi-denominational national schools account for less than 2% of all primary schools in the country. Lodge and Lynch (2004, p.49) note that there is still "no alternative to denominational education for a large number of parents and their children, especially for those who live outside the small number of urban centres where most multi-denominational school are located." The demand for this type of provision has escalated, and according to the Educate Together website, this stems from increasing parental demands for greater choice:

Educate Together is facing unprecedented demand for places in its schools, for increased services to schools, and is under pressure to open new schools in new areas....This growing demand can be attributed to objective factors in modern Irish life, namely the rapid diversification of society, economic growth, increasing population, globalisation of the economy and improved communications. It is also attributed to the increasing demand of Irish parents to participate as partners in the educational process and a wish that their children should grow up at ease with social, religious and cultural difference. (Retrieved from www.educatetogether.ie on 2 October 2008)

The most recent challenge to church control of schools came at the beginning of the school year 2007/8 when the number of children without school places was significant in the Dublin area. It is estimated that the school going population will increase by 100,000 in the next ten years (DES, 2008). Traditionally, the establishment of schools has been undertaken by the patrons in response to demand. However, with the sharp increase in demographics and the increasing numbers of children from migrant families in certain areas of Dublin and its commuter belt, a crisis emerged in the enrolment of pupils and in this context, Catholic schools gave priority to children from Catholic homes. To ease the enrolment crisis that emerged, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin agreed that a number of schools, under Catholic patronage, would reserve places for children from non-Catholics families. This was a landmark development in the governance and control of schools. The following statement from Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin also indicates that a shift in the Church's position in relation to the patronage of schools is taking place and it censures the Department of Education and Science for its lack of forward planning and lack of engagement in the structures of education:

The Catholic school will only be able to carry out its specific role if there are viable alternatives for parents who wish to send their children to schools inspired by other philosophies. The government's delay in provision of such alternative models makes true choice difficult for these parents, but it also makes it more difficult for Catholic schools to do their work and maintain their identity. (Cited in Professor Coolahan's presentation to the *Conference on The Governance Challenge for Future Primary School Needs*, 27 June 2008. Retrieved from www.education.gov.ie).

The Minister for Education and Science in 2008 invited the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee, traditionally concerned with second and third-level provision, to establish and manage two primary schools on a pilot basis. The landscape for the governance of primary schools is changing dramatically.

In June 2008 a conference on the governance challenges of the primary sector was convened to discuss the challenges presented by the current model of school governance and to identify future structures for the management of schools. Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Batt O’Keeffe T.D. commenting on the role of patron bodies in the development of Irish education highlighted the need for a debate on this issue and the necessity for the establishment of a more varied and inclusive management structure:

Our model of school patronage has served us very successfully for many generations. We are indebted to the churches and, in more recent times, to the newer patronage bodies, for their leadership in creating and sustaining a national network of primary schools that have provided opportunities for generations of our children, have provided the roots for social cohesion and have been core to our collective identity and a sense of civic community and belonging. We cannot take for granted, however, that the basic tenets of our successful model of primary education will continue to be relevant in every respect to the new Ireland of the 21st century. (Mr. Batt O’Keeffe’s presentation to *The Conference on the Governance Challenge for Future Primary School Needs*, 27 June 2008. Retrieved from www.education.gov.ie.)

2.22 Teachers and Primary Education

Drudy and Lynch (1993, p.90) argue that the nature of the Irish education system is shaped through the interplay of a number of powerful interest groups in Irish society and the organisations representing the interests of teachers exert a dominant influence on the system. Teachers are highly unionised and 98% of teachers are members of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) which has emerged as a highly influential power-broker in educational policy making. It also exerts significant influence in shaping national pay agreements and preserving conditions of work. Coolahan (2003, p.8) notes that proposed educational reforms require “protracted negotiation” and at times, the INTO instructs its members not to co-operate with reform initiatives. In particular, in recent years the union has opposed

national standardised testing of pupils at first and fifth classes and the use of pupil profiles to monitor pupil achievement. The union also provided support for a Supreme Court challenge to the publication of Inspectors' reports. While protecting its members' interests, the INTO has also been successful in aligning agreements to implement change with pay increases, the provision of enhanced management positions within schools and the funding of various initiatives such as induction programmes.

Traditionally, the majority of Irish teachers complete a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in one of the denominational colleges of education in the state. The churches have retained their involvement and influence on the formation of primary teachers (Tovey et al., 2000). Until the 1990s, the selection of candidates for colleges of education was undertaken at interview, following the successful completion of the Leaving Certificate. The majority of primary teachers complete their undergraduate education in colleges of education³ and must study the teaching of religious education, as required by the curriculum. Colleges also provide elective courses in religious education. A qualification in religious education is usually required before a teacher's appointment in a denominational school is ratified by the Patron.

Primary teaching maintains high status as an occupation. This is evidenced by the fact that primary teaching still attracts recruits from the top quartile of the students at the Leaving Certificate examinations and competition for entry into the B.Ed. course is intense. Drudy's (2001, pp.14 – 15) research on the views and characteristics of intending teachers found that those choosing primary teaching were good academic

³ Teachers received the qualification of National Teacher in Training Colleges until 1975. A graduate degree was awarded to primary teachers from 1978 onwards. At that time, the Training Colleges were renamed Colleges of Education.

performers. They also were more interested in factors such as job satisfaction, fulfilment and creativity than those choosing other careers. Intending primary teachers were also more orientated to the principles of care and expressed egalitarian views. They were not as focused as other students on pay and prestige. Irish primary teachers are disproportionately female and are from rural, farming and middle class backgrounds (Drudy, 2001, 2006). Although teaching is a predominantly female profession at primary level, only half of principal positions are held by women (INTO, 2004).

Primary teaching, as a profession is beginning to diversify. The introduction of post-graduate courses, which provide a qualification for degree holders to teach in primary schools, has attracted a large number of mature students who have previous employment experience than formerly (Drudy, 2006). Coolahan (2003) argues that teachers are highly respected within the school system:

Traditionally, the role of teachers has been respected by the Irish public and this regard is deeply rooted in historical circumstances. Even when teachers did not benefit from good salaries there was regard for their scholarship, the nature of their work and their roles in the community. ...Various attitudinal surveys have indicated that teaching is one of the most highly regarded professions by the public....Traditionally, there has been a high level of public trust and confidence in the school system. Results from international comparative studies... have helped to foster a positive public view of schooling. (pp.7 – 8)

One of the greatest changes in the teaching force over the last thirty years has been the sharp decline in the religious composition of the teaching force falling from a total of 1598 or 7% of the total teaching force in primary schools in 1983/1994 to less than 2% in 2002/2003 (Tovey et al., 2000; DES, 2005). The teaching workforce at primary level has expanded considerably since the introduction of resource teachers under *Circular 8/99* (DES, 1999) and also the increasing number of pupils

receiving additional language supports. Between 2002 and 2006, over 10,000 teachers were recruited at first and second levels (CSO, 2008). In 2007 alone, over 2,000 teachers were recruited at primary level (DES, 2008). Other initiatives such as favourable pupil-teacher ratios for disadvantaged schools, literacy projects, Reading Recovery and Mathematics Recovery have been introduced. These specialist roles have arisen from initiatives largely to combat educational disadvantage and schools in disadvantaged areas have been assigned more teachers to combat poverty. The diversification of roles within the teaching profession has occurred as a result of individual initiatives rather than as part of a strategy for the development of the teaching profession.

The policy for teacher education reflects government's policy for the general population, which is to focus on learning as a lifelong process. Therefore the policy is developed in terms of initial education (undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications for entry to teaching); induction and in-service teacher education as a support for the teaching career. The establishment of the National Pilot Project on Induction and the development of a system of teacher mentors in schools participating in the scheme reflect the emphasis on capacity development within schools to support and assist in the process of evaluating the work of probationary teachers.

The traditional model of educating teachers was challenged in 2003 when the Further Education Accrediting body accredited a private provider, Hibernia College, to offer a post-graduate teaching diploma that was recognised by the Department of Education and Science. Sugrue and Dupont (2005) argue that this development bears

the hallmarks of a privatisation agenda and is a general indication of the impact of the market forces and deregulation on the teacher education sector.

The teaching profession has experienced significant change. The *Teaching Council Act, 2001* (Government of Ireland, 2001) which has led to the establishment of a Teaching Council in 2004 is a significant development in Irish education and according to Hogan (2003, p.13) furnishes teachers with “opportunities of truly historic proportions.” The Act accords significant self-governing powers for the teaching profession and its budget facilitates the provision of grants for teachers as researchers. The Teaching Council has a remit in promoting the professional development of teachers, in maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and in the establishment of standards and policies and procedures for the education of teachers and the enhancement of professional standards and competence. In 2007 a code of practice for teachers *Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (Teaching Council, 2007) was circulated which emphasises teachers’ core values and expected professional standards. The code reflects the changing requirements of teachers’ work that are a feature of other Western countries. These include the requirements that teachers work as reflective practitioners and participate as part of a collegial workforce to promote high quality educational experiences, to undertake whole-school planning and school self-evaluation. Teachers are also expected to commit themselves to continuously improve and develop their professional practice.

Coolahan (2003) notes that Irish teachers complain of ‘change overload’ when they are required to develop new approaches or to deal with emerging issues. The Teaching Council’s professional code includes teachers’ response to change as a

core value of the profession thus placing the change agenda as a central aspect of a teacher's work. It states:

Teachers acknowledge the changing nature of society and recognise their role in providing appropriate educational responses to cater for the identified needs of students. It is recognised that this is enhanced through mutual support from all partners in education. (Teaching Council, 2007, p.10)

2.23 Conclusion

During the last ten years education policy making in Ireland has been influenced by the overall patterns of change and reform introduced in other western countries, though this change seems to be introduced following a significant time lag. The legislation making process dominated the 1990s and since that period there have been continuous rolling reforms in areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. Educational policy making has become a partnership and consultative process involving unions, parents, patrons, and the other partners. While the teacher unions have protected their sectoral interests in the partnership approach, much progress has been made on achieving agreed goals in primary education. Policy making is also shaped by international trends and the education system is influenced by research and evaluation reports undertaken by bodies such as the OECD which emphasises increasing standards, comparison of pupils' outcomes with their peers in other industrialised countries and higher levels of accountability. These pressures on teachers are also accompanied by whole-school evaluation instruments, the publication of school inspection reports and various Department of Education and Science implementation studies which focus on the degree to which curricula are implemented as intended rather than the specific context of schools and teachers.

The teaching profession has deep, historical roots and is highly valued in Irish society. However, as Coolahan (2003, p.10) notes “It faces many new challenges in a fast-changing society when educational policy is being re-shaped to cope with the knowledge society in a lifelong learning framework.” The challenges presented to teachers emanate from the changing nature of Irish society, the increasing multicultural environment, the increasing diversity in classrooms in terms of learning needs and abilities and the break-down of traditional institutions such as the church. Teachers are also the recipients of continuous reforms and in disadvantaged schools, these reforms flourish. While the OECD (2000) reported that Irish teachers had the highest degree of decision-making regarding curricular issues across several counties, it is uncertain whether this discretion has been maintained in the climate of reform which prevails. The changing role of the teacher in this era of change and reform has not been the focus of attention from policy makers and reformers (Coolahan, 2003) and the challenges which teachers encounter as they fulfil their role are not debated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Teachers' personal and professional identities, their actions and beliefs, and their reactions to change and reform are influenced and shaped by their personal histories. This research, based on the ethnographic research traditions, is grounded in the principles of life history research and seeks to place biography at the centre of the teaching practice and the study of teachers. The life-history approach is used to generate the experiences and responses of eight primary teachers to education policy, change and reform. The qualitative techniques of in-depth interviewing and document analysis were used in this method. The decision to use life-histories as the primary methodology of this dissertation was based on the defining features of life-history research as described by Goodson (1992, 1994, 2002), Sykes (1991), and Woods (1985).

The relevance of this study lies in its efforts to understand how teachers interact with policy and change while maintaining their commitment to teaching. The degree to which teachers feel a sense of ownership of change or possess a personal vision to implement change is crucial to the implementation process. This study seeks to probe teachers' experiences of change in the past and to examine teachers' current interactions with large-scale national reforms. As qualitative research, it examines whether teachers are reluctant or enthusiastic change agents and explores whether government-led policy changes are important in teachers' lives and careers. It attempts to interrogate how teachers react to external reforms and explores how these reforms are integrated into participants' work.

3.1 Theoretical Framework and Perspective

The social constructionist perspective provides the underlying theoretical framework of this research. This perspective stems from the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967) and from Lincoln and Guba (1985). The social constructionist approach recognises the importance of understanding the world through exploring human experience and relies upon the 'participants' views of the situation being studied (Cresswell, 2003). Berger and Luckman (1967) argue that:

However massive it may appear to the individual, [the institutional world] is a humanly produced constructed objectivity...it does not...acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it. (p.60)

The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the subjective experiences and views of the participants (Cresswell, 2003, p.8).

The social constructionist perspective conceptualises identities as being socially constructed as people engage in everyday activities. As a result, identities are relational, constructed in language and affected by the discourse available with society. Identities are viewed as shifting over time and from context to context. Identities are therefore provisional, dynamic and historically and culturally specific rather than fixed. In addition they are multiple, de-centred and changeable rather than singular, centred and stable. Furthermore, social constructionism assumes that cultural organisations and institutions as well as society tend to socialise their members.

One of the assumptions of social constructionism is that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences and these meanings may be varied and

multiple and influenced by cultural, social and historical perspectives of the society in which the individual lives. Social constructionism suggests that meanings arise in conversation and are socially negotiated. New conversations evoke new realities, and the frequency and intensity of the conversations play an important role in the continual construction of reality. Meaning is born of interaction. People actively construct or make meaning of their experience, based on their current assumptions about themselves and the world. These “meanings” shape participants’ behaviour and are not solely cognitive and are used to refer to feelings, perceptions, emotions, moods, thoughts ideas, beliefs, values and morals. Gergen (1999) referred to the process of creating the ‘self’ within relationships. Individuals are relational beings that create constantly changing meanings in interaction with others.

Social constructionism asserts that knowledge is not only shared in interaction, it is created in interaction (Gergen, 1999). Thus following on Rorty’s “pragmatic view of truth” (1979, p.175) knowledge is the property of knowledge communities, that it, of cultures and subcultures, including professional disciplines that use, create and maintain it in ongoing discourses or social conversations. Knowledge is constructed through meanings that are shared between individuals and society.

The social constructionist perspective suggests that human beings are not merely acted upon by social facts or social forces, but rather that people are constantly shaping and creating their own social worlds in and through interaction with others (Gergen, 1999). Therefore, research based on the social constructionist perspective requires the researcher to ask open-ended questions, to understand the individual

within their context or setting and to search for the complexity of views rather than “narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Cresswell, 1998, p.8).

Social constructionism situates the researcher within the research while recognising his/her background, biases and experiences. Consequently, the researcher’s personal profile is outlined in detail in Chapter 1. This research relies on the researcher generating data from participants through in-depth interviews within the context or setting in which the participant lives or works, so that an understanding of the historical and cultural settings of the participants is developed. The researcher makes an interpretation of what is found, an interpretation which is shaped by her own experiences and background and moulded by her relationships with the participants (Cresswell, 2003, p.9). The social constructionist perspective acknowledges that interviews are a collaborative process, and that in the process of interviewing, the participants’ perspectives influence the researcher’s subject position as they actively and constantly create language and understanding (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

The aim of this research therefore is to gather detailed descriptions of several teachers’ lives and develop theory relating to them. This theory will be generated by and ground in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than starting with a theory, the researcher generates or inductively develops a theory from the interpretation of the data. The social constructionist perspective sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other data (Charmaz, 2006, p.130). Section 3.8 elaborates further on the data analysis phase of the research.

3.2 Teachers' personal and professional lives

Teaching is an intensely personal matter. Teaching and learning to teach are activities that are embedded in one's life. As outlined in Chapter 1, teachers' personal and professional identities are closely interlinked. Teachers' personal values, beliefs and biographies permeate their teaching lives. Teachers' professional experiences also shape their sense of efficacy and self-worth. Nias (1989) writes:

The personal and occupational self may be so loosely related that, in their own terms, they 'become' teachers: The persons they perceive themselves to be go to work and the teachers they feel they are come home, often to occupy their sleeping as well as their waking hours...Many teachers, for part or all of their working lives, invest their personal sense of identity in their work. (pp.224-225)

Ball and Goodson (1995) suggest that it is likely that teachers' previous careers and life experiences shape their view of teaching and that "teachers' lives outside school, their latent identities and cultures, have an important impact on their work as teachers" (p.13). Following from the work of Nias (1989) and Ball and Goodson (1985), this research is based on the premise that teachers' professional responses to educational policy, change and reform are shaped by situational, biographical, and historical factors. The research examines how teachers respond to change experiences depending on their identities, age and career stages and contexts of work. It recognises that teachers' professional practices are influenced by the school in which they teach, the quality of interaction which they experience with their colleagues, their emotional and psychological well-being, the stability of their family and personal lives as well as the professional knowledge and experience which they develop in their work (Van den Berg, 2002; Hargreaves, 1999). As

Hargreaves (1999) reminds us “understanding the teacher means understanding the person the teacher is”. He observes:

We are beginning to recognise that, for teachers, what goes on inside the classroom is closely related to what goes on outside it. The quality, range and flexibility of teachers’ classroom work are closely tied up with their professional growth – with the way in which they develop as people and as professionals. Teachers teach in the way they do not just because of the skills they have or have not learned. The ways they teach are also rooted in their backgrounds, their biographies, and so in the kinds of teachers they have become. Their careers – their hopes and dreams, their opportunities and aspirations, or the frustrations of these things – are also important for teachers’ commitment, enthusiasm and morale. So too are relationships with their colleagues either as supportive communities who work together in pursuit of common goals and continuous improvement, or as individuals working in isolation, with the insecurities that sometimes bring. (p.vii)

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.7) contend that “...each individual has his or her own social history and an individual perspective on the world.” The researcher chose the life history methodology as it embraces these important considerations and tessellates with the theoretical framework of social constructionism. Goodson (2001) argues that life history does not categorise teachers’ lives into personal and professional; rather, it demands a holistic view of teachers because as Bullough (1998), cited in Goodson (2001, p.133) notes, “public and private cannot...be separated in teaching...The person comes through when teaching” (pp.20-21).

3.3 Life History – The Methodology Underpinning this Research

Life history methodology provides the researcher with the methods to delve into teachers' biographies and to explore the history which they carry around with them (Giroux, 1981). It facilitates a deeper understanding of a teacher's life and work in terms of the meaning they have for the individual teacher (Butt, Raymond, McCue et al., 1992). Life history assigns significant value to the person's own story and to the interpretations that people place on their own experiences. The vital role of life history research in helping to understand teachers' beliefs, practices, and commitment has been demonstrated in research on professional development and teacher change by Goodson (1992), Huberman (1993) and Sikes et al. (1985).

This research studies teachers' personal and professional lives and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences and views of policy, change and reform. The life history approach is the methodology which facilitates the generation of deep insights into how participants make sense of their experiences of educational change. In giving their life stories, the participants were also involved in the process of making sense of their own experiences and life. In keeping with the social constructionist perspective, through telling their life stories, the participants were provided with opportunities to construct past events and actions and to make sense of personal experiences. Therefore this research provided a site for the social construction of self. The participants' experiences of what they did, felt and thought, their actions and interactions with other people, provides the basis for self-construction, self-awareness and self-reflexivity (Ho, 2005, p.359).

Teachers' life stories are personal narrations and constructions of meaning. As Goodson (1992) reminds us, they develop into life histories when the stories or narratives are understood and contextualised in relation to wider historical, cultural and social contexts. Cole and Knowles (2001) argued that context distinguishes life histories from some of the other related approaches, including autobiography, biography, case history, interpretive biography, life story, narrative, and personal history. They argue that:

Lives are never lived in vacuums. Lives are never lived in complete isolation from social contexts. ... To be human is to experience 'the relational', no matter how it is defined, and at the same time, to be shaped by 'the institutional', the structural expressions of community and society. To be human is to be moulded by context. (p.22)

The contextual factors which emerge in the life stories include many social, economic and cultural factors. They also include the influential roles of other people (teachers, principals, lecturers, parents and other family members). The life stories reveal perspectives on socio-demographic trends, changes in social and education policy, the changing composition of the teacher workforce and the impact of legal reforms on primary education. They illuminate evolving professional ways of working, professional standards and knowledge. The significant factors and themes in the data are selected by the researcher based on the objectives of the research and include the policies, changes and reforms experienced by the participant over an extended period. They also encompass the changing environment in which teachers' work and the impact of these changes on teachers' lives.

The use of the life history approach is particularly appropriate in the context of this research as it provides a method for documenting teachers' experiences over time, placing them in social and cultural contexts and helping to answer questions about how teachers interact with policy. The participants in this research are in the later stages of their teaching careers. They have experience of teaching in primary schools or working in primary education during the last three decades. The selection of experienced teachers allows the researcher scope to probe the factors that developed or restrained their practice and it facilitates participants to consider policy and the impact of reforms on their work and lives. Malm (2004) contends that it is within this domain that we are able to see the individual in relation to the history of his/her own time.

The life history approach enables the researcher to interrogate human agency in the area of policy implementation. It allows the creative responses of the participants in relation to different policy initiatives to be examined and acknowledges the agency of teachers to re-interpret policy. By maintaining a focus on context, life history researchers attempt to balance the emphasis on foregrounding individuals and their agency with the background structures and the associated constraints on agency.

A feature of life-history research, as outlined by Labaree (2006a, p.123), is that it gives voice to the experienced life, particularly for those whose voices may be unheard or deliberately ignored or suppressed. The majority of participants in this research are teachers in schools serving areas of disadvantage or teachers who work with schools in these areas. Their stories and experiences of current reforms in

schools serving students who experience poverty, social and cultural disadvantage and underachievement provide an important dimension to the study.

Writers such as Huberman et al. (1993) and Day (2006) define a series of successive themes in the teachers' career cycle and career stages. This is particularly important as a context for understanding stability and change in classroom practice and resistance and resentment in the face of mandated reform and change. The selection of participants, who are experienced teachers, in the later phases of their career, should facilitate an analysis of whether Irish teachers' career trajectories follow a similar path to those outlined by these researchers.

Work on teachers' lifestyles and careers points to the fact that there are critical incidents in teachers' lives and specifically in their work that may crucially affect perception and practice. Critical incidents are often turning points in people's lives, when people seek new directions, change their jobs or opinions, change their social, personal or material circumstances and may, according to Goodson (2001), be crucial for teachers in the process of becoming a teacher. These critical incidents can be provoked by a number of external and internal factors. External factors may be associated with economic buoyancy, change of national curricula, the provision of new school buildings and national pay agreements. Internal factors may relate to decisions to move from mainstream class teaching to teaching in a more specialised context. Personal factors relate to the individual teacher's personal decisions such as getting married, having children, moving house or their experience of illness, bereavement, separation or other personal trauma. Through this research, the extent

to which teachers identify critical incidents and their impact on teachers' responses to policy and change will be explored.

3.4 Limitations of Life History as a Methodology

In spite of the advantages of life history research and their connection to classroom practice, there are shortcomings in this methodology as a research design and these were considered prior to embarking on this research. These limitations are concerned with power and inaccuracy of the narrated stories.

Life histories document the past and they represent the perception of events as interpreted by the participants at a given point in the present. Life history research also tells people's stories in their own words and, in this way, the researcher and the reader are drawn also into the interpretative process as they make meaning and form judgements of the life stories as they are viewed through their own realities (Labaree, 2006a). Additionally, as the researcher locates the life story in the socio-political and historical backdrop, this provides the researcher considerable "colonising power" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.7). The life-historian offers an interpretation of the life story and constructs a view of the past through the lens of the ever-changing present (Labaree, 2006a). Further, the researcher's identity, values and beliefs become "part of the equation – a built in component that cannot be eliminated as an influence" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 89).

Goodson (1997) warns that, in an effort to give the individual teacher a voice, the researcher or interpreter of the story may flavour the account of events. The social context of the constructor of the story may influence the actual data as much as the

social context of the teller of the story. Life historians through their research seek to make 'better' sense of the world and seek to interpret and represent an aspect of the world which is subjective and lived experience (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This dilemma is overcome by locating the narrated stories in the social and historical contexts and seeking a pattern among the narrated stories. In order to counteract any colonising power over the teachers' narrated stories, documents relevant to education and social policy, teaching and the teaching profession in Ireland were studied in order to provide background, contextual and comparative material. This served to triangulate the findings.

Autobiographical methodologies in educational research have been criticised because of the subjectiveness of the data, the selective recall of the participants and the incompleteness of the stories narrated. Munro (1998) argues that the subjective nature of life histories should be regarded as a strength rather than as a weakness:

The current focus on acknowledging the subjective, multiple and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history methodology. What were previously criticisms of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature, are now its greatest strength. (p.8)

Goodson and Sikes (2001) acknowledge that participants narrate stories that are not exactly consistent with the life lived or experienced. However, the goal of life history research is to get the interviewees to narrate their lives and experiences as accurately as possible. For many teachers this is the first time that they have had an opportunity to reflect on their life and for most of the participants, while they may be experienced narrators of events which occur in their classrooms, they have had little experience of discussing their involvement in changes and reforms and narrating instances of working on new initiatives. While life-histories are the

subjective interpretations of teachers' individual lives, Eisner (1998) reminds us that this does not reduce the import of the story nor the insights it provides:

Each person's history, and hence world, is unlike anyone else's. This means that the way in which we see and respond to a situation, and how we interpret what we see, will bear our own signature. This unique signature is not a liability but a way of providing individual insight into a situation. (Eisner, 1998, p.34)

The intent of biographical data is to amass many people's accounts in order to "develop a wider intertextual and intercontextual mode of analysis" (Goodson, 1992). Although the data begin with the individual, the combined stories of many teachers can help to inform educational practices.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the researcher felt that teachers' life histories provide the most complete and integrated approach to understanding the life of the individual in relation to his/her contemporary world.

3.5 Selection of Participants for the Research

This study is concerned with changes occurring from the 1970s onwards, that is, changes occurring over an extended period of time. Consequently, one generation of teachers who started their teaching careers in the 1970s to early 1980s was chosen to participate in the research. This selection of participants is justified in that it allows the research to focus on teachers with significant experience of teaching in different roles and in different school contexts. It also allows participants to reveal critical incidents in their lives and work over a prolonged period spanning three decades.

Life-histories were generated from eight participants who are practising primary teachers. Sample sizes in life history research are usually very small because

gathering, recording, and interpreting the data is an intense and time-consuming activity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). A heterogeneous group of respondents (primary school teachers) was selected in order to explore commonalities and differences among them. Data from this sampling method highlights cases of uniqueness or reveals shared patterns across the sample group.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) recommend that the participants in the life-history research should be identified through purposive discovery governed by convenience. This method was employed to select the participants for the study. Initially, ten teachers with between twenty seven and thirty five years' teaching experience were identified as potential participants through personal acquaintance, reference, and recommendation. All the teachers were contacted by telephone and they expressed an interest in participating in the study.

The participants are in the later stages of the teaching career and have experienced waves of change in their professional lives and have engaged in a range of initiatives which demanded personal and professional involvement. By combining the individual stories of these participants together with structural and contextual factors and influences, the life histories of a distinct group or generation of teachers are constructed. Field and Malcolm (2005) argue that creating a generational view at times of rapid social change is particularly beneficial as people from different age groups shape their actions and responses differently.

The participants in this research, as well as the researcher, are of the same generation and were born during the same period (mid 1950s to mid 1960s).

Consequently, they share similar backgrounds and experiences of education. The researcher, who worked as a primary teacher for a significant period, has a deep insight into the identity of teachers and has long experience of working in education as an institution in society. As a result, many of the interviews were an actively shared space in which the individual contributions of both the interviewer and the participants were acknowledged (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

3.6 The Participants

The eight teachers who participated in the research phase are fully-qualified permanent teachers, each with a range of teaching qualifications and experiences in different school contexts and within the education system. The participants were mid- to late-career teachers. All participants have significant experience of working in schools in areas serving disadvantaged communities or work with teachers in disadvantaged schools. Seven of the teachers had taught in more than one school during their teaching careers. It emerged during the interviews that seven of the participants had completed postgraduate work and an equal number of teachers held leadership responsibilities in their schools or in the education system. Four of the participants had worked as principals of schools.

The researcher was not aware of the participants' unique profiles prior to the interviews. As half of the participants had been selected on the recommendation of colleagues or fellow doctoral students, it is probable that participants were suggested for their expertise and varied experience within primary education. However, the profile of the eight participants may not be typical of teachers in this age cohort nationally. As data on the characteristics of primary school teachers are not available

nationally, the extent to which this group of teachers differs from other teachers in the same age group cannot be established.

The table on the following page provides an overview of the participating teachers. This table is designed to facilitate the connection of a quoted experience with the relevant name and profile.

3.7 Data Collection

The most common technique for gathering life history data is to interview participants. The goal is to create an in-depth profile of the respondent's life experiences relative to the research problem being investigated (Labaree, 2006a).

A draft semi-structured interview schedule, which outlined prompt questions to stimulate the conversation, was formulated and piloted with two teachers at the early stages of the study. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was further refined and additional focus questions included to ensure that participants' perspectives of change, reform and policy during each phase of their teaching careers were explored. Participants were interviewed once and as far as possible, were asked open-ended questions in order to elicit each participant's interpretation of his or her experience (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 1: Profile of the eight participants

Participant	Profile – summary of details
Hannah N.T., M.A., Diploma in Special Education Undertaking doctoral studies	Hannah is in her mid fifties. She was the eldest child in her family and always aspired to be a teacher. Her teaching experience has been exclusively in disadvantaged schools. She has completed postgraduate work in equality studies and special educational needs. Her work roles have included mainstream classroom teacher, special educational needs teacher, and home-school community liaison teacher. Hannah is currently working as a principal. She is in a permanent relationship and does not have children.
Sarah B.Ed., M.A. Grad. Diploma in resource teaching Diploma in learning support	Sarah is in her late forties. She is the eldest child in her family and always aspired to be a teacher. She has taught in four schools – two disadvantaged schools and two schools catering for more advantaged pupils. Her roles in primary school include mainstream class teacher, resource teacher for special educational needs, learning-support teacher, special class teacher and principal. Sarah is a curriculum advisor who works with schools to implement change and reform. She has completed post-graduate work in the Arts. Sarah has one adult child.
Noel N.T., B.Ed. Diploma in learning support	Noel is in his mid-fifties. His choice to become a teacher was limited by the career opportunities available in the 1960s. He has taught in two schools but has been a member of the staff of his school for over 30 years. He has completed postgraduate work in education. His roles in school include mainstream class teacher, learning support teacher and assistant principal. Noel is in a permanent relationship with three adult children.
Joe B.A., Postgrad Dip. in Primary Education, M.Ed.	Joe is in his mid-fifties. He decided to become a teacher after completing an Arts degree. He has taught in three disadvantaged schools and is now principal of a large urban school. Joe has completed postgraduate work in educational management. Joe is a member of two national networks of principals. He is in a permanent relationship with two adult children.
Peg N.T.	Peg is in her mid-fifties. Peg's mother was a teacher and she comes from a strong teaching tradition. She has taught in three schools as a permanent teacher and has experienced a range of other schools as a substitute teacher during a break in her career. She has held various positions in her school as mainstream class teacher, resource teacher, assistant principal and leader of an initiative in numeracy. Peg is in a permanent relationship and has three children.
Alice N.T., M.A., Diploma in Special Education	Alice is in her mid-fifties. She never wanted to become a primary school teacher but an influential principal insisted that she apply for college and complete her training. She moved schools three years ago and is now a literacy co-ordinator in a disadvantaged area. Alice has completed postgraduate work in equality studies and in special educational needs. She has worked as a mainstream class teacher, a special needs teacher, a resource teacher for Travellers and learning support teacher. She is in a permanent relationship with two adult children.
Máire N.T., M.Ed. Diploma in learning support	Máire is in her mid-fifties. She comes from a teaching background and wanted to become a teacher from an early age. She has worked in the same school since her graduation from college as a mainstream class teacher, a learning support teacher, a literacy co-ordinator. She has completed postgraduate studies in education. She is in a permanent relationship with three adult children. Her husband works in the field of education.
Antoinette N.T., Diploma in Special Education	Antoinette is in her early fifties. She loved school as a child. Her experiences of college were poor and Antoinette felt she established her identity as a teacher when she started teaching. She has worked in four schools, and her roles included mainstream class teachers, special educational needs class teacher, and learning support teacher. Antoinette is now principal of a disadvantaged school. Antoinette is in a permanent relationship and has two children. Her husband is also a teacher.

Interviews were approximately one to two hours in duration and were conducted in a location of the participant's choice. The interviews were largely conversational in style with the participants controlling the direction of the interview through the key moments they narrated in their life stories. Life-history interviews rely on unstructured and open-ended forms of inquiry which are generally defined as guided conversations. While a semi-structured interview protocol was prepared, a small number of questions were used to prompt discussion or focus the discussion at intervals during the interview. The format and order of questions, delivery, pace, detail and variance in the topics discussed were structured by the nature of the interaction between the researcher and each participant, thereby generating very different interviews.

The interviews began with introductions and the researcher explained the rationale for the research and the methodology involved. The researcher then asked the participants a short series of factual questions which were designed to put the participants at ease and to establish communication and rapport. Participants were asked about early childhood years, family life experience, experiences of primary and secondary school, reasons for choosing teaching as a career, experiences of college, formative teaching experiences and teaching positions held in schools. Interviews also focused on experiences of change within career, role changes in teaching and participants' views of policy developments that had a significant impact on their lives and careers. Seven of the participants agreed to have their interviews audio-taped. One interview was recorded in writing at the participant's request. All the participants are referred to by pseudonyms in this dissertation.

The interviews with the eight participants differed. The participants' personal experiences and stories guided the interviews and as participants revealed personal experiences or offered specific insights, unexpected topics were discussed or more in-depth questions were asked to clarify the participants' views and perspectives. Many interviewees noted that the interviews demanded a level of introspection and discussion of experiences of events which was rare for them in their daily lives. Seven of the interviews yielded rich, thick data about the various themes outlined above. Participants recounted stories from their early childhood, their experiences of school and college with great clarity and sometimes with humour. Primary school teachers have good oral communication skills and the transcripts of the interviews convey fluidity and coherence in the teachers' narratives.

The eight participant's interview was much shorter than the other interviews conducted. During the initial phases of the interview, the participant discussed at length details about childhood, family life, school experiences, college life and early teaching experiences. The interview focused on the broad strokes of the participant's teaching career and did not generate insights into practice, the climate of the school or the factors that sustained the motivation to teach. During the analysis and presentation of the findings of the life histories, the researcher was aware of her obligation to reflect the content of each interview in order to contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives of the research. Where possible, quotations from each interview are included in the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5. However, the researcher recognises that there is a lack of reference to the eight participant in some sections. This is not a reflection of bias on behalf of the researcher to the participant,

the content of the interview or to the views expressed by this participant. Rather it reflects an absence of data that could be included in the appropriate sections.

3.8 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in handwritten format and then transcribed electronically. Electronic files were saved so that each participant's identity remained confidential but coded so that the participant's comments could be identified by the researcher. One of the central obligations that field researchers have is to assure the confidentiality and guarantee the privacy of participants engaging in life-history studies so that the real names of participants or places are not used in the research but are substituted by pseudonyms (Lofland, Snow, Anderson et al., 2006, p.51).

The participants declined an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews. The timing of the interviews during the final term of the school year may have contributed to participants' reluctance to read their interviews. However, further contact (by telephone) was made with two participants who were willing to clarify their responses and elucidate further issues.

The crucial stage in life-history research concerns the transformation of life-stories into life-histories (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Qualitative data are inherently rich and full of possibilities, thus allowing several stories to be constructed from the data. The process of gathering and analysing evidence was undertaken simultaneously, as recommended by Boyzatis (1998).

The data analysis was conducted in two phases and was informed by the grounded theory approach which tessellated with the social constructionist framework. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed this approach to develop theory from systematically gathered data. In the first phase of data analysis, the data were coded using open coding. This method relies on the researcher's ability to analyse the interviews and to generate codes. The process began with the researcher re-reading the interviews to identify the core aspects of the participants' life stories. This was followed by line-by-line coding of the data to identify substantive codes emerging within the data. The open coding was undertaken at a vertical level (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and the individual participant was taken as the unit of analysis. The data were coded into meaningful analytical units (Cresswell, 1998) using the qualitative analysis software programme MAXQDA. This software allows data to be identified, retrieved, isolated, grouped and regrouped for analysis.

The starting point for the second phase in the analysis was the horizontal or comparative analysis. In this phase common patterns and processes that recurred across the different cases were interrogated. Categories and code names were changed and amended as the transcripts of interviews were read and re-read and examined. In subsequent rounds of coding, other categories emerged and some codes were merged for ease of analysis. MAXQDA provides for the extrapolation of all comments relating to identified themes, individual words and codes. Labaree (2006a) argues that this inductive approach to coding data is particularly suited to life history research.

During her life history interview, Hannah recounted her early experiences of school and this description was coded in different ways:

I had the pleasure and privilege of being taught by a number of very good teachers and by a number of awful, vicious and sadistic teachers too. Unfortunately some of them were religious. School is tempered with that horrible memory of fear. It's to do with the time I lived in and the time I went to school. But hard, I remember it being hard. We were liberally beaten for failure at lessons. But I do remember being afraid and having teachers who were quite horrible, who didn't have any relationships with kids. I remember other teachers who were marvellous. I had a teacher in Fifth and Sixth Class and she was just passionate about History, a good teacher with a warm relationship with us. My memories of primary school are not as happy as they should be, given the fact that I wasn't really that bad at school, that I came from a relatively stable home and that my parents were interested – I had all the supports that were there.

Hannah discusses influential teachers who inspired her to become a teacher and who instilled in her a love for learning. These were coded 'influential teachers', 'love of learning'. She also refers to the use of corporal punishment and this was coded 'negative experience – harsh regime'. Other codes assigned to this extract include 'motivation to teach', 'value for education', 'supports from home'. When this data were read in subsequent rounds of coding, other codes emerged that resonated with themes found in other participants' interviews. These were 'positive school atmosphere' and 'personal commitment to teaching'. Each of the audiotapes of the interviews were read and re-read for intonation, colour and any form of expression that would enhance the researcher in her analysis and interpretation of data.

The codes identified reflect the researcher's understanding of what was described in the experiences and issues discussed by the participants. The emergent patterns or trends were first identified separately for each participant. As the themes emerged, the research literature relevant to the key themes was consulted. A small number of significant and recurring themes were identified through a systematic analysis of the

interview data. The final analytical step was to arrange the codes into broad groupings or themes. Fourteen themes were identified. The identification of these conceptual categories helped to determine the similarities, differences, patterns and structures of phenomena that were raised by the participants. Examples of the themes and the codes generated in the overall data are provided in Appendix C.

3.9 Ethical Issues

Life history interviews elicit highly personal information and researchers have a responsibility to protect the privacy of participants in the research and to inform respondents of their rights. When teachers were invited to participate in the study, a brief synopsis of the framework of the research including the broad aims, the principles of the life history method including the central role of the teacher in theory and practice and the possible outcomes for education were discussed and explained to each participant. A statement of guarantees such as the protection of privacy and the teachers' right to review, correct or amend the transcript of the interview was provided. Participants were provided with the option of selecting where and when the interviews and conversations took place. The interviewees were provided with an option to withdraw from the research at any time and were advised that they need not answer questions or divulge any personal information which they were reluctant to discuss. Each of the participants signed an informed consent form outlining their willingness to participate in the research (Appendix B). Six participants were interviewed in their school, one participant selected a neutral venue and one participant was interviewed in her home.

The relationship between the researcher and the teacher is crucial to the life history method. At the start of the interviews it was important that the researcher assured teachers that she had relinquished her professional role as a schools' inspector and that during the interviews and conversations that judgements or evaluations of teachers were not made. This commitment was also reflected in the informed consent form. Life-history research requires that the roles and positions of the researcher and the participants are transcended and dissolved so that the teachers feel sufficiently free and relaxed to be 'themselves' in an informal interaction (Woods, 1985, p.14).

Respecting participants' privacy is an important component of building trust and rapport and facilitates the success of life-history interviews. It is particularly important to ensure participants' privacy and anonymity in presenting the findings. As a result, the researcher endeavoured to portray the participants as accurately as possible in the data analysis chapters. Personal information that might reveal the participants' identities or cause them any unease was excluded from this work. Details of the location of schools and any other identifiers which could link the participants with this research were also omitted.

3.10 Presenting the Data

The findings of the eight life histories are presented in two chapters and analysed as features of three broad historical periods. Within these eras the data are examined thematically and supported by narrative excerpts drawn from the various interviews. Charmaz (2006) recommends that researchers need to immerse themselves in the data, to keep the participants' voice and meaning present in the theoretical outcome and to embed the narrative of the participants in the final written research.

The data are presented in Chapters 4 and 5 under broad conceptual headings or key themes which emerged from the data and reflect the influence of policy initiatives on the teachers' lives. In line with constructivist grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the researcher constructed themes as an outcome of her interpretation of the participants' stories. The data point to the impact of broad social movements (emphasis on accountability, inclusion and diversity) on the experiences of the participants. The themes are situated within the historical and social contexts and linked to the broad developments in education reform. The goal of this research is to "bring understanding to complex social phenomena that cannot be reduced to precise, statistical relationships and written in a style that uses literary sensibilities to take readers inside the issues and settings under investigation" (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p.224).

The participants' experiences and stories are presented in the analysis chapters to demonstrate the role of the participants in the construction of the theories presented and to ensure that there is a sense of their "presence" in the final text. Charmaz and

Mitchell (1996) advise that the researcher's voice need not " transcend experience but re-envisage it...bring[ing] fragments of fieldwork time, context and mood together in a colloquy of the author's several selves—reflecting, witnessing, wondering, accepting - all at once" (p.299).

The emerging policy motifs were examined alongside a vast array of documents on social, cultural and political changes which have occurred in Irish society. In particular, an analysis of educational change and policy development 1966-2006 and perspectives of Irish educationists on policy development are included in the data analysis chapters.

3.11 Trustworthiness of the Research

Validity is important in life history research. Labaree (2006a) argues that readers of life history research must have confidence that the researcher has represented and described the individual participant's construction of reality. He argues that the concept of validity relates to the confidence that the methodology is investigating what it is supposed to investigate and notes that if the researcher is searching for the subjective story, then the life history approach becomes the most valid method.

In life history research, validity refers to the perception that findings are consistent with the subjective reality of the participants and that the researcher has presented their stories of events and people. Validity checks, including an audit trail and peer review, contribute to the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Audit Trail

The original interview transcripts and field notes from the in-depth interviews generated in the research have been maintained in a secure location. Electronic files of the interviews were also maintained. A log of how the data were coded was maintained and this provides an audit trail of the codes and themes used to describe participants' experiences. The availability of this documentation and original data contributes to the transparency of the research process.

Peer Review

The trustworthiness of qualitative data can be enhanced by working with 'peer debriefers' who review the audit trail periodically and who raise questions about bias, the positionality of the researcher within the text and who will read and critically examine all of the data from the study. The peer debriefer role for this research was undertaken by the thesis supervisor.

3.12 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis is based on life-history research. A sample of ten teachers was recruited through personal acquaintance, reference, and recommendation. A semi-structured interview protocol was devised and piloted initially with two teachers. The interview schedule was reviewed after the piloting. Eight interviews were conducted with teachers who are in the later stages of their careers. The interviews were open-ended discussions, each unique to the interaction between the researcher and the participant. The interview protocol was used as a scaffold and did not limit the discussions held. The data were transcribed electronically and coded using a qualitative software tool, MAXQDA. The codes emerged and were refined

during several reviews of the data. The literature was consulted as the data coding and analysis were undertaken.

Finally, the experiences of the participants emerged in distinct but interrelated historical periods. Chapter 4 deals with the first period which spanned from the mid-1970s to the mid 1980s when teachers experienced a phase of stability and continuity. This chapter reveals data about the participants' personal lives which includes their early childhood, their adolescent and early adult phases. It also draws on their early professional experiences as newly qualified teachers. In Chapter 5, the participants' experiences of policy, change and reform from the mid 1980s to 2008 are outlined. The participants sought role diversification and challenges in their teaching. They pursued a range of professional development courses and actively sought engagement with initiatives that brought about change and reform. The chapter locates teachers' experiences of teaching within a period of unprecedented national reform and change. Chapter 5 focuses on the professional experiences of teachers. Insights into the current personal lives of some of the participants are provided.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING IN THE 1970s AND 1980s – DECADES OF STABILITY AND CONTINUITY

The first years as a beginning teacher are difficult and challenging. The participants' life stories provide data about their early careers and their personal experiences provide a lens through which primary education can be interrogated during the 1970s and 1980s. The teachers' original motivations for entering teaching, their experiences of college and of their initial years in the classroom when their identities as teachers were formed, are outlined in this chapter. Quotations from teachers' life-histories are presented to provide a portrait of the internal and external factors impacting on teachers' lives.

4.1 Rationale for Entering Teaching

There is remarkable similarity in the participants' motivations and decisions to enter teaching as a career. Many of the participants came from backgrounds where education was highly valued in the home. The parents of most of the participants had received a minimal education and had left formal education at the end of primary school. While the majority of primary teachers during the 1970s and 1980s were drawn from rural, farming backgrounds (Morgan & Dunn, 1981; Pritchard, 1983), only one of the participants in this research came from a farming family. The majority of the participants are from lower-working class backgrounds.

For most participants, the values of hard work, respect for school and church permeated their family lives. For Joe's family education was a 'core thing' and each child in the family was put 'under equal pressure to achieve'. Sarah remembers that

her mother, like most of the participants' parents, was highly motivated and interested in education.

Everyday in school you had to do your best, you had to do your spellings and you had to have good handwriting. There was pressure on me from the beginning to learn, to know and to be able to do it. My mother saw school as an opportunity that you got once – it was something you didn't have to pay for.

Two of the participants came from backgrounds where their parents insisted on their attendance at school but were not 'pushy or 'terribly ambitious'. However, for Antoinette school life was a very important dimension of her early experiences and she recalls:

My own school life was very important to me. There was great excitement and anticipation every year about returning to school. I loved the smell of new copies and new books.

Many of the participants received scholarships and this provided access to second level education. For other participants, the introduction of Free Education in 1966 provided opportunities which their parents and siblings had not been able to access.

Antoinette explains:

I had one sister and we didn't have enough money – my sister was seven years older than me and she left school early and got a job. My sister did some subjects at night but she always had a chip on her shoulder about not getting the same chances as I did. Free education meant that I could go to secondary school but she didn't and she resented it. Even when I got this job (position as principal teacher), even in my own family, there wasn't much excitement.

During the 1970s and the 1980s the decision to choose a career as a primary teacher was generally taken early in life, at the completion of second-level education. The requirements of teacher education at that period included competency in needlework, the successful completion of a general interview, a singing and music test and an interview in spoken Irish. In the 1970s the sewing examinations were conducted prior to the Leaving Certificate, usually around Easter. The other

interviews were generally conducted when the results of the Leaving Certificate were made available. The interviews were discontinued in 1987.

Most student teacher started their college life at 17 years and completed the qualification of National Teacher (N.T.) at 19 years. Teacher-training certificates were replaced by a Bachelor of Education degree validated by a university in 1975 and this qualification attracted the same financial 'degree allowance' that second-level teachers received. Teachers completing a degree course of Bachelor of Education usually started teaching at 20 years of age. The first alternate entry route into primary teaching was provided in 1978 when the Minister for Education, Mr. John Wilson T.D., initiated a graduate entry teacher education programme. The students who completed this graduate course were referred to as the 'Wilson Grads'.

Four of the participants harboured ambitions to become teachers as children and these participants made decisive choices to become teachers. Both Hannah and Sarah recall wanting to teach but also they were influenced positively by their experiences at second-level and they both aspired to become secondary school teachers. Both participants wanted to pursue academic courses in their selected subjects and wanted to do a Bachelor of Arts degree in a university. Both Hannah and Sarah cultivated a deep love for learning. However, financial constraints limited their choices and both women chose the teacher education programme. Sarah recalls:

The reason I went to Training College was very simple - the cost of the course. In first year, the fees were £300. It was cheap and it was all in – your food and your accommodation. We didn't qualify for a grant. Training College and it was accessible, both financially and geographically. My first choice, if I had a choice, was to do a B.A. but that wasn't a financial option.

Hannah's ambitions to become a second-level teacher were stymied by financial considerations and when her mother developed a serious illness, her options became more limited. At the age of seventeen Hannah began her studies in college:

I chose the Training College for financial reasons. I got a scheme whereby you could borrow the cost of your tuition and get it taken out of your wages as a teacher. I was the eldest in the family and my father was a low-paid worker. My mother unfortunately had got cancer at that stage so I think financially it wasn't an option for me to go off and do a B.A. and it was much easier to do a two-year course in Training College. I went into Training College reluctantly. I would have preferred to have done it the other way around.

Most of the participants had been positively influenced by teachers at primary or at post-primary level who exuded a love of learning, possessed deep knowledge and who inspired their students through their intellectual facilities. These teachers were dedicated to imparting wisdom and fostering the life of the mind. Their motivation to become a teacher was to continue with this intellectual endeavour and they wished to teach an academic curriculum in schools.

Peg and Máire came from middle-class backgrounds. Their motivation to become teachers stemmed from the positive experiences they had of interacting with young children during their childhood. They also experienced teachers within their close family networks and both admired their lifestyles and the status accorded to them by their occupation. Peg's family has a strong tradition of teachers and Peg found her career choices to be limited and in some extent, pre-determined by her family interests:

The only time I can remember really wanting to do teaching was directly after the interview for the Training College and doing the sewing exam. After that I really decided I wanted to do it. What did you do then? You did the bank, teaching or the civil service. Well, my two older sisters were teaching and my mother was teaching.

For some participants, the decision to become a teacher is best described as a negative decision or a series of non decisions (Ball & Goodson, 1985, p.21) or a 'forced decision', as it was one of the few alternative professions available to those from a rural background. For Noel, the limited range of career opportunities which was available during the 1970s, contributed to his decision to become a teacher. Noel explains:

When it comes down to it, the options weren't huge – you had the Guards, the ESB and teaching. I was bright and I was good at school. The fact that a lot of my relatives were teachers had a lot to do with it. I thought 'This is something I can do'

Alice grew up in an urban area and went to a school that was recognised as serving a disadvantaged community. Her parents supported Alice's decision to leave secondary school after the junior cycle (Intermediate) to embark on a secretarial course. However, the principal of her school visited the family home and convinced Alice to return to school to complete the Leaving Certificate. She provided shorthand and typing lessons to Alice and six other girls whom she influenced to return to full time education. This head nun played a significant role in Alice's career choice. She explains:

The head nun said to my parents 'That girl could be a teacher and leave her in school for another two years'. They were surprised she said I could be a teacher. I didn't want to be a teacher at the time and it hadn't occurred to anybody else. Even when it came to the Leaving Cert, the head nun got the application form for Training College. I wouldn't send it. I told her it was a waste of money and it cost £5 to apply and I wasn't going to waste my parents' money. She said that she would pay it. I didn't get a place immediately – I got a late place. Everyone who had applied to Training College had to call up to the convent. She rang the College and found out I had a place and accepted it on my behalf. She came in and told me 'Right you're going'.

4.2 Experiences of Teacher-Education Courses

The participants attended the main colleges of education during the 1970s and 1980s: St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and Carysfort, Dublin. As college students, these participants would have been part of the educational elite in Ireland at this time as only 4.9% of students were studying at third-level at this time (Pritchard, 1983).

The participants' experiences of college are diverse. Both Alice and Hannah 'loved' college. They established an active social life, made a large circle of friends and became involved in games, societies and student politics. For many of the participants, such as Sarah, college life was very 'austere', very similar to her impression of what boarding school was like:

Having gone to a co-educational school I felt that College was like taking five steps back in that it was very, very regimented, very strict regulations in terms of how you lined up for your food, how you walked up the stairs and in relation to your general demeanour. You were assigned an identification number and that was very alienating.

However, for Joe, his experience of college life was very different. Having completed a Bachelor of Arts in a university, he found some aspects of college life constraining, but he enjoyed many aspects of the course. He comments:

I enjoyed the grad dip. It was a shock to the system in some ways – in university you could come and go as you pleased. In Training College it was far more regimented. Again I enjoyed the PE, the Drama and the philosophy. A lot of it would have linked in with my own interests and the subjects I had studied and I felt prepared for it.

The social background of some of the participants was an impediment to their participation in college life. Sarah remembers that students, who came from a

teaching background, “had a royal welcome” from the college staff and Alice, who grew up in a disadvantaged inner city area, felt that the other students in college ‘seemed to come from posh schools’. She recalled that at interview for Training College, she was asked about whether there was much vandalism in her local area. She notes “There was a bit of snobbery attached to the whole process”.

Sarah and Hannah found enjoyment in aspects of the course. Hannah found intellectual stimulation in the theoretical foundations of education, particularly in psychology and sociology.

I liked psychology and I thought that was a good stretch of the imagination and psychology made sense. It trained you to understand how children learn. I loved sociology as well. We had an inspirational lecturer. We had lectures on Saturday morning. Sociology made a lot of sense when you start analysing people’s positions. I liked those two aspects.

Sarah on the other hand, found that her chosen academic subject provided an intellectual challenge and the study of English was the highlight of the undergraduate course for her:

I liked the academic side, the lectures particularly in English. I loved the poetry and the writers we were introduced to. The lecturer we had stretched your mind and I loved studying English. I also enjoyed the methodologies such as English and Music.

For other participants such as Noel and Peg, college life was a very negative experience. Noel attributes his lack of engagement to difficulties in his early childhood. Both participants articulated remorse that they were not mature enough to enjoy or engage in college life and both felt they had lost an important opportunity in self-development and identity formation:

I wasted it completely. I wasted it insofar as I did nothing. I absolutely literally sat around the place. I didn't study. I didn't take drugs. I didn't take part in anything. There was a whole pile of stuff that I should have done and that I didn't do. There was stuff that I shouldn't have done and I still didn't do it. No, my attitude at the time was wrong. It was completely wrong. I wasn't amenable to learning or being guided. I lacked direction to be honest. (Noel)

I can remember when my parents dropped me at college I was really devastated. I didn't know what to do or where to turn. I was in the hostel which was on the campus. I went walking along the corridor and I met a girl and I started talking to her and we became friends for our two years. I never made any attempt after that to mix with people or get involved in college life. It was where I went from Monday to Friday. I used to buy a packet of Royal Scot and a Coke and when I'd arrive back at the hostel on a Sunday night I'd sit up in bed and eat the sweets. I remember the nun putting her head round the door and telling me to turn down the music. And I just didn't want to be there. I was unhappy. When I look at how people enjoy their College days now I'm sorry I missed that. (Peg)

Many of the participants have clear memories of struggling with the academic requirements of the course, of experiencing difficulties in passing exams and of being unprepared for the rigours of college life. Some had been diligent students in second-level and they found the college courses more demanding.

I was out of my depth. I had been number 1 in my own school and I had been to a small school and when I went to college I was completely lost. (Antoinette)

I came from a small pond and I would have always done well because I worked hard. But now I felt myself under pressure. My Irish was very poor and I was worried about it. In fact I just got through by the skin of my teeth. (Peg)

I'd say I struggled a bit because the learning had been very regimented in secondary school. All of a sudden you were on your own and when people told me 'I'm doing nothing' I believed them. It took a while before I copped on to that. In English I was reading the actual books but I didn't understand that I was supposed to read the reference books as well. So I scraped through. (Alice)

Joe, on the other hand, found that he completed the graduate programme without difficulty or effort. He remarks:

I was one of the original Wilson Graduates in 1977. I did a primary degree first and I actually don't regret it. I thoroughly enjoyed my time doing the primary degree. The grad year in Training College was like heaven to us. We were used to being in college and doing everything for yourself. When you went into Training College everyone did everything for you. You got your meals and everything. For us it was a doddle and it was much easier than we had been through.

Participants' experiences of teaching practice were generally positive, and provided them with an opportunity to 'learn the craft of teaching'. For Sarah, inspired by her teaching practice supervisor, found that the experience of teaching practice was 'magical':

I had a wonderful supervisor and I was in a disadvantaged school. I remember saying to the children "I want you to close your eyes" and when I looked down the supervisor had his eyes covered. I discovered that there was magic in teaching and that you could bring magic and wonder to your teaching. He gave me that sense that I could bring enjoyment to the children and that was great. There was no going back after that. (Sarah)

The experience of teaching practice and college life was negative for a small number of participants who found that the course content and emphasis on theory were irrelevant to them. They found that the course did not align with their personal view of teaching or their previous experiences in primary school. Antoinette illustrates this sense of disconnection during her teaching practice assignments when she comments:

I didn't learn anything from teaching practice or from the teachers I did teaching practice in their classrooms. I was too afraid of them. I did a very good home teaching practice in the school where I had gone to school and I learned more from them than from all the lectures I had in college. I think I was very like the teacher I had in fifth and sixth class. (Antoinette)

4.3 Early Experiences of Teaching

The participants commenced their teaching careers after graduation. Some recalled that they got their first teaching positions through personal contacts, or through the principals of their primary schools.

I had an aunt who had a shop near the school and my aunt mentioned it to the nun that I was finished college. I went up to talk to the nun and I got the job. (Antoinette)

My first job was back into the Christian Brothers, my old alma mater. That was the time when there wasn't much credence put on interviews or that. What actually happened was that a Christian Brother sent for me one weekend when I was at home and he said he had two jobs – one for me and another fellow who was in Training College - that's how I got my job. (Joe)

Beginning teaching was a difficulty but fulfilling experience for these teachers. While many of the participants have positive memories of these early and formative years in the classrooms, they also recall the demands of beginning teaching. As beginning teachers, many of the participants experienced a 'praxis shock' when they were confronted with the realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher, particularly when their idealistic views about teaching were being challenged by large class sizes (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2004). Sarah remembered the challenges of those first months in the classroom:

I remember coming out of college thinking I was a wonderful technician and I suppose I was. You have disjointed bits of knowledge. I was good at making flashcards and charts and teaching rhymes and songs but I didn't see the big picture. I didn't know about getting pupils to line up or of looking after their health and safety issues. I suppose you learn that from the principal. Those kinds of things were huge. It was the logistics of working out a day, I was focused on the nuts and bolts of teaching, but I didn't have the big picture.

For Noel, the establishment of his identity as a teacher was a slow process and he attributes this delay to his lack of maturity. When Noel got married, he acquired a

more positive orientation to his role as 'teacher' and found satisfaction in the challenges of teaching. He acknowledges that he discovered, for the first time, a sense of mission and true purpose in his teaching career.

At that stage of my life until I was about 28, my head was completely all over the place. I didn't know what I wanted. I didn't really value the experience (his first two years in a suburban, developing school), I was still in the 'up in the air' stage. I don't think I did anything for them and I don't think they did anything for me.

Teaching in primary school was physically demanding. Participants describe their experiences of managing large classes, coming home from school feeling exhausted, and going to bed until evening time:

I had big classes and I got the class that no-one else wanted to teach. I had forty three of them and they were wild. Then you had your Diploma. I remember it was tough and I was tired when I went home. I used to go straight home from school and basically fall asleep. My mother used to bring me up my dinner on a plate when I used to wake up.

When Joe started teaching, corporal punishment was permissible in schools and was part of the culture of the school where he taught:

The school was quite authoritarian. That was the law of the land – that's the way it was. I mean corporal punishment was corporal punishment at that time. I can still remember the leathers vividly. We had corporal punishment for the first two years and it was part of the culture of the school and it was part of teaching.

However, while strict discipline was maintained in the school, the atmosphere among the staff members was positive and warm. Joe remembers:

I was three years in that school. They were great years. There were twelve of us on staff and they were a real disparate group and when I look back now it was a real social school. In the second or third year I was there I would have been getting married. There was a great social life. There was great camaraderie there.

Hannah got a teaching position in a convent school in a disadvantaged area. She spent two years in the school. Once her Diploma [accreditation as a fully recognised

teacher] had been achieved, Hannah decided to leave teaching and to travel with a college friend for a period. Hannah recalls that this would have been considered an unusual decision at this time, as career breaks had not been introduced for the teaching profession. Hannah returned to Ireland to continue her teaching career when her mother was terminally ill. After a short period she found another teaching post in a convent school in a disadvantaged area. Her father became ill and died during this period. Teaching provided an anchor for Hannah during this period of loss. She describes it as:

Looking back on it now – I can't remember those years very clearly. It was a strange time. I was lucky. I could throw myself into work. I liked teaching. Yes, I loved it. Hard work when you're doing your Diploma and I had a repeat to do in Irish as well (*examination from College*). But I liked it and I liked the school. I liked the kids and I was very sporty so I used to stay back and play basketball with the kids.

4.4 Resources

Schools in the 1970s and 1980s were poorly equipped and resources for teaching and learning were scarce. Teachers invested a lot of personal time collecting and making resources from recyclable materials, creating their own teaching aids and making workcards and activities for pupils. Peg recalls that as a newly appointed teacher, she travelled by bus to her country school:

I had gathered up all these spools, conkers and I had a big bag of them on the bus. The bus stopped suddenly and everything went all over the floor. I was on the floor of the bus picking up all the bits I had collected. I was all of 19 years. It was an extra class and I was teaching in an old community centre. I was very happy.

Alice moved to a suburban school after four years in a city centre disadvantaged school. She experienced professional isolation and found that her colleagues were not sharing resources or teaching experiences. As a result, Alice guarded closely her own resources, and she experienced a sense of isolation that was perpetuated by the

school community where she worked. She contrasts the paucity of resources available in a middle class school with the well-resourced convent school she had initially taught in which was located in a disadvantaged area:

I went into a prefab with nothing in it – just tables and chairs and someone gave me a vegetable rack for some books. That was the difference. The convent school was very well-equipped. There were paints, paper, paintbrushes and scissors. There were all old but there was lots of everything. I went into this middle-class school and there was nothing. Everything I collected myself was mine. What you bought you kept and you learned that if you share it you mightn't get it back, so don't share it.

In some schools, the participants refer to the isolation of teaching and the fact that 'they were on their own', that teachers hoarded their resources and there was little sharing.

4.5 Development of Craft Knowledge

Most participants found that their practical experience and grounded knowledge of teaching developed and expanded during their early years in the classroom. Their interviews illustrate that they developed a greater knowledge and understanding of their pupils and they sought different ways of working with pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Many of the participants recalled meeting individual pupils later in life who expressed gratitude for the care and attention that they had received. Antoinette explains:

When I moved to this very disadvantaged school all the teachers were young and motivated. You were there to work – you had to because the parents weren't motivated. I always remember meeting a former pupil Gary some years after I had left the school. He asked me whether I was still teaching and when I answered 'yes' he said – "How could you still teach after what I put you through?". Those children were very neglected – there were beatings, brutality, neglect and harshness in their homes.

For many of the participants working in middle-class schools, their teaching concentrated on the core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Irish. Textbooks dominated their teaching methodologies. As Noel reflects:

I would have been very concerned with the 3Rs and I would have been looking at the Maths and Language all the time. It was absolutely important that those were right, that everyone could read and spell. The other things were nice and interesting and I would do them if I had time. If I couldn't, the attitude was 'what the hell'.

During the 1970s and 1980s teachers were responsible for the implementation of a 'new curriculum' which had been centrally devised by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science. During their pre-service education, the participants had focused on the methods and content of the curriculum and implemented these approaches during their teaching practices. However, as Alice observes she implemented 'group teaching' during her Diploma year only. When the participants started teaching they introduced these new curricular emphases into schools. Joe remembers vividly that the 'older teachers' very much welcomed the appointment of younger teachers as they brought new ideas to the school such as teaching art and placing a greater emphasis on social skills. However, traditional teaching methods dominated the schools where these practitioners started their teaching careers. There was no whole-school planning or discussion in the staffrooms concerning implementing the new curriculum, adapting methodologies or co-ordinating approaches within the school. As Peg notes "How we taught was very much follow the book. So once you had the book you were prepared".

Antoinette remembers experiencing success and deriving great satisfaction from teaching during these early years. She remembers modelling her teaching practice on

an influential teacher who taught her in primary school. Her comments illustrate how she assumed more traditional methods in her work:

I think I was like my primary school teacher. I was never into show and I was very systematic. I always revised. I was more of a practical teacher and I was very methodical. I was a good teacher and I enjoyed teaching.

While participants became highly skilled classroom managers, their accounts of teaching in this period do not refer to the growth in their professional knowledge of pedagogy or their developing methodologies.

It is interesting to note that none of the participants refer to the autonomy of primary teachers over the curriculum and the content of the programmes which they could devise for their students. In fact, the participants in accordance with the traditional nature of their schools, adhered to textbooks for core subject areas such as English, Mathematics and Irish, and taught a narrow curriculum which focused on core skills. They exercised little professional discretion over their classroom work.

4.6 Professional Development

During this period (1970 - 1985), most of the participants were unable to recollect attending professional development courses. Antoinette notes that teachers “were always doing self-development courses” during these early days such as philosophy, pottery and art. These course were provided in Education Centres⁴ but were popular because they provided a social outlet for teachers. The benefits of inservice education and its contribution to classroom practice were not prioritised. Access to these courses depended on the geographical location of the teacher and the size of

⁴ Teachers’ Centres were first established in 1972. Formal statutory recognition was granted to centres in the Education Act 1998 and centres are now referred to as Education Support Centres. Retrieved from www.ateci.ie on 2 October 2008.

the Centre. Sarah recalls that a Teachers' Centre was located in the town where she taught, but it was part-time and access was limited:

I remember one night searching it out and it was closed. Because it was a relatively small town, in those days, we certainly didn't have an active Teachers' Centre.

For many participants, their teaching expertise was consolidated during this period. Teachers planned for their work individually. Three participants commented that working as a team, as a staff or collaboratively was not embedded in the culture of schools. Peg notes that the school day didn't lend itself to this type of interaction "Those were the days when you went home out of teaching at 3.00 p.m. At that time schools were locked up and everybody left".

These participants found that union meetings were helpful in keeping them familiar with developments in education and they facilitated teachers to meet one another and to discuss issues and share practice. Participants' personal lives were extremely important to them during these years and developing social networks, travel, enjoying theatre and hobbies were priorities for some of the participants.

4.7 School Culture

At the start of their career most primary teachers have to manage full-time classroom teaching responsibilities as well as finding and negotiating a place of their own in the school's existing organisation (Nias, 1989). Most beginning teachers are unaware of school politics and the power relations between different interest groups and members of the school community. The early years of teaching are spent juggling the demands of teaching and of functioning within the school as an institution.

All the participants noted that during the 1970s and 1980s teaching was an individual activity. Teachers recall teaching in a “cocoon”, of being “on their own” and teaching in isolation from their colleagues. There were few opportunities provided for teachers to collaborate or to discuss aspects of their practice with others. Teachers did not plan together and most teachers never saw other teachers working in their classrooms. Staff meetings were convened in some schools and these were mainly concerned with organisational issues such as the school timetable, discipline issues, adhering to breaktimes and other recreational periods or filling the rollbook. Teachers did not discuss education or teaching openly in the staffroom. In some schools teachers did not communicate at all. Alice recalls:

There were a few teachers who just wouldn’t talk. They sat there looking at the wall, which was a bit scary. The rest of us just talked about anything and everything. You would always talk about something funny that happened in the classroom – maybe something to do with a child, or a family but not teaching.

Sarah remembers that there wasn’t a culture in staffrooms of talking about teaching. Teaching was a private activity, not shared or discussed. Antoinette recalls that collegial support was a strong feature of the convent school where she started teaching but when teachers provided help or assistance to a colleague, this was done “quietly, they’d take you aside and have a quiet word with you”. While relationships with other teachers on the staff were good, there was no tradition of assisting younger members or staff or sharing expertise. These findings support other commentators who identified that individualism, isolation and privatism were widespread features of the culture of teaching in the 1970s and 1980s (Zielinski & Hoy, 1983).

Hannah recalls that the culture of the school was very different to the “GAA, parish and Catholic view of teaching” which pervaded other schools. She attributes the positive culture of the school to the principal, a member of a religious order, who had a keen sense of vision:

I have to hand it to the nuns, they were very forward thinking. There was a great sense of socially caring, so my sense of social justice was well-catered for here. We were encouraged never to look down on people, which did happen at that time. We were encouraged to engage with them.... There was a great sense of community.

Hannah describes the school as ‘radical’ and forward-thinking for a girls’ convent school in the 1970s and 1980s:

Compared to other schools it was probably a bit radical and open for a convent, girls’ school. We were encouraged to have an opinion. We had staff meetings when other schools didn’t. One thing about a convent school was that the principal changed every five or six years. So in my lifetime I’ve had about five or six principals. It was great. Some were gibbering idiots but you always got a sense that there was a new beginning with each principal. It was a great opportunity to learn your craft, to see several different people in the role.

At the start of her third year as a teacher, Antoinette moved to a newly established school in a very disadvantaged urban area. She recalls that her motivation for changing schools stemmed from the realisation that she needed a new challenge. She found the culture of her first school restrictive and she considered that the “teachers were very old and were going nowhere.” Changing schools provided Antoinette with an opportunity to build and contribute to the new school’s professional culture. Antoinette recalls this period in her teaching career as exciting and challenging. She recalls that the teachers were young and vibrant and there was a “great social life and everyone was involved in doing extracurricular activities and in working with the community.” She recalls the early years in the school as being concerned with innovation, trying things out, visiting art galleries, bringing the children on the bus

to see a play and organising extra-curricular activities. The staff formed a cohesive unit, each teacher contributing to their full potential.

4.8 Involvement in Decision Making

The first memory which Sarah has of her involvement in decision making was when discretion was accorded to schools to decide on the calendar for the school year. She recalls:

I think during the fourth or fifth year I was teaching there were ten days that we could play with in the school calendar and we could make decision around the closing dates for the holidays. Up to that I don't remember us making decisions and there wasn't a culture of staff meetings in those early days.

Joe recalls that decisions were 'handed to you' and that the leadership styles he experienced in his early years' teaching were 'top-down' and 'authoritarian' in nature. He recalls:

If you were an infant teacher, you had that job for life. During the 1970s and 1980s even the class you taught was decided upon by the principal - there was no talk of class preferences or choices. I could have gone to the principal and said I wanted a change, but that wasn't part of the culture of the time. It suited everybody at the time but to me it wasn't healthy.

Noel also experienced an authoritative school climate where the principal made all the decisions and where teachers were discouraged from questioning his authority.

I started in [name of school] in my second year teaching. It was a very academic school. It was an easy school at that time for teachers to be honest. I enjoyed teaching at that time. At that time the principal was the absolute boss. You didn't have a Board of Management or anyone else impinging on your life at that stage. Both principals in those early years were tremendously able and were very supportive.

In these traditional school communities, the most senior teachers were usually assigned the most senior classes. Beginning teachers were usually assigned the least

desirable class or the most difficult students. Alice recalls that when she was assigned her first class, her principal commented that “she wouldn’t wish my class of boys on anyone”. Seniority prerogatives meant that, in many schools, the most academically able children were streamed and assigned to the most experienced teachers. Consequently, variation in teaching assignments only occurred as older staff members retired or moved from the school. Participants comment on the lack of challenge in their work as teaching became routine and monotonous. Alice comments:

I spent twenty years teaching first and second class. It was a junior school. I felt that I was well able to do it and I found it quite monotonous. I found it a bit boring, to be honest. I had hoped when I got the job that there would be some movement between the junior and the senior schools, but I didn’t understand how they worked at the time.

Many of the participants got married during this period and the predictable nature of their work provided them with opportunities to invest their energies into their young and growing families. Antoinette recalls that in the early 1980s her husband became principal of a large school near his home town. This necessitated a change of school and re-location of her family to a new house closer to her husband’s school. These changes in Antoinette’s personal life had an impact on her teaching:

I found that when I moved to the new school, which was in a rural location, the dynamic had changed. The job satisfaction wasn’t the same. The job became the second priority. Teaching in this school was like going back in time. It was very traditional – you didn’t have to try hard, you didn’t have to dig deep. I didn’t have to give as much of myself – the children were bright, the parents were nice and they were very middle-class and they wanted to get on. We were staying in temporary accommodation and we couldn’t afford to buy a house. Teaching in this new school gave me more energy for my family, However, I spent a lot of that time worried – we were young, we had money worries.

4.9 Micro-Politics of Schools

A principal's leadership style exerts a powerful influence on school culture (Fullan, 2001b; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994) and on the actions and the morale of their staffs. In the majority of schools, the participants found that they had a strong supportive principal and supportive peer relationships. Almost all participants started their teaching careers in schools managed by religious orders. The participants remember the principals of these schools with affection. They described these leaders as having a "being kind and thoughtful" or "having a kind word for every child". Antoinette recalls the principal of the first school where she taught:

She was a great influence on me. She was a very thoughtful person – she always remembered people's birthdays and organised cakes and teas and coffees. Even on the first day when I started teaching in the school she left a card for me on my desk welcoming me to the school and wishing me well.

For a minority of participants, school life was a difficult experience. Alice remembers that the appointment of a new principal resulted in the balkanisation of the staff into two groups. The new principal was unable to establish a cohesive community of teachers in the school and this left the staff divided and entrenched, consumed with petty squabbles and embittered disputes:

A new principal was appointed and the vice principal had gone for the job and didn't get it. There was a man appointed and we were an all-female staff. People were very annoyed about it and behaved very badly. It continued for a long time and some people wouldn't come into the staffroom and they had their lunch break in the corridor for twelve, thirteen, even fourteen years afterwards. That put a bad atmosphere in the school. I wasn't involved in any of it but it affected everything. The level of co-operation and helpfulness and good humour was very bad for years. The more senior people in the school who were very affronted stayed as a group and the other people just got on with it.

In the face of internal communication difficulties and tensions, Alice felt that her own ‘professional identify and self-respect’ ensured that her commitment to her students never wavered. Her capacity to be resilient when confronted by a negative work context stemmed from the satisfaction she derived from her professional work in the classroom. Alice always felt a high level of effectiveness in the classroom, was confident in her relationships with pupils and had a strong personal identity as a teacher. However, her isolation within the staff increased as the years went by, as she continued to work in an environment where colleagues were negative and consumed with their own emotional struggles with the management of the school. While always on the brink of leaving the school, Alice’s own children were enrolled in the school and they were progressing well. While Alice struggled with the tensions and challenges presented in the school she built upon the positive aspects of her work to overcome these pressures in this constrained environment.

4.10 Satisfaction with Teaching

Nieto (2003, p.122), in her study of American teachers, found that the “emotional stuff” of teaching sustains teachers. Hargreaves (1998b) posits that emotions are at the heart of teaching:

Good teaching is charged with positive emotions. It is not just a matter of knowing one’s subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. 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 creativity, challenge and joy. (p.835)

Most of the participants perceived that they had high levels of efficacy during their early years in teaching during the 1970s and 1980s. They experienced the intrinsic rewards of teaching such as their good relationship with the children, seeing their

pupils progress and develop and these fuelled their job satisfaction, commitment and motivation. Many of the teachers experienced extrinsic rewards such as letters of appreciation from parents at the end of the school year, affirmation from their principals and validation from the occasional visits of the school inspector. Several of the participants received acknowledgement on a more continuous basis from their principal.

When the inspector would come, she would delay him. She was on my side and she was proud of me. She sent every inspector to me. I was a good teacher and she wanted to show me off. (Antoinette)

I got great validation from my inspector. He would admire the work and encouraged me to keep working with the pupils. (Sarah)

During the 1970s and 1980s parents remained largely on the periphery of schools and the education system. Despite this lack of engagement, Noel remembers that teachers at that time “had the absolute support of parents”. Parents interacted with teachers when there was a difficulty and as Sarah recalls “I could count on one hand the number of times I met a parent. It wasn’t the done thing”. Teachers were in control of the work in their classrooms and in the school.

4.11 Status of Teachers in Society

Lortie (1975) notes that in the 1970s, when most of the participants commenced their teaching careers, that teaching was one of the more important routes into the middle class. He contends that teaching offered upward mobility for people who grew up in blue-collar or lower-class families. This view was also expressed by Irish teachers in the 1980s. Pritchard (1983), who conducted a study of status of teachers in Ireland, found that for primary teachers’ educational qualifications accorded them

elite status in a society which was emerging from an agrarian stage and which was transforming slowly into a more industrialised society.

For some of the participants the status of the primary school teacher during the 1970s provided a career incentive. Noel, who grew up in rural Ireland, remembers that the status of teaching as a profession was an important consideration for his parents whom he recalled “Wanted to be the people in the village”. Máire’s grandfather was a national school teacher and she remembers admiring his lifestyle, his close relationship with children and the fact that in a small west of Ireland town that he enjoyed “a certain role and status in the town and I think I liked the fact that he was well-respected in the locality”. Peg’s mother was a teacher and she recalls:

The fact that my mother was a teacher in those days was a big thing. In those days you were somewhere above the ordinary common gardener but you were not quite there with the doctor – you were somewhere in between. I would remember my mother as being very much alone. She was quite up the social ladder but not up there with the other professions.

Teaching during the early 1970s was a ‘high status’ occupation. Hannah recalls that in society generally and within her own family the position of primary teacher was ascribed significant status. She noted her fellow-students in Training College were:

From rural areas and the vast majority of them were going back home to schools where their mother or father were principals or were teacher, or were going home to high status jobs. It was overall a big status job. Within my own family it would have been too. I was the first person of my family on both extended sides to go to college, secondly it was seen as high status because it was a primary teacher and thirdly, it was a pensionable job. They were hugely important at the time. They were things that were a little bit more than the rest.

The primary school teacher held a special position and status in Irish society. Teachers, particularly those who held teaching positions in rural areas, were attributed a high amount of prestige. Pritchard (1983) found that Irish teachers

attached a great degree of importance to their professional status and most Irish teachers during this period expressed satisfaction with teaching as a career and with their occupational prestige.

The participants felt that as a result of this special position within society, teachers' personal and professional lives were scrutinised by the parents and the community in which they lived. Teachers were perceived by other members of society as being concerned with maintaining the moral order and with close adherence to the religious practices and tenets of the denominational schools in which they taught. The participants felt constrained in their private lives. Hannah remembers that when she socialised, she and her friends would never acknowledge their identities as teachers:

There was a time when teachers couldn't do anything in their private lives. We lived with a bit of angst; people viewed us as the moral type of stick.
(Hannah)

When I started teaching, de Valera and Childers died, we walked the children up to the pro-Cathedral to see them lying in state. The people would comment about you, your appearance and whether it was acceptable or not. (Antoinette)

During the 1970s and the 1980s you were very much viewed as 'the teacher' or 'the principal'. Teachers were in a fish bowl. At that time it would have been unusual to have any staff member that was separated or a single parent or whatever. (Joe)

4.12 Conclusion

The participants remember in great detail their motivations to become teachers, their personal experiences of school and their experience of college. Because of the highly personal nature of teaching, a small number of the participants did not value what they had learned during their teacher education programmes as they seemed

disconnected to their lives and their experiences of schooling (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Sikes & Troyna, 1991). Some of the participants found that their preservice course was fragmented and disconnected and it did not impact on how they perceived good teachers and teaching. These participants found that their practice was more influenced by teachers who had taught them than the courses they had studied.

Most of the teachers made the transition to the role of teacher within the first year. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) claim that teachers who started their teaching career in the 1970s develop a personal nostalgia for a time when the school was a smaller and more coherent unit, when students were easier to teach and when teachers had more professional autonomy and organisational influence. They describe this phenomenon as ‘teacher nostalgia’. The participants’ life histories do not reflect this sense of nostalgia and longing for a ‘golden era’. They recall their positive interactions with pupils, the personal investment of time and energy into preparing for their work and managing large group of pupils, and their exhaustion from teaching. The participants were at ease with the curriculum and the methodologies and they felt valued by the principal of their school.

The first phase of the participants’ teaching career typically spanned three years and is consistent with the description of the “early phase” (Day et al., 2006) when teachers were learning the craft of teaching and establishing themselves within the school organisation. Half of the participants changed school within the first five years. They changed schools to facilitate their developing relationships or to look for greater challenge. All participants recall a long period of stabilisation where they experienced success in their teaching. Hargreaves (2000) notes that in the pre-

professional age of teaching that the “grip of traditional teaching” was so tenacious that “even those teachers who appeared to espouse new philosophies of teaching and learning during their teacher education programmes quickly reverted to transmission and recitation patterns when they took up their first positions”(p.156). The participants relate that much of the teaching was textbook based during this period. They do not recall examples of changing their teaching practices or trying new approaches in the classroom. However, the participants felt that their competence as a teacher improved and this was acknowledged by the principal and the school inspector. Some of the teachers engaged in courses, and involved themselves more in the professional organisations associated with teaching. During this long period of stability, most of the teachers formed relationships, got married and started family life.

Almost all the teachers started their careers in schools managed by religious orders. While the term ‘ethos’ was not part of the educational discourse during the 1970s and 1980s, the participants recall the atmosphere and cultures which pervaded their schools. In general, teachers were independent and autonomous, working within the confines of their own classroom. Teaching and learning were not discussed with other teachers and advice was given discreetly. Where staff meetings were held, teachers discussed organisational issues. None of the participants can recall any change or reform during this period which had a direct impact on their work. Professional development was not a feature of school life and participants undertook courses to fulfil personal interests rather than as a component of their professional lives. The pattern of school life remained stable and unaltered for most of the participants during this period.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIENCES OF POLICY, CHANGE AND REFORM 1985 - 2008

5.1 Introduction

Participants' life histories point to considerable diversity in the range of changes and reforms which they experienced during their professional lives. There is also considerable variation in the participants' motivation to experience change and to become involved in change at local or at national level as active reformers and change agents.

The participants experienced two waves of change and reform in primary education. The first phase occurred between 1970 and the 1980s, when policies of social equity and equality became increasingly important in Irish society. The Department of Education introduced a series of policy initiatives to counter educational inequalities and these focused on Traveller education, educational disadvantage, and learning support. The churches' central role in the governance of schools was challenged at this time and a new model of school patronage was established. As a result, the number of multi-denominational schools grew throughout the country. Almost all the participants experienced role diversification within their schools during this phase. One of the participants experienced significant change when she began to work in a newly established multi-denominational school.

Section two of this chapter reviews the changes that were introduced during the second wave of reform which extends from the publication of the *Education Act, 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998). What followed was a period of rapid change

and reform in terms of legislation, curriculum, the management of schools and the responsibilities accorded to schools and teachers. Specifically, the policy initiatives that resonate in the lives of most of the participants interviewed include special education, the introduction of middle management (distributed leadership), curriculum change and whole-school planning.

SECTION 1: CHANGE AND REFORM 1985 - 1995

During the 1980s and 1990s, pressure for reform emanated from employers' demands for a more highly educated workforce. As the economic climate improved, the national agreements incorporated specific targets to reduce the numbers of students not transferring to post-primary education and reflected increasing government concerns over raising standards in literacy and numeracy. Most of the participants actively sought engagement with the new initiatives in primary education such as Traveller education, learning support and special education. Half of the participants changed roles from mainstream class teacher to one of these more specialised roles during this period. The experience of one participant who taught in a multi-denominational context is also explored.

5.2 Traveller Education

During the mid-1980s the educational provision for Travellers broadened and schools responded to the challenge of enrolling pupils from diverse backgrounds. Lodge and Lynch (2004) note that in policy documents and in society in general, Travellers were regarded in the report as "deviant, destitute drop-outs from a homogeneous Irish population" (p.93). Therefore the implementation of a policy that promoted increased involvement of Travellers in education resulted in a variety of

responses. Two of the participants chose to work in Traveller education. Both worked in different school contexts: Hannah was involved in the implementation of the policy in a disadvantaged school and Alice, who was now working in a middle-class school, became a special teacher for Traveller children. Their personal recollections illustrate how school contexts are highly influential determinants of the success of an initiative.

Hannah embraced the opportunity to work with Travellers and she made a seamless transition from mainstream class teaching into a special education class. She received considerable support, both financial and collegiate, from her school community for her work. Hannah's sense of social justice, nurtured in her youth by her parents, resonated with the social mission and principles which were articulated and enacted by the successive principal teachers of her school. This motivated her to work with children who were excluded from mainstream education. She also acknowledges the influence of one principal, who was a member of a religious order at the time, who encouraged innovation and the sharing of ideas:

We had a very inspiring woman who later left the convent. She did things like taking the poorer kids on hostelling holidays and she encouraged teachers to give their time and go. She got rid of the separate staffrooms for the nuns, the staff on the first floor and the staff on the second floor. She got everyone in together and to sit down. We had staff meetings when other schools didn't.

Alice's experience of Traveller education was different. The introduction of Travellers as part of the school population was greeted by hostility and resistance from the management and staff of the school. As Alice explains:

It was an extraordinary experience. There was a huge amount resistance in the area at the time. There were over 100 Traveller children and no schools would take them. The Archbishop and the INTO got involved to try to solve the problem. Our school had an empty pre-fabricated building at the time so the resisters had to give way and take them. A lot of teachers were very against this.

Alice opted for the special class because she needed a change from the “monotonous” and “boring” routine of teaching the same class level for over ten years. However, the majority of the staff was resistant to enrolling the Travellers.

Alice comments:

When I was teaching the kids, I found myself coming up against this attitude of resistance. A lot of the teachers were all from rural areas. There was a feeling that we had our own school, with our own kids, our parents and we weren't letting these people come in from outside. And that was said in a staff meeting.

The implementation of any change or reform has significant impact on the confidence of the teachers involved. Alice's experiences of change were difficult and painful and working with a group of pupils that were marginalised within the school challenged her position within the staff. Participation in the reform undermined Alice's status within the school. At the start of her teaching assignment Alice remembers that she felt inept. Her self-esteem and her efficacy as a teacher were threatened:

In the beginning I was wondering was I capable of teaching at all. I had to remind myself I know I can teach. I had been teaching for years. It was very difficult.

Shortly after moving to the special education assignment, both Hannah and Alice returned to college for a year to complete the full-time special education course. This course provided them with the skills and knowledge they required to work in

special education. Both Hannah and Alice got opportunities to explore theories of learning which they could then relate to their teaching practice in different class settings. The duration of the course and the enthusiasm of the lecturers meant that both participants found the course professionally satisfying and personally challenging:

That was intellectual stimulation of the highest order; because I was studying for once what I had chosen to do, I absolutely loved it. I don't know if I ever enjoyed anything as stimulating. Really special education training is the ultimate teacher training. You have to teach at that microscopic level to people who have learning difficulties. Then you really cut your cloth as a teacher. It was an exciting time to be in special education. The work we had to do and the training we got was tremendous. (Hannah)

I did the special education course and that helped a lot. It was great because I realised I could study. It was full-time in College and then you did teaching practice in every type of special school and did your final teaching practice in your own class. (Alice)

When Hannah returned to her school she found that the principal and staff of the school were supportive and encouraging. Hannah involved other staff members in her work by talking about her class and the activities that they were doing:

There was no prescription and you ploughed a furrow and did your best. I had an opportunity to try out thousands of ideas and was given free rein. I did team teaching with the vice-principal. There was a great opportunity to do innovative things. We invited fifth and sixth class to do cookery with our class. The principal put in a kitchen in our room, quite forward thinking again. If you had an idea and were prepared to do the work and prepared to run with it, the back-up was here and the resources were given to you.

Following completion of the special education course, Alice returned to her school and resumed her work with Travellers. Alice received little support from her colleagues in the school and did not have opportunities to reflect on her practice or to share her successes and failures with other members of the staff. She experienced

further resistance when she proposed integrating the Travellers into mainstream classroom settings:

A lot of the Travellers really needed a special class to start off. As they improved there was no willingness to integrate them. You get fond of children that you're teaching and you can see that they would have been much better if they were integrated for part of the day. You knew that if the teachers got to know them that they'd become fond of them too. The resistance was there, it was kind of a communal resistance.

The resistance to change stemmed from two sources: resistance to a reform that was perceived as being foisted on the staff from outside the school; and a deep sense of institutional racism which Alice felt pervaded the staff at that time. Also, the initiative to introduce Travellers to the school had not been accompanied by inservice education or other supports to prepare the staff for a change in ethos, mission and school goals. The responsibility for the initiative rested with Alice. She observes:

The principal and the board saw their role as protecting the school. This class had been foisted on them against their will. I suppose their fear was that if they integrated those children into mainstream classes they'd be given another 15 in a special class. I think that was the fear. I think the fact that I was happy enough to teach them and to keep them separate, everything was okay.

Alice became a member of a national professional network of teachers for Travellers. The network engaged in discussions about teaching, pedagogy, the culture of Travellers and provided a supportive context essential for serious change.

Alice remarks:

I used to bring the issue of the Traveller up at staff meetings just to let them know what was going on around the country. I was in the Association of Teachers for Travelling People so I was learning what was going on around the place and appealing for integration. There wasn't that much discussion to be honest. It was still resisted.

Alice's constant struggles to cope with the staff's resistance to the Travellers and her increased stress levels from teaching challenging pupils resulted in burn-out and disillusionment:

It was very tough teaching a special class and by the time I had finished I was burnt out. Now it actually got much better as it went on. As special classes were being done away with all over the country, there was more integration and eventually they were all integrated. But I had it at its hardest – I had 15 Travellers, one of them had moderate SEN and one had mild SEN. They were wild little kids and they lived in a field that was permanently water-logged. Terrible conditions really.

Alice felt angry and indignant at her colleagues' dismissal of her work, their dissension and resistance and she was affronted by their behaviours, attitudes and lack of moral integrity. This situation was created by various factors such as lack of collegiality, lack of professionalism and communication, disagreements among staff rivalling for management positions within the school and poor decision-making. The resentment and resistance forced Alice eventually to leave the school and to seek her motivation through further study:

I'll be honest I had been very disillusioned with the way people treated the Travellers. I wasn't impressed and I remember thinking at the time 'I'm getting out of here' I wasn't impressed with peoples' attitudes and behaviours and some people did shocking things at the time so that made me think of getting out.

5.3 Forging Closer Relationships between Schools and Parents

In the early 1990s, the home-school community liaison scheme (HSCL) was introduced into many urban, disadvantaged schools to promote partnership between parents of marginalised pupils and teachers (DES, 2007). Hannah fuelled by the positive opportunity to work in special education, volunteered to undertake the role of home-school-community liaison co-ordinator.

Hannah's role as HSCL co-ordinator meant that she was released from all teaching duties and was assigned to fostering interrelationships between home and school. The scheme, which was initiated in 1990, was still in its infancy. Hannah's role was ill-defined and she found the transition to this new position difficult as she was no longer in the familiar context of the classroom. Hannah felt marginalised from her colleagues and the familiar routines of the school. She recalls feeling isolated and she describe the position as "...a lonely, lonely position because it was new and nobody had a clue what I was supposed to do".

Hannah was shared with two schools in her local area. The new principal of her own school was very enthusiastic about the scheme as it divested her of the burden of managing parents and their concerns. Hannah describes the principal's reaction to the introduction of the scheme:

My principal was delighted because it meant that I was there to fend off the parents, to deal with parental problems and it left her free to set up more labelling systems through the school, which she was very good at.

In contrast, the principal of the shared school in the area had an authoritarian leadership style and for the first time in her teaching career, Hannah was forced to manage conflict and aggression. Hannah outlines her experiences:

I was shared with the school across the road where there was the principal from hell who would spend his entire time picking fights with parents and would then send me down to their homes to sort it out. He'd have eaten the face off a parent and the mother would have been crying in the yard. Then he'd send me down to try and sort it out. Or sometimes he'd eat the face of someone and the parent would go home to get a drain pipe for him and threaten to attack him. When I'd visit the house, I'd press the doorbell ever so slightly and say to myself 'They're not in' and then I'd run back to the school. I hated it, I absolutely hated it. I was very isolated from the staff.

Hannah found that both principals had little understanding of the intended purpose of her role and were unable to support her as she set about empowering parents to engage themselves and their children in education. She felt that the principals had not engaged with the reform.

After surmounting the first year, Hannah found the role change very positive. She made links with other teachers and schools:

I loved it. I loved the buzz of interacting. I loved the buzz of sorting out problems and getting programmes off the ground. We set up an out-reach programme of the Equality Studies here and we got lecturers out from the local university and we got the parents, the more higher-achieving parents, to do a certificate. They were really exciting times.

The introduction of HSCL provided Hannah with scope to exercise her creativity and to pursue aspects of educational provision outside the normal activities of the school. While the role of HSCL co-ordinator was not clearly defined, it allowed scope for Hannah to exercise professional control and authority over the activities that she co-ordinated for parents. Hannah remained in the position for ten years. This role provided the groundwork for her next role in the school as principal teacher.

5.4 Teaching in a Multi-Denominational Setting

In 1990 Sarah's family circumstances changed and she returned to teach in an Educate Together school near her home base. She was impressed by the democratic ethos of the school which had been set up in the late 1980s and had grown rapidly to a five teacher school in 1991. She found that the school had a well-articulated philosophy and a child-centred curriculum. For the first time she discovered 'vision'

and she associates this vision with the principal teacher's focus on teaching and learning. Sarah had not encountered this before. She explains:

That school had vision which the principal exemplified in everything she did. I had not encountered vision before. I was working with a principal who was working with ideas. The centrality of the child and the centrality of the parents, and the partnership between the parents and the teacher were the key things. Huge respect was accorded to the child as a learner. Great emphasis was placed on the quality of the learning experience for each child within the school. The principal thought about her teaching and she encouraged me to think about it as well. For the first couple of years it was a very positive experience.

Sarah describes the school as attracting pupils from 'multicultural' families'. Some parents had academic backgrounds and as Sarah describes "They were looking for something more enlightened than the ordinary national school. They were rebelling". The school, because of its more open environment, attracted some children who hadn't been successful in their local schools and many pupils in those early years had behavioural difficulties. This created a challenge for the teachers who were working hard to implement the principles of the Educate Together movement. Sarah recalls that the teachers discussed teaching as a group and completed courses on managing behavioural difficulties. Professional development provided Sarah with the skills to implement the philosophy of the school and it assisted in renewing her teaching approaches and methodologies. The courses were specifically designed to suit the school context. This was the first time that Sarah remembers being part of a learning community and of continuing professional development being tailored to the teachers' needs.

Sarah spent eight years working in the school as a mainstream class teacher, a learning support teacher and a resource teacher. She recalls this experience as being very positive and one that increased her effectiveness as a teacher:

Certainly, while it was tough, it was always positive. It certainly taught me to value my own teaching. It reaffirmed me as a teacher. Because you had this partnership ethos, you got feedback from parents in a very human way. They appreciated everything you did. I was now meeting parents constantly and we were on first name terms. You were like an extension of their family. There was a certain amount of respect.

The experience also involved Sarah in debating, exploring and internalising the specific goals of education associated with the Educate Together movement. She also had opportunities to interrogate the nature of “child-centred” education and to explore its enactment in a democratic school environment. This contrasted with the previous schools where Sarah had worked. The increasing concern with the characteristic spirit of the school and the holistic development of the child were issues which the Educate Together movement were exploring almost a decade before these concepts were enshrined in legislation later in the 1990s.

5.5 Supporting Pupils with Learning Difficulties

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the learning support service, which was formerly known as the Remedial Education service, was extended to most primary schools. Learning support teaching was introduced to provide additional supports for pupils with very low achievement in reading and/or mathematics. Historically, a greater number of learning support positions were found in designated disadvantaged schools (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin et al., 1995). Máire comments on this policy initiative:

We didn't have remedial teachers in the school and we had 600 children with 40 in most classes and in each year there was a large tail of children that failed. About four or five years after I started there was a big change. They started introducing remedial teaching and this had a very positive impact. For the first time, attention was being given to children.

The provision of additional learning support positions provided opportunities for teachers to change roles and to develop more specialist skills in literacy and numeracy teaching. Three of the participants assumed the role of learning support teacher during this period. Máire completed the remedial course with another colleague in 1985. She found that the remedial course was of poor quality and she felt that it gave a poor foundation for the work that she was to undertake. She recalls:

During the 1970s and the 1980s you were guessing what was wrong with the children. We had no training and no preparation for these type of children. I did the remedial course in 1985, and we visited a remedial teacher in another town and this was the first time that I saw a child with Down's Syndrome in a mainstream school. Before that I was completely unaware that schools could cope with these children.

Some of the participants report that teachers' perceptions of 'remedial teaching' were consistently negative during this period. Máire returned to mainstream class teaching after three years in the learning support context. She missed the interaction with the pupils and the different pace of the work. She resented the fact that other teachers viewed the role negatively:

I didn't like teaching remedial very much. I wasn't seeing enough rewards for the efforts I was putting in. In some staffs remedial teachers are valued, but in some places the other teachers think that it is a cushy number. I was glad to get back into mainstream and into a faster pace. I found the remedial teaching isolating.

Sarah describes her attitudes to learning support or 'remedial teaching' in the following manner:

I was offered the job of learning support teacher in 1990 but hadn't taken up the job as I would have seen it as a backwater and I would have considered myself more valuable than that. I felt I would have been diminishing my own value before my colleagues and the parents.

Sarah eventually took up the position of learning support after making a detailed submission to the Department of Education seeking a learning support teacher for the school. She found that learning support teaching was a much more satisfying experience than she had initially assumed. She recalls that for the first time she began to see children as clients who were entitled to a service and to teaching that would help them to benefit from education. As learning support teacher, Sarah recalls visiting other teachers in their classrooms but she found that full responsibility for pupils with learning needs was transferred to her. The class teachers did not engage in the programmes for these pupils. Sarah describes the change in her approach to teaching at this time:

Up to now I had focused on my own teaching, my own performance. When I started as a learning support teacher I was now trying to have a learning and teaching relationship, a symbiotic relationship. In the learning support you could see the gaps and you could see the wonder of a child learning.

5.6 Engagement in Professional Development and Further Studies

Almost all of the participants completed post-graduate degrees during this period. Both Alice and Hannah's professional development paths took similar trajectories. Both teachers had a background in working with disadvantaged and minority pupils and were buoyed by the enthusiasm of completing the Diploma in Special Education. They were anxious to return to academic work. Both teachers completed Master's degrees in Equality Studies. Alice explains her motivation:

I think I was hungry. I just wanted to learn new stuff. Now after the Special Ed. course I felt I could. It gave me the confidence, I was getting restless where I was working but I couldn't leave because my daughter was in the school. It wasn't an option. I wanted to do something different and studying seemed to be the option.

Sarah had completed a Master's degree early in her career and had gained a diploma in learning support. She assumed a leadership role in organising a learning support teachers' network and she was active in the provision of continuing professional development for the teachers in her area. Interestingly, Sarah notes that the term 'continuing professional development' had not been coined at that time, as she states "We didn't have those words". The establishment of local networks of teachers coincided with the roll-out of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the increased funding for Education Centres to provide for the ongoing professional development of teachers. Sarah organised courses on a voluntary basis and the work was completed at night-time and at weekends. She was excited by change and the demand for continued professional development and increased professional knowledge. She describes the motivation and the personal satisfaction she derived from this work:

The buzz was my colleagues because they started to come. We started off with twenty teachers and the good word went out and we could get forty teachers the following night. We were all learning together. I was there to learn and I was sharing the learning experience with other teachers. We were becoming more aware of the diversity of pupils and we were up-skilling ourselves and we got great support from all the psychologists and NEPS and the Health Board and the college of education.

Her involvement in learning support teaching was the catalyst for further diversification in her career. Sarah changed schools in 1999 to work in a unit for pupils with specific learning difficulties and to focus on using her newly acquired skills in this area.

5.7 Conclusion

For many of the participants, during the 1980s and 1990s change was introduced incrementally. Each new initiative brought challenge but was also accompanied by the possibility of opening new horizons for teachers.

Hannah, Alice and Sarah experienced change on a more personal level. The initial adoption of reforms was accompanied by a period of self-doubt, loss of self-efficacy and a period of introspection when the participants questioned their abilities. Most of the reforms centred on the role of one teacher in implementing a significant policy change. As a result, some of the reforms failed to involve the whole-school. Pockets of good practice developed in schools but the change rarely impacted on the work of all the teachers in a particular setting. The capacity building of the other members of staff to support the reform was largely ignored to the detriment of the reforming teachers' enthusiasm and idealism. Reforms such as the HSCL allowed for different responses and for teachers to emerge who could shape the initiative to the community in which they worked.

The principals of their schools emerge as central figures in the reforms, in some cases providing vision, guidance and support; in others, diminishing the reform through prejudice or disappointing the participants through their neglect of them as change agents. During this phase, the development of professional cultures of teachers received little attention from policy makers. The case of the multi-denominational school illustrates that meaningful reform requires teamwork,

collaborative relations among groups of teachers and teacher-discourse that is centred on teaching and learning.

The participants benefited from their experiences of continuing professional development. In particular, membership of local networks of teachers provided the stimulus for the sustainability of reform within these teachers' work contexts. Engagement in continuing professional development and the completion of diploma and degree courses provided them with the theoretical frameworks, the skills to engage more fruitfully with the reforms and it enabled them to contextualise their work within the education system. In the next section, the impact of large-scale national reform on the participants' lives and careers is developed.

SECTION 2: LARGE-SCALE NATIONAL REFORM 1996 - 2008

5.8 Introduction

The participants' experiences of different initiatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s provided them with the capacities to lead and manage change in a period of large scale national reform which began with the publication of the *Education Act 1998* (Government of Ireland, 1998). Six of the participants emerge as change agents within their own schools and at local and at national levels. Their views of change and reform are encapsulated in the quotations included in the text. The professional and personal experiences of these teachers in engaging with change and reform are reflected in their journeys of self-adjustment and professional growth within their particular contexts. As the participants engaged in change, they were confronted by professional and personal tensions and challenges to their values, beliefs and practices. They emerge as teachers who have the capacities to build upon favourable influences and positive opportunities in their work and life contexts in order to overcome the emotional tensions associated with change initiatives. Throughout these reforms, the participants have been successful in maintaining a sense of vocation and a commitment to teaching.

The changes which have affected teachers' lives and careers include special education, the introduction of middle management and curriculum change. Finally the chapter concludes by exploring the conditions necessary to effect change and the participants' understanding of the profile of teachers who implement or who resist change. It also explores the aspects of the participants' work that sustains their

change efforts and influences their capacities to work successfully in a change-focus environment.

5.9 Special Education

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream classes emerged as a significant issue in the mid 1990s. Special classes or units were established to accommodate pupils with speech and language delays and other physical and developmental disabilities. The *White Paper on Education* (Government of Ireland, 1995) paved the way for change in this area by recognising the rights of special needs pupils to an inclusive education. The issuing of *Circular 8/99* (DES, 1999) established pupils' entitlements to resource-teaching hours based on their assessed needs. The granting of resources to individual pupils resulted in the creation of additional teaching posts in most primary schools. Almost all of the participants availed of the opportunities to change role and work in special education during their teaching career.

Joe is the principal of a large disadvantaged school. The introduction of special educational needs had a very positive effect on the organisation of Joe's school. The staff expanded threefold and there almost thirty special needs assistants were appointed in the school. Joe feels that the policy on inclusion of pupils has been a positive change. It has raised the profile of the school and it has facilitated the introduction of other changes such as team teaching and the mentoring of younger teachers who work on a daily basis with more experienced teachers. He observes:

We have a very good set up here in regard to special needs. The extra support makes a huge difference and most of our support is classroom based which means you have two teachers working together – an experienced member of staff with a younger teacher. We all started off and you closed the door behind you, literally. Nowadays, they could have two other adults working in the room. It has taken a while for their confidence to deal with that. When we started a few years ago certainly the biggest restriction against it was the attitude of the more experienced teachers who did not want another teacher in the room with them.

As a classroom teacher, Peg recalls that she resisted the changes that special educational needs brought to the organisation of the school. The first change she encountered was the opening up of the classroom to facilitate team teaching with the resource teacher. Peg agreed to this reluctantly, but only on the premise that she retained control and co-ordinated the work. The lack of control over her classroom was a threatening aspect that the policy of inclusion brought:

So many changes have happened in my teaching career. One of them was that the resource teacher coming into the classroom. It was huge and I resisted it for years. I knew where I was in my own classroom and I was used to being in control. As a class teacher, I knew my role. I was very much the person who was running the classroom and I was aware of that and I was reluctant to hand that over.

Sarah, who worked as a resource teacher, experienced similar resistance in her school when she suggested team teaching. She was startled by this negativity especially from teachers whom she describes as ‘good’ teachers and those with moral purpose:

I went off and did my postgraduate studies in special educational needs and when I came back and wanted to team teach. One teacher whom I respect refused saying ‘I need to know who is in charge of my classroom and if you came in I wouldn’t feel in charge.’

She attributes this resistance to the low priority accorded to pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs in the school. While Sarah was driven to innovate by her desire to respond to the pupils' learning needs, she felt that her work and her expertise were not valued. Her willingness to introduce change and to work in a new way was perceived by her colleagues as a threat:

When I went into resource teaching, I was put into a prefab which was outside the main building. Resource teaching was seen as an adjunct, you were taking the weakest of the weak children. I felt that my principal and staff had a Rolls Royce out the back but they persisted in cycling. I would see myself as someone with huge expertise but that was not recognised by the staff or at staff meetings. I felt my influence there was negligible even about the organisation of the school.

The introduction of special needs assistants into classrooms and the need for teachers to team teach and to engage in collaborative planning changed many aspects of teachers' practice. Peg perceives these changes as inevitable and mostly positive. However, she is concerned about the fracturing of the classroom. She comments:

Things have changed beyond all measure and things were difficult. It was hard to come to grips with. The big change was the opening of the classroom. That was not easy. I do think there is a negative side to it. Classrooms have become very fractured which for children, particularly those with special needs, is not good for them. It's the same for everything. If you look at children's TV, everyone is talking at once. Children are used to this constant barrage. I think there is something to be said for calm, peace and order and for children to know what they are supposed to be doing.

Eventually in 2006, Peg moved from mainstream class teaching into special education and is responsible for the Maths Recovery initiative. She agreed to change role because the initiative has specific objectives and the role has a defined teaching remit:

I thought this is a job with something specific which I can learn more about. I felt I didn't know what my role would be if I just slotted into resource. At this stage of my life I needed to know what I'm doing and what my position is. I took Maths Recovery and I decided I would have a shot. Anyway I had taught every class and where was I going to go?

Peg is unhappy that after one year of implementing the programme that she is still 'Scratching the surface'. She dislikes the freedom and the uncertainty attached to the initiative. She comments "No I don't like it – I like to know exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. I like to feel certain about what I'm doing."

The policies on special educational needs were accompanied by mandates such as legislation and Department circulars and guidelines and these exerted a profound change on schools and teachers. The incentives of increased staffing in terms of dedicated resource teachers and special needs assistants supported the implementation of the reform in schools. The opportunity to change role and to develop specific teaching skills proved attractive to many teachers who had long experience in mainstream classrooms. Inservice education or other capacity-building initiatives were not provided initially. Many of the initiatives accorded schools and teachers with the professional freedom to shape the reform to their specific school contexts. The reforms were successful in the schools where teachers were willing to work collaboratively, to take risks and where the reforms were perceived as contributing to children's education and where different approaches to teaching and learning were implemented.

5.10 Middle Management

All of the participants referred to their increased role within the school organisation during the last ten years. As experienced teachers with long years of service, the participants hold posts as assistant principal or special duties postholders. As a result, they have organisational and curriculum leadership tasks to complete in addition to their full-time teaching assignments. Participants are required to collaborate with colleagues and to participate in and lead the school decision-making process. Joe, a principal for the last eleven years perceives the introduction of distributed leadership roles as a welcome reform:

It was a blessing in disguise. Middle management was a big change – when you signed up, you signed up to do work. In the previous set up you got the post because of seniority. A lot of the posts had no meaning to them at all. All the posts now contribute hugely to the school.

For Peg, the introduction of additional roles has been the most significant reform in primary education since the 1970s. It has allowed her the opportunity of being promoted in her own school:

The most positive change has been the opening up of promotional possibilities. There's always been the option of going for a principal's post but I've been very happy here. I never wanted to move. The opportunity to further my career in my own school has been great.

Being a senior member of the in-school management team has added significantly to her role in the school and to the satisfaction she derives from her job:

It made a change, not to my teaching role, but to my professional role, to how I saw myself in the school. You feel that while you're doing a bit more and I like having the extra responsibility. Yes, my role has expanded and I now support all the First Class for Maths. I support the Second Class teachers for Literacy.

Peg referred to the value of supporting other colleagues, of guiding the work of young teachers, of co-ordinating important aspects of teaching and learning such as assessment and progress records. Peg views the additional responsibilities as a challenge but also as a professional reward and recognition for her experience and her contribution to the school.

The introduction of in-school management posts on the basis of merit rather than seniority posed a significant challenge for Hannah, who was promoted to principal eight years ago. Her staff was not ready to implement the policy and preferred to preserve the traditional route of seniority as the basis for promotion:

We're in the old style here unfortunately. Everybody with a post is at the upper end. I don't have the moral courage or the 'where-with all' to take all of those and shake them up. I don't have the mental energy to do it. It would be a monumental change. You would run the risk of negativity, there's an enormous amount of goodwill here that's partly due to the fact that I leave everyone to do the best job that they can do.

The introduction of distributed leadership in schools has enabled Joe to develop the capacity of his staff to have an ownership of the internal and external change initiatives introduced in the school. The middle-management structures allow the postholders the freedom to drive the change agenda and to take responsibility for the various initiatives implemented in the school. However, he notes that many teachers with leadership roles in schools are not applying for the post of principal. Becoming a principal was seen as a natural aspiration for a teacher, particularly a male teacher, during the 1980s. This finding resonates with the INTO (INTO, 2003) survey on primary principals conducted in 2003 which concluded that even though primary teachers are predominantly female, almost half of primary principals are male. Joe notes that the numbers of teachers applying for the job of principal has declined

dramatically. He observes that the increasing workload of principals and the demands of a more-accountability driven system are barriers to promotion:

In the 1980s being a principal was seen at the time as something to aspire to. That's the sad thing about nowadays. Being a principal used to be the pinnacle of someone's career. This was something teachers wanted to become. The role has become much more complex. For a teaching principal it is impossible. There aren't enough hours to do the role. There is too much emphasis on getting the paperwork right.

5.11 Curriculum Change and Reform

Large scale reform in terms of curriculum and whole-school strategic planning were both introduced in 1999. A range of capacity building initiatives was provided to support the introduction of these changes. Two separate support agencies comprised of seconded teachers delivered seminars, worked with teachers in schools and facilitated whole-school planning activities and developed schools' knowledge of the curriculum.

Hannah assumed the role of principal in 2000 after spending nearly two decades in special education roles and as HSCL. As a result she felt that her curriculum expertise had diminished and she was not confident in assuming a role as curriculum leader in these circumstances. She believes that it took four to five years to "get my head around the whole thing" including managing staff, parents, pupils, curriculum planning and whole-school planning. She recalls:

I took a back seat as it had been seventeen years since I was in a regular classroom and I didn't know anything about reading schemes or geography programmes. So I had to sit down and learn from scratch with the rest of the staff. I kept completely STUM about it until I was able to get my head around it which is really only in the last three or four years.

Hannah also feels that leading the teaching and learning in the school is not a traditional role of principal teachers in Ireland. She believes that this focus would meet resistance as it runs counter to the culture of primary schools. She claims:

I don't see my role as leading teaching, partly because it's not traditional in this jurisdiction. We are twinned with a school in Belfast and the principal has spent a few days shadowing me here as part of the programme. We've had conversations about our roles and I'm appalled by the fact that she has to write regular reports on teachers' performance. She's sitting there with her peers writing performance reviews of them. That's a no-no in this jurisdiction.

The participants' accounts of curriculum change suggest that schools reinterpret and adapt the reform to suit their particular needs. Joe assigned responsibility for curriculum leadership to his in-school management team. As principal, he is not aware of any changes that have occurred in teaching practice. He maintains that teachers' practice has continued unaltered. Rather, the curriculum reform has allowed teachers to delve into the areas of the curriculum which had not received much attention heretofore:

No, the teaching methods would have been the same. We didn't change radically. But I'd say the inception of special needs has changed it more so than the revised curriculum. You see the curriculum is very slow to feed into a new system. We would have done our standardised tests and we would be keeping an eye on the basics as well. The big thing then was to cut back on the overload and we actually found that all the other stuff was brilliant.

The curriculum subjects were introduced on a phased basis over an eight-year period. Schools were provided with inservice on the curriculum, followed by school-based planning days. However, most participants regard the effectiveness of this provision negatively. Alice was working in a middle class school when the curriculum was introduced. She recalls that teachers were cynical and dismissive of the curriculum. Alice feels that a lot of the new emphases on the curriculum consist

of “putting new names on the stuff”. Peg welcomed many aspects of the curriculum such as the focus on social, personal and health education and the emphasis on learning as a process. However, the programme of inservice which teachers received left her feeling frustrated and lacking in confidence:

I started off very enthusiastic about it but at the end of the inservice I said I can't take anymore of this. And the big thing was everyone was selling their own area. And it was all so easy and all you had to do was to pick up a few cornflake boxes and you had a periscope. It all sounded so easy. But that person was dealing with one subject all the time. I would have always felt capable in every area of the curriculum and I love to sing. By the time we had done our inservice I felt I couldn't teach Music. I couldn't teach it from the perspective of the curriculum. I can sing but I cannot play an instrument.

Hannah found the programme of inservice education exhausting. She felt that too many initiatives were being introduced at the same time and that she and her staff did not have enough time to absorb the changes when additional demands were made of them to interact with something new.

They were effective individually. But you were so bombarded you could barely get your head around getting a box of historical artefacts together and setting aside an area at the end of the corridor for the history box when you were hit with the Maths day. They were effective individually, on their own, but as a unit or a whirl-wind introduction to the curriculum, they damaged each other overall.

The introduction of curriculum change together with the requirement to develop a school plan and engage in whole-school planning was difficult to manage. Peg found that teachers were required to introduce new methodologies, become familiar with curriculum documents as well as writing curricular plans for each area of their work:

Yes, some of them were worthwhile. The policies such as discipline were good but some of them are just a case of having them on paper. You do have to have them when push comes to shove. A lot of it is paperwork. That's huge now. We never had those before. You have to have that up-to-date.

Alice considers that the inservice changed the way that she organised her classroom and the way she approached her teaching. However she felt that whole-school plans had little effect on the practice in the school “The curriculum changed things I did in my own classroom. But I don’t think they changed things as a result of a whole-school plan.” Specifically, Hannah found that the whole-school planning process left ‘bad memories’ in the school. She recalls that most of the planning seminars were not tailored enough to the context of the school and did not recognise the challenges faced by staffs in areas of social disadvantage:

Most of the time you’d come out of a planning day with your eyes rolling up to the heavens saying ‘Where the hell do they think we’ll get the time to do that – do they not realise that most of the kids come to school hungry and cold’. There were a lot of airy, fairy notions.

The publication of the policy DES Delivering Educational Opportunity in Schools Serving Disadvantaged area (DEIS) in 2005 introduced additional initiatives in disadvantaged schools. These schools are in receipt of much more attention and intervention from central advisory services than other schools and attention is focused on supporting literacy and numeracy, boosting standards of attainment and attendance. As a curriculum advisor, Sarah feels that schools are not aware of the implications of the DEIS strategy for their work and have not fully ‘bought in’ to the concept that they can influence the children’s learning. She notes “Teachers are beginning to realise that they can make a difference and that I can make a difference to what the children actually learn in school.”

Hannah describes DEIS as the most important policy reform that the school has experienced. Hannah is particularly proud of the process which the school

community engaged in to devise the action plan and the specific targets for improving literacy and numeracy in the school. However, she is critical of the methods employed by the Department of Education and Science to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of DEIS strategies and she has grave doubts about placing undue emphasis on outputs, in terms of pupils' learning, to the neglect of the process of change which the staff engaged in or the provision of quality learning experiences for the pupils. She comments:

I feel as a school, we went through a very positive process in trying to set those targets, these were realistic targets with real kids in mind and a realistic view of our lives here. It was very focused on our own context. I feel sorry for them (external evaluators and policy makers) because they have to justify the initiative, I'm actually confident enough now not to get into a sweat about it. I'll fill in their targets for them but these do not reflect the successes of the school.

Alice feels that teachers are not implementing the curriculum due to the scale of the reform that they are asked to implement. She believes that teachers are trying to do too many new things, to implement curricular plans, Reading Recovery, First Steps, Maths Recovery, Ready Steady Go Maths and a range of other initiatives that schools in disadvantaged areas are involved in. She remarks:

There's so much to do in it that I don't think you could implement it all. All you can do is to pick bits you like because they strike you as being good. I don't know how you can implement the whole lot, it would be impossible.

However, while concerned about the intensification of the changes which teachers are requested to implement, Alice volunteered to co-ordinate a research project in the school in association with the local college of education. The reform enabled Alice to increase her competency in teaching reading and she valued the experience of local educational innovation and the opportunity to develop new skills in technology.

The participants' comments indicate that large-scale curriculum reform and whole-school planning experienced limited success in Irish schools. Teachers welcomed the new emphasis on developing pupils' learning skills and the introduction of new subjects on the curriculum. The phasing in of eleven separate curriculum subjects over an eight-year period meant that the impact of the different reforms was diluted. While the success of the curriculum depends on changing teaching approaches, only a small number of participants detailed how their classroom practices had developed. Principals' reluctance to lead the teaching and learning process and to delegate the core work of the school to the middle-management team indicates that only limited reform can be achieved in this area.

The requirement to produce whole-school plans for each aspect of the school's work exhausted staff's energies. The value of these plans is questioned by the participants. Reeves (2006) argues that while planning is necessary, the size of the planning documents is inversely related to the amount and quality of action and change in teaching and learning practices in the school. In many schools planning became a substitute for action. Engagement in planning to meet statutory obligations meant that the focus centred on producing paper plans and they distracted teachers from the central component of the reform, which was to improve teaching and learning strategies.

5.12 Principals' Perspectives on Leading the Change Process

Three participants currently hold roles as principals of urban disadvantaged schools. These participants are highly responsive to the demands and challenges placed upon their schools by both internal and external forces. Their schools are in close contact with Education Welfare Officers, special educational needs officers and psychologists. The principals of these schools manage other services provided for pupils such as school meals, the School Completion Programme and a myriad of community initiatives to combat drugs, promote healthy lifestyles and involve parents in education. Participation in these initiatives frames much of the change agenda for these schools. However, the principals have an active role in shaping the reform agenda for their schools based on their own missions and values.

The specific context of Joe's school dominates the change agenda to a far greater extent than any policy initiative which has been introduced nationally. During his early years as principal, Joe had to contend with intra-staff communication difficulties, falling enrolments and the perception in his local community that the school was attracting the 'wrong sorts of pupils'. Joe's core work was focused on marketing his school and enhancing its profile. He completed a Master's degree in educational management and his leadership style was influenced by the philosophy of competitiveness and marketisation which were hallmarks of conservative government educational policy in England:

We had to market the school here. We had to attract people in. You were fighting the area first of all because people associate the school with the area. The first thing we had to do was to get sell the school, to get the message out about the positive things we were doing.

Joe's practical nature meant that he prioritised the physical environment of the school and succeeded in renovating and extending the school to accommodate the growing staff numbers. Joe perceives that his essential role is that of human resource manager and his staff appointments are critical for the success of the school. Joe appointed a highly committed and enthusiastic deputy principal from among the staff. He delegated issues relating to teaching and learning to his deputy while he set about establishing relationships with parents and the local community. He introduced policies such as class rotation which caused some conflict and controversy, but succeeded in establishing his role as the manager within the school.

Joe is actively involved in two networks that support principal teachers. He feels that his main influence on policy development is at national level through his involvement with a principals' network. In particular, he feels that he has a national role in leading change in the management and organisation of special educational needs and this arises from his experience in his own school. For Joe, the principal networks are pressure groups that have developed into a powerful lobby in Irish primary education. As a result, Joe represents these networks during policy negotiations with the Department of Education and Science on the aspects of a school's work that impact on the role of the principal.

Antoinette was appointed the principal of a large inner-city girls' disadvantaged school in 2001. Like Joe, she has focused on revitalising the school and managing a school building project. She comments:

I thank God that I was lucky to get this job, I feel rewarded. When people believe in the way that you are doing things and they take things on that I suggest, I feel very affirmed in my role. The new building that was a huge undertaking - it was a very big project to take on. It is a legacy to leave to the school. When people come and admire what we have accomplished, I feel affirmed.

Introducing other changes into the school has been more difficult for Antoinette to achieve. In particular leading the curriculum change process and changing teaching and learning practices have presented significant challenges. Antoinette is aware that the specific culture of the school inhibits change. The school had been a religiously-managed school until Antoinette assumed the role of principal. She found that teachers were reluctant to express opinions, they were afraid of “overstepping the mark.” From a teaching and learning perspective, the DEIS advisor plays a leadership role in moving practice in the school. Antoinette is anxious to promote her personal change agenda for the school and she prioritises the areas of the curriculum in which she has expertise such as music and Irish.

Hannah was appointed as principal in 2000. Hannah’s leadership practices are organised around a number of core personal values concerning the modelling and promotion of respect for individuals, fairness and equality and caring for the well being and the whole development of students and staff. She comments:

My role is to be the leader, but you can lead in lots of different ways. You have to be involved with the kids, the people in the school, with parents, the teachers. I have to have an individual relationship with the children in the school. I have to be seen by them as a person of authority and a person who cares about their learning and who cares about what happens to them. That takes a lot of behind the scenes work. Leadership involves a lot more than teaching and learning, those are the business of the school. I’m lucky that the things that have to be put in place, I have a natural ability to do such as getting on with people, working hard and developing relationships with parents. It comes naturally to me. But those kinds of things are highly important.

The principals' role in leading change is complex. Joe, Hannah and Antoinette feel they should protect their teachers from unnecessary intrusion or burdens, by acting as gatekeepers to external pressures and demands. While there are innovations and new initiatives at each school, the priority is given to those that would improve children's life chances, fulfil the development programme of the school and would not simply compete for teachers' classroom time and energy. The initiatives which were prioritised resonated with the principals' own personal agenda for change. They invested energy into creating a good climate in the school, and in establishing the school community's confidence that their vision was worth sharing.

5.13 Characteristics of Teachers who Change

Sarah, who works as a curriculum advisor, believes that many teachers have not engaged with the curriculum reforms to any extent. She encounters resisters in her daily work with teachers in their classrooms "Some teachers are blissfully unaware of the curriculum. They work out of textbooks. The curriculum has not made any difference to what they do"

She feels that these teachers need more in-depth engagement with the reforms being introduced. Teachers need to develop confidence and see the reforms implemented in their classrooms and in the school context. However, even with these supports teachers can resist change "You need to give teachers confidence, to give them faith in what they are doing".

Joe believes that to secure change in a school there are two essential components which need to be in place: a school culture that is open to change and strong, good teachers who have the confidence to try new things.

Hannah argues that more on-site supports are required for teachers to change. She reports that the resistant teachers on her staff were left “to their own devices”, unaided in their efforts to make sense of the reforms. Hannah ascribes some of the resistance to the fact that these teachers have been left undisturbed in their classrooms for “25 – 30 years and have never really been challenged to do something different”. The resisters have remained as classroom teachers for almost three decades and have not engaged in continuing professional development. Hannah feels that their resistance is a product of the system that did not require teachers to engage in professional dialogue and thereby, complacency and inertia were encouraged:

By and large, those teachers that I’m talking about, and they are in every school, were left to their own devices. They were bunged off for a day here and a day there. They were given a set of notes and they were given more pressure to write X and they were left on their own.

Hannah feels that one of the greatest sources of discontent is teachers’ perception about the level of planning demanded. Teachers, especially those in the later stages of their careers, would prefer to retain the traditional practices of planning from textbooks. She reports:

I would say honestly that the mature teacher, or the teacher who had grown up in my type of training, a lot of them had done nothing since they got their National Teaching qualification, and these teachers resist change. The younger teachers are more adaptable. They came out of college with the skills. They are willing to share their work and are not embarrassed about showing off something that they had done, which older teachers would be.

Sarah, who works as a curriculum advisor does not feel that a teacher's career phase is the key determinant of his/her willingness to innovate and to engage in change. She notes that teacher commitment is the critical factor in the success of introducing innovations:

There are very committed teachers who want to learn, who want to improve and who have great pride in their teaching. Age doesn't matter. I can see older teachers of my vintage who are looking for the other side of the jigsaw. They have children as their focus and they can see the value of the work for the children. These are the teachers who recognise that it's a legal requirement and responsibility that teachers teach well. There's a moral dimension to what teachers do, when teachers realise that they are doing this for the children and that they are in *loco parentis*.

At whole-school level many of the participants believed that the level of collaboration that exists among the staff is the most important factor in the change process. Sarah feels that a collaborative culture is essential for change to occur:

Change happens where teachers are not afraid to share. They're not afraid of putting their learning out on the corridor or their pupils work out on the corridor and they're not afraid of celebrating each other's work. They are not afraid of complimenting one another.

Peg, who co-ordinates change initiatives at infant level in her school, is critical that the reforms require teachers to collaborate but the structure of the school day has not been changed to support the reforms. As a result, a school culture where changes are discussed and practice is shared is difficult to achieve:

There should be an extra hour in the day when everyone is there and when all liaison is discussed. Gone is the day when you go in and close your door and do your own thing. We have to be able to get together.

Teachers also need to reflect on their practice and to realise that something needs to change. Three of the participants referred to the value of school inspections, also

known as whole-school evaluations (WSE) in stimulating the change agenda in their schools and for identifying aspects of practice that needed improvement. Sarah comments:

I suppose they've come to a place and they realise that what they are doing so far hasn't worked. That where the WSE comes in - it is so vital – it holds up the mirror and allows them to realise it's not working for them, I'm coming in before the WSE and I'm working along. The WSE gives them a wake-up call. It recognises the seeds that have been sown and recognises the developments and gives them a boost of confidence to continue with an innovation.

5.14 Views on Policy

The literature on educational change assumes that teachers in schools are cognisant of current educational policy developments and accordingly play an active role in interpreting and implementing policy. It became evident during the interviews that this assumption does not reflect the subjective realities of most teachers. Participants were asked their views on the policies which had directly impacted on their lives and careers. The term 'policy' remains elusive and some of the participants were unsure what the term meant. Alice commented "Policy is such a broad term. I can't think of any." In some interviews, examples of policy documents or policies were provided to participants to enable them to clarify their ideas or to stimulate discussion.

During her early years in the classroom Sarah was unaware of policies. She remembers "You wrote your notes and your yearly scheme and that was your own. You went to school and did your teaching and you came home. I wasn't aware of any policies." She became a principal of a developing school for a two-year period during the 1990s. She cannot recall any significant external change that was introduced during that time:

No I can't remember anything, because even as principal circulars only came for generic things - they were things that the secretary put into folders and they may have been for the Board of Management. They might have only come once or twice in the year. They might be for grants or for the returns. Being principal at that stage was about running the school, the care of the children and the care of the teachers, the physical environment, getting the school cleaned, opening the school and closing the school.

It was apparent that teachers had little first-hand knowledge or contact with policy texts and as such, were unaware of their main tenets and implications for the way in which schools work and operate. For the most part, the teachers did not recognise the *Education Act 1998* as a policy and when prompted for their views of the policy, some of the participants were unsure of the effects of legislation on their work. Alice remarks provide an illustration of how teachers work within new parameters but are unaware of the impact of these changes for their work:

I couldn't tell you what the Education Act said. I know there was somebody in my last school always rabbiting on saying we should have an Education Act. Off the top of my head the only thing I think it might apply to, and I'm not even sure of it, is the fact that special needs children have to have an individual education plan.

Teachers' work and policy

Sarah feels that teachers' work is divorced from policy. Policy is largely ignored until some external influence spurs teachers and schools into action.

I think teachers see policy as something external – it comes upon them. Each school would have their own policy in terms of their school plan but they don't see it as that. They don't see it as an opportunity to make it one's own. They see it as something they have to do to fulfil a school inspection, something for external pressure. Review or reflection on a policy is only done as a result of an external force. Teachers don't see themselves as innovators or perceive themselves as professionals who can do it for themselves.

Even when teachers recognised that the school had a key role in policy interpretation and implementation through the whole-school planning process, this activity seemed remote from the focus of teaching and learning. Alice comments:

There is a very strong feeling in this school that we make our own policies. In fact, people are fed up with making policies. They prefer to talk about nitty, gritty things.

Alice feels that teachers can influence the policy process within their own schools.

In this way teachers can decide the priorities for their school and make decisions about the way in which they conduct their work:

I think teachers can influence policy through their actions. I mean you can make up a policy and stick to it in your school – that's one way. And once something is written into a policy you have to be aware that it is something you've said you'll do and then actually doing it.

However, most respondents were unsure of how teachers could influence the national policy making process. Peg acknowledges that while teachers play a role on national policy-making committees organised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, she feels that their influence is limited. She cites the introduction of testing at ages seven and eleven as examples of policies that teachers would never endorse:

That's not the way we want to go, you know that teachers aren't having a major say in this policy. But it's going to come in anyway. There are lots of things which we don't have any say over anyway.

Peg feels that the prescriptive nature of the curriculum has curtailed schools' control of their work and has limited teachers' professional autonomy. As a result, teachers' professional judgements have been undermined by the need to adhere to policy and external demands for change. Peg is reluctant to pursue a programme that she feels would be appropriate to the needs of the school as these decisions may be in conflict with those of policy makers and could lead to a negative outcome in a whole-school evaluation. Peg associates inspection processes with the increasing external control of schools:

Well I think we should have more autonomy about the programme in particular about subjects such as history and geography. I feel we should pick three topics a year in history and geography and do those in a way which allows children to discover and emphasises the process. I feel if we made a case for that we could do it. But I don't know – we might be shot down on the WSE.

Sarah feels that teachers are powerless in the policy process. While recognising that teachers have the authority and capacity to make decisions about the way in which they conduct their work, she feels that the local context does not influence national policy. Rather, in her opinion, the policy-making process is an external activity which exerts pressure on teachers. She reflects “We still see it as a juggernaut, its coming down upon us.” Sarah feels that as schools improve their practice and as inspectors legitimate these practices and validate them through external evaluation practices, that local policies may have an impact on the system.

Hannah is convinced that teachers, who engage in the lifelong learning process and acquire additional qualifications and knowledge, influence policy development through their work in their schools. She comments:

They can influence policy because more and more teachers are doing courses. It is almost customary now for younger teachers to have a Master's. That's tremendous. These people are not going into research. They are going back into their own schools having had the ability to research, and they've had the ability to look at the theoretical view or the academic view. Even more and more people are doing doctorates and they are staying in the system with those skills. So yes, they can.

Principal teachers and policies

External policies that drive reform appear to have a strong influence on teachers who assume leadership roles within their schools or who work in advisory roles in schools. These participants were very familiar with policy, understood the policies that were receiving attention and were able to contextualise their role in the policy-making process.

Most principals assumed the role of policy interpretation and implementation and indicated that they felt that it was their responsibility to interpret and filter policies on behalf of the staff. Hannah, as principal, feels that her role is to buffer her teachers from the unnecessary documentation and policy documents which she feels comes to the school on a daily basis. Hannah feels that the daily arrival of circulars, guidelines and evaluation reports results in teachers' lack of engagement with policy texts. She notes:

I spend a lot of time putting things into my red paper bin. I put circulars that are of a mild interest to the school in a big box in the staffroom and I don't burden people with those. Teachers don't read them. It's my job to filter out what I think people will read. I put two or three things into the staffroom for people to look at each month and that's enough for people.

Principals, in their efforts to relieve teachers of the pressure to work through documents, further distanced teachers from the policy process and many teachers are unfamiliar with the range of changes occurring and the purposes of different initiatives. The following comment from Alice illustrates teachers' disengagement from the policy process, their perceptions that the rate of change has intensified and points to the fragmented and transitory nature of many of the policy changes introduced:

When new circulars or reports come to me I think “Not more of this” and then shove it in a drawer. The thing is they come when you’re teaching your class. You look to see if it has anything to do with you, if it doesn’t you put it in a drawer. That’s the way it’s for me anyway and I’d say it’s the same for half the people. There seems to be an endless stream of materials coming in. I resent these big glossy books that come in and they must be costing a fortune and every teacher in the country gets one and teachers never look at them. It’s more of the same. The curriculum is very useful and the pieces to add to the curriculum are useful but I know I’ve gotten at least three of these glossy things in the last year and I couldn’t tell you what they’re about.

Perceptions of the Department of Education and Science

Three of the participants expressed negative views on the role of the Department of Education and Science in the policy make process. Alice asserts “I think they (teachers) put up with the Department. All the changes the DES make are seen as imposed and there’s more and more of this stuff. It doesn’t seem to have an awful lot to do with us.”

Hannah feels that the Department of Education and Science is innovative and creative in its policy responses. However, she feels that education policy needs to be integrated with wider social and economic policies. There is a lack of co-ordination of policies and schools are given more responsibilities than they can realise. She argues:

To give the DES their due, and they get a lot of flack and bad press about having an inward and restricted view of the world, I disagree actually – I think they do quite marvellous things and I think the DEIS is an example in point, it’s really a fantastic opportunity for schools to do something themselves. Not every school is capable of doing it. You can’t deal with the effects of educational disadvantage in a school. You have to look at social exclusion and poverty.

Some of the participants were unaware of the organisations that are responsible for policy development such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

and were not always sure where policies emanated from or what schools should do with policy documents when they received them.

5.15 Maintaining a Balance between Teaching and Personal Life

Many of the participants expressed a deep emotional attachment to their work. They invested heavily in their work and teaching is the site for the development of their self-esteem and self-fulfilment. As professionals, many of the participants felt that their work life is very time consuming and dominates all other aspects of their lives. Sarah works with ten schools to introduce curriculum reforms. Working as an advisor has enhanced her sense of professionalism and she feels a greater sense of control over her work. However, there is a significant price to pay for this commitment in terms of workload and Sarah works during weekends, evenings and during school breaks. Sarah feels she needs more balance in her life:

I love teaching. It takes me a lot of time to prepare. I don't resent it but I've give a lot of personal life to it. I feel pressure that I give teachers something worthwhile. I wonder at times am I too tied up with my teaching. At times, my teaching is actually my life. My zest for learning dominates my teaching. I would like to develop more skills for myself, personal skills in terms of more hobbies.

For most of the participants, their teaching and the other responsibilities which they are required to fulfil as part of their leadership roles in schools, means that work tasks dominate many teachers' lives. Peg reflects that after a lifetime of having to collect her children or bring them to after-school activities, that she is now free to devote all her personal life to school. As a result, she feels that school dominates her life:

For years back my life belonged to others and was governed by what everyone else needed, and it is not now. School is what I want and I'm happy to be able to do it. Everything in my life is based around the school. My friends are school based and then my family.

Some of the participants felt that younger teachers were more successful in managing the work-life balance. Younger teachers were described as enthusiastic and energetic but also not as willing to lead extra-curricular activities or to undertake tasks not specifically related to their work in the classrooms.

Many of the participants have maintained their motivation and their desire to ensure that their pupils benefit from their work. For Sarah, Antoinette and Peg, their teaching careers have remained the ballast upon which other aspects of their lives have balanced. Antoinette clarifies this point:

I feel I have achieved a lot of the goals of this job. I am very content. I have moved from being children-driven to being school-driven. My children have found their niche. My relationship has survived and our careers have succeeded. The stability and happiness in my teaching has grounded me and it has always been a positive influence even when other things in my life were not so good. I feel that I have made a difference to children's lives.

For more than half the participants, this moral perspective underpinned their work, and their success in their teaching, their interactions with their students and with the wider education community. It is a hugely significant aspect of their lives and careers.

5.16 Teaching as a Career

Most of the participants stated that teaching as a profession has changed since they began work in the 1970s and 1980s. Peg feels that the schools are now different places and teachers are required to network with psychologists, speech therapists, and other professionals. They are also required to communicate with parents differently. As a result, she feels that teachers are more professional now than before:

In the past there was a different understanding of professional. But I think people are more aware of being professional now. You are dealing with outside agencies more than you were in the past and you need to be able to do that properly.

Despite participants' positive experiences of teaching, most feel that teaching as a profession had declined in professional and social status. Hannah remarks:

I think teaching is no longer the high status job, particularly at primary level. I think society has changed a lot. Teaching has become more difficult especially in a disadvantaged area. I think parents' values and teachers' values might often be at odds with each other. There are lot of demands on teachers - there are curriculum demands, policies, all the requirements and life is busy. We live in a busy world. As you get older life gets busier as well. They impinge on your ability to do your work.

While acknowledging that teachers are better paid now than in previous times, Hannah feels that financial rewards help to balance the drop in social standing. She notices that young teachers are very comfortable in their role as 'primary teacher', something which she feels was not characteristic of her age cohort of teachers.

Noel contends that the homogenous nature of primary teachers and their common training which persisted until the late 1990s hindered change and cocooned the profession. He welcomes the increasing number of postgraduate courses in teacher education and he attributes this diversity in entry to teaching as one of the factors that has resulted in younger teachers adapting to change more easily. He argues:

A lot of them have come to teaching through a circuitous route. So they are not as generic as we were. Most of us came out of the same box and we nearly knew what each other was thinking. They are different – they are coming from different areas they're coming from nursing, from business and they are bringing their own skills and own experiences to the thing.

As a result, Noel feels that younger teachers are more predisposed to change and to adapt to the changes introduced in terms of teaching approaches:

From the point of view of teaching methods they are much broader, they are willing to try things more than we are and I think they take in more of their training than we did and they are willing to give it a whack.

Peg supports this view and feels that the opening up of additional routes into teaching has contributed to the status of teaching as a profession. She believes that graduates who enter teaching from other disciplines have much to offer in terms of the skills base of teaching and the positive perception of teaching as a career:

Lots of the teachers in this school have done different degrees and have gone to England to qualify. It's fantastic – it adds so much to the profession to have all these skills and it's great to see the profession being valued in this way. That people can do other things and then say “I could teach” is a great boost.

Máire feels that there are better career structures in teaching than ever before and this is a motivational aspect for teachers. She feels that the new teachers coming into teaching are “super-confident”. However, starting teaching again would be an intimidating experience and it is something which she feels she would be incapable of doing:

I think I would find it more intimidating to start teaching now – the amount of notes that the young teachers are required to do and the accountability is considerable. When I started there was an intensive two years and then you relaxed and grew into the job and you felt you had more freedom and weren't monitored - I'd find starting out again to be overwhelming.

Peg also shares her views about the increasing difficulty of the work of a primary teacher. She comments:

It's definitely become more difficult. It's hugely demanding. It could take over your whole life. It's more rewarding. Before we taught by numbers. That's not the case anymore. On top of that you have the special needs and that is a big change. You have people in the classroom. You have all this record-keeping, all these psychological reports and assessments. It just bears no resemblance to the job I started out in the 1970s.

5.17 Future Roles in Education

Many of the participants have taught for more than three decades and decisions about their future are being considered. For a small number of participants such as Sarah and Peg, they are unable to conceptualise the future outside of teaching. These participants struggle to separate their identity as a teacher from their identity as people. Peg articulates the extent to which teaching has a personal and professional significance for her, and defines her personal purpose and brings achievement and motivation:

What matters to me most now, at 54, I suppose, is being good at my job – that's the biggest thing. My family of course - their happiness and security are a priority. From a personal point of view I'd say doing a good job. It's a terrible thing to define yourself by your job but it's very important.

Both participants are content to continue their teaching careers. Sarah intends to continue working with the support services while DEIS is still a policy priority. However, she is also satisfied to return to full-time classroom teaching responsibilities. Her future plans include enhancing her own learning and broadening her interests. Antoinette, on the other hand is looking forward to retiring from teaching and to using her skills and abilities in a new area. She notes:

I feel that I have another phase of my life to live and it has nothing to do with education. I am looking forward to not being a prisoner of time. I am looking forward to getting off the treadmill.

Peg harbours an ambition to complete a degree. Her family responsibilities and her location restricted her opportunities to engage in further education. She reflects:

My older sister did the B.Ed. degree course the last time it was offered but the kids were small and I couldn't be there. But I regret that – I am conscious of the fact that I don't have a degree. I am very conscious of that. And I'm sure no one else is. In a profession where everyone has a degree I think it's terrible to be here without one.

Hannah believes that she will be unable to sustain the commitment required of principals into the future. She would like to work supporting new principals in their leadership roles by becoming an associate of a support service such as Leadership Development in Schools (LDS). She comments:

I think I have done as much as I can do in this school. I think it is time for someone else to take over. I'm eight years in this role and I think it is enough. I think I'll stagnate. I have a sense of power over my own destiny. Mentally I'm beginning to disengage.

Equally, Alice would like to train as a Reading Recovery specialist and work in a dedicated way to support teachers in schools. Joe is in the process of changing roles. During the current school year he will work full-time in an advocacy position for an organisation for principals. He sees his role as influencing national policy and of bolstering primary principals' roles and positions within the education sector.

5.18 Conclusion

The type of change that participants experienced during the late 1980s and 1990s may be categorised as self-generated or professionally initiated innovation. This finding is consistent with trends in other countries and Huberman (1989) argues that teachers, who have spent more than a decade teaching mainstream classes, tend to enter a phase of 'diversification' and 'experimentation' after the period of pedagogical consolidation or 'stabilisation'. Feiman-Nemser (1983) argues that teachers embark on a series of personal experiments by diversifying their roles, their

methods of instruction and their approaches to working with pupils. While many of the roles they adopted were the outcome of government policies, the various initiatives provided career opportunities that facilitated the participants to fulfil their own missions. Change was not perceived by the participants as being externally imposed as the roles the participants adopted resonated with their individual missions.

The diverse roles undertaken by participants during this period caused them initial stress and some felt a lack of confidence. For one participant, the experiences of change were difficult and painful and challenged the participant's sense of self-esteem and her efficacy as a teacher. The cultural and structural characteristics of the school as an organisation impacted on the change process. The extent to which each school supported the various innovations was critical to their success and to the participants' experience of successful implementation. Involvement in change initiatives re-energised participants' commitment to teaching and the innovative teachers became involved in associated activities such as teacher networks, professional development and academic work. The participants, in general, invested personal commitment and emotional energy into their roles and into the initiatives. The initiatives themselves provided the participants with a new world view and with opportunities to refine and to develop their skills. The change in role also acted as a catalyst for other changes in the participants' teaching careers.

From 1999 onwards, reforms in curriculum and the introduction of whole-school planning introduced a new emphasis in primary schools. For the first time,

curriculum change in the Irish context was accompanied by the recognition that teachers required ongoing professional development. Consequently, seminars, workshops and school-based planning days were provided. These changes required teachers to collaborate, to discuss matters concerning teaching and learning and to adopt new methodologies and classroom practices. The analysis of the participants' stories shows that the scale of the change limited the success of the reform. Teachers felt that they were given little time to embed changes in one curriculum area before a new programme was introduced. Teachers implement changes, such as curricular reforms, in an individualistic way and interpret the reforms within their specific contexts.

In disadvantaged schools, policy change meant that literacy and numeracy were prioritised and schools received a range of other initiatives. These changes were welcomed by schools and the sustained model of support provided by a dedicated advisor was perceived to be effective and context specific.

The participants' experiences of change varied. Some participants welcomed the educational changes and other reforms that were introduced. Their sense of professionalism has been enhanced and reforms such as distributed leadership have resulted in these participants holding leadership roles in their schools. Change for these teachers was concerned with having opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills and it offered professional development opportunities and personal growth. In addition to the benefits of collaborative engagement and outside support, the participants (all of whom were female) referred to the positive implication change had for the pupils and communities that their schools were based.

However some participants found the change process difficult. While acknowledging that their own classroom practice had changed and developed, they expressed uncertainty about the extent of the changes on a whole-school level. Participants responded to various reform efforts in an individual way. Reforms that achieved currency with participants were those that resonated with teachers' personal interpretative frameworks. Participants adapted these reforms to their specific contexts. In this way, participants remained in control of the reforms and retained professional autonomy.

All of the participants perceived the introduction of team teaching, the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into schools and the focus on the process of learning as positive developments associated with reform initiatives. Some of the participants resisted the requirements for new forms of whole-school and classroom planning and found that planning had little resonance for their practical work. Participants who were working as classroom teachers did not engage with policy documents and felt that their influence on policy was negligible. Policy was seen as external, imposed by the Department of Education, curriculum advisors and inspectors, and unrelated to their work in their classrooms.

The participants referred to the increasing work demands in recent years. However, the sources of work intensification were not only external. Individual teachers, who strive to improve their teaching and to provide the best for their pupils, can themselves be sources for increased pressure through their engagement in a variety

of initiatives that are additional to the national change agenda. Teachers who engaged in research projects and other school-based initiatives felt professionally autonomous to make decisions and to interpret national reforms in ways that tessellated with their own practice in the classroom.

The data suggest that leadership in schools serving areas of disadvantage is primarily concerned with maximising, conserving and renewing people's energy through distributing leadership, building relationships and focusing on areas of the curriculum prioritised by principals. While all the participants who worked as principals prioritised literacy and numeracy and supported the DEIS initiatives, teaching and learning did not dominate their change agenda. These principals tried to harness the human potential that resided within and outside the school. Local priorities for change such as raising the profile of the school or undertaking a new school building consumed their energies. The principals relied on staff members to drive the focus on improving teaching and learning. Their work centred on creating strong school communities built upon teamwork, trust, dialogue and sharing. Principals tried to maintain staff unity and cohesion. They realised that many teachers in their schools resisted change. Many of these teachers were entering the later stages of their careers and principals were resigned to maximising the energies of enthusiastic teachers, many of whom were young to lead different initiatives.

Each principal pursued what they believed was the best for their schools and their children. The principals' contribution to the reform process in each of their schools was similar: they had a leadership role in prioritising the reform agenda of the

school based on the school context, their leadership style and their personal missions. Therefore, they shaped the reform process through ascribing importance to different initiatives and through adapting the reform to fit their local contexts of implementation.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The participants' life histories provide unique insights into their personal and professional lives and careers spanning three decades. The stories originate in their early family lives and they illustrate the personal beliefs and values as well as the educational experiences, critical incidents and decisions which shape the participants' identities as teachers. While each participant sees the world through "a different prism of practice and thought" (Goodson & Walker, 1991, pp. 148 - 149), their life histories draw attention to the fact that teachers' responses to reform initiatives and experiences of change depend on their personal identities, work contexts, professional knowledge and opportunities for development.

This concluding chapter returns to the primary research question which examines the extent to which teachers' lives and work are influenced by policy, change and reform. In analysing the spectrum of participants' responses, several themes emerge. These are presented under broad headings: teachers' experiences of change and reform; teachers' perspectives on policy; teachers' career stages; and the broad movements of educational change that are refracted through teachers' lives and work. Finally the chapter concludes with the implications of the research and suggests some areas for further study.

6.2 Teachers' Experiences of Change and Reform

Role diversification emerges as a constant motif in many of the participants' teaching careers. The majority of participants experienced role change through engagement with reforms that had their origin in external change initiatives. Many of the government reforms introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s were specific initiatives or policies borrowed from other countries, and without detailed guidelines for their enactment in the Irish setting. Consequently, they provided opportunities for teachers to adapt the reform, to make change their own and to generate creative responses within their own school contexts. As a result, the teachers gained ownership of the changes and they aligned the reforms with their interests and purposes.

During the 1980s and early 1990s little attention was given to investing in organisational learning or to the leadership of change. Consequently, many of the participants who became involved in change initiatives had to make a significant personal investment in these reforms in order to ensure their success in their school contexts. In most cases the principals of their schools delegated the leadership of the change to the reforming teacher. The participants became change agents, driving the reforms and as a result, the changes were perceived as positive and compatible with teachers' personal and professional goals. This input was so intense that the reforms became internalised and therefore they were not perceived by the participants as imposed or externally generated. This finding is congruent with Hargreaves' (2004) study of Canadian teachers which concluded that the origin of reforms was not an important determinant of the success of initiatives; rather, the level to which teachers

are supported and the benefits of the reform for their students were more significant factors for teachers. The data from this study suggest that the reform initiatives that participants engaged in had benefits for them professionally as well as for their students. The participants remained professionally autonomous and exercised judgement over the extent of their engagement with the reforms, thus working as ‘street level bureaucrats’ as described by Lipsky (1980).

Participants who changed role early in their careers continued to develop expertise through their involvement in different initiatives. Reform and change for these teachers were concerned with having opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills and they offered professional development opportunities and conditions for personal growth. They allowed the participants to expand their responsibilities outside the classroom and to refine their activities within classrooms. Reform and innovation meant developing a deeper knowledge of their professional practice. The desire of this group of participants to continuously broaden their horizons and to experience new challenges is unique. As participants became confident in their roles and profited from self-initiated professional development courses, they needed to face a new challenge within their own schools.

The teachers were motivated to experience change as a form of investment in their careers. Their engagement in reforms was stimulated by “altruistic, intrinsic or extrinsic motivations” (Rippon, 2005, p.284). As the participants became more professionally confident, they engaged in self-initiated reforms that benefited their students and which granted them recognition from parents and from their colleagues. For the participants, the reforms that allowed opportunities for teachers to mould

and shape the initiative, that matched participants' personal and professional purposes and which provided opportunities for personal and professional growth and development proved to be the most successful. These findings align with Hargreaves' (2004) view that "External change can lead to positive and productive teacher emotions if it is inclusive of teachers' purposes, respectful of their priorities and sensitive to their working and implementation conditions" (p. 301).

Curriculum reform and strategic planning

Large-scale reform, particularly relating to curriculum change and whole-school planning, consumed the energies of teachers during the last ten years and has negative emotional associations for most of the participants. Many of the teachers found themselves overwhelmed by the scale of the reform and by policy congestion. This finding supports Van den Berg's (2002) thesis that the introduction of too many policy changes at the same time is counterproductive. There is little evidence, from this data, to suggest that instructional practices have changed as a result of the reforms. Rather, curriculum change resulted in reduced levels of self-efficacy and in feelings of disempowerment for some of the participants.

The introduction of strategic planning in conjunction with the introduction of the revised curriculum was perceived negatively by some of the participants who saw little connection between whole-school plans and their practice in the classroom. The requirement to produce whole-school plans for each aspect of the school's work exhausted staff's energies. In many schools planning became a substitute for action and distracted teachers from the central component of the reform, which was to improve teaching and learning strategies. The requirement to constantly engage in

whole-school planning had little impact on teachers' practice and failed to gain commitment from the participants.

The participants' experiences of change and reform were influenced by the school context, the commitment to learning in the school and the leadership of the school. These themes are discussed in the next section.

6.2.1 The Influence of School Contexts

The data illustrate that school contexts are highly influential determinants of the success of an initiative. Similar findings on the importance of school contexts have been highlighted in the work of Evans (2001) and Fullan (2001b). Participants' experiences of change, as either positive or negative, depended on the climate of the school and the support provided from staff members. This finding resonates with Hargreaves' (1994) view that the context in which change is introduced is important for the choices and the decisions which teachers make and underscores their responses to change efforts. The data from this research indicate that even when teachers experienced resistance or had negative experiences during involvement with change initiatives, these were not sufficient to deter the participants from engaging in subsequent reforms. While a small number of the participants worked as change agents in hostile school environments, they retained a desire to innovate, to revitalise their teaching, to develop their skills and to engage in ongoing learning. Professional networks and professional development were important supports in maintaining their enthusiasm and their receptivity to change.

The participants who worked in disadvantaged schools had more opportunities to change role and to experience change and reform than their colleagues working in middle-class settings. The challenges provided by the work setting served as a catalyst for change and renewal. A small number of the participants worked in schools where there was an emerging professional community which is often described in the literature as a “teacher learning community” (Talbert & McLaughlin 1994, 2002). Teachers in these schools collaborated to a greater extent about teaching and the organisation of supports for their pupils. The data suggest that many of the participants were indifferent to the possibilities of collaboration in the early stages of initiatives. Some clung to their classroom autonomy when efforts to engage in team teaching or other activities were forced on them by colleagues. As participants engaged in the reforms, they expressed a growing commitment to collaboration and they recognised its importance in the landscape of teaching. Similar outcomes are documented by Lieberman and Miller (2004) on teachers’ participation in learning communities in the United States.

There is some evidence from the participants to suggest that middle class schools emerge as more conservative workplaces where value is placed on academic knowledge, the preservation of a homogenous pupil community and the maintenance of traditional models of school organisation and methodologies. Dealing with diversity presents a significant challenge for these schools. Within these settings, participants’ experienced resistance and hostility when they endeavoured to initiate reforms in teaching practices or when they introduced changes that were perceived as threats to the profile of the school or the autonomy of

the teachers. Changes that affected ethos, power and relationships in the school were challenged and caused resistance and conflict (Conley, 1997).

There was strong resistance to innovations where staff relations and communication were poor or when there was a lack of consensus concerning the school's core purposes. These findings resonate with McLaughlin and Talbert's (2006) work on building teacher communities. Participants who worked in weak school communities were demoralised by a lack of collegial support and this was particularly acute in schools where teachers worked in an individualised culture. As a result, participants felt vulnerable, especially when they believed that they were innovating alone. The innovating teachers' professional roles and relationships were compromised. In some instances these feelings contributed to the innovating teachers' departure from the school or their disengagement from the projects, thus supporting Fullan's assertion that critical incidents can have negative effects on teachers' career patterns (Fullan, 1991).

One of the most important school-based factors in the reform process was the support of a committed, authentic and strong leader. Leadership for change can come from different levels within the school as an organisation. The principals of participants' schools emerge as central figures in the reforms, in some cases providing vision, guidance and support; in others, diminishing the reform through prejudice or disappointing the participants through their neglect of them as change agents. It is interesting that a small number of participants referred to working in a school where the leader had a defined vision of education and for the school. In these contexts, the charisma of the leader inspired other teachers to change and they

were successful in initiating innovations in the school and motivated the team to focus on whole-school goals.

Professional structures which emerge as powerful influences on participants include teacher networks and professional development opportunities. The findings in relation to professional development and change are discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Professional Development and Change and Reform

The participants' life histories emphasise the centrality of high-quality professional development in their professional careers (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Engagement in meaningful continuing professional development and the completion of diploma and degree courses provided the participants with the theoretical frameworks, the skills to engage more fruitfully with the reforms and it enabled them to contextualise their work within the education system.

The inservice provided to support national reforms since 1999 was criticised for its fragmentation, its disconnection to the participants' schools contexts, and its irrelevance to the needs of the teachers or to their pupils. Little (1993, p.138) describes generic orientation courses, such as those provided for teachers at the start of an innovation, as "shallow". Some participants felt that their efficacy in teaching aspects of the curriculum had been diminished by the national supports provided. As Bandura (2000, p.120) warns, when teachers doubt their capabilities, they "slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions."

Participants who experienced DEIS as a reform were much more satisfied with the professional development supports which were customised for their specific school contexts. They welcomed the sustained nature of the supports provided and the opportunity to learn from other teachers, both inside and outside the school. Elmore (2006) argues that teachers need to engage in this type of continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they actually work.

More than half of the participants engaged in Master's degree programme for personal and professional renewal and for intellectual satisfaction. The receptiveness and enthusiasm for professional development are clearly demonstrated in the teachers' innate motivation to enhance their knowledge in the classroom, as well as in their lives and in their profession. The participants looked for deeper experiences of learning, which is compatible to the image of "teacher as intellectual" rather than teacher as technician (Giroux, 1988).

Teacher networks

The life histories illustrate the importance of teaching networks in sustaining the participants' involvement in change initiatives and in providing opportunities for teachers to work in collaborative relationships. They reveal the way in which teachers' motivations and commitment to the reforms were sustained and nurtured through their engagement in teacher communities.

Teacher networks emerge as a significant support for teachers during periods of change (Lieberman & Mace, 2008). Almost all of the participants engaged in teacher networks at different stages during their careers. Many of the participants worked in

isolation on a specific innovation and the networks enabled them to gain a sense of ownership of the initiative and to meet and interact with teachers or other professionals who had a vested interest in the area. Therefore, as teachers became involved in initiatives in areas such as special education and learning support they started to rely more on other teachers for professional development. During network meetings the teachers pooled resources, and made sense of the innovations within their schools. This form of networking enabled the participants to develop new skills and dispositions. The opportunities to meet teachers and other professionals to discuss educational ideas and to receive feedback from one another on aspects of their work and to make their practice public were important for the participants (Lieberman, 2006). Networks facilitated teachers in reworking their roles and identities as professionals in a more consciously collegial educational environment (Lieberman & Mace, 2008).

The participants exercised different roles, responsibilities and relationships in the networks. Many of the participants held leadership roles in these networks and they devised programmes to extend and expand teachers' professional development. The networks also contributed to the capacity building nationally. Many of the curriculum advisors, who subsequently emerged to lead professional development courses as the revised curriculum was introduced at a national level, had been active members of school networks at local level.

Participation in the teacher networks provided the stimulus for many of the participants to sustain their involvement in reforms, particularly in those schools where there were resistance and hostility towards the innovation or the teacher

associated with the innovation. The participants looked to other teachers involved in similar initiatives for a sense of direction and mutual support (Day, 1999). Teacher networks outside the school context sometimes provided the only strong professional community for teachers working in schools with limited collegial interaction.

Some of the participants found that the networks had an advocacy role and developed into powerful coalitions and lobby groups. In this context networks are situated between “macro” or system-level reforms and the “micro” realities of teachers’ classrooms (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). In particular, the principals were able to use their professional knowledge which they had honed in their schools and further extended through their work in teacher networks, to represent their views on developing policy with policy makers in the Department of Education and Science.

Leadership roles

Almost all of the participants assumed leadership roles within their schools, within teacher networks and in national policy groups. Through their work they were able to share their vision for change and to motivate other teachers to participate in the reforms or to work in more collaborative ways.

The sharing of leadership roles was viewed positively by the participants who felt empowered in the life of the school. Leithwood (2005) argues that middle management structures allow the skill potential of the staff to be optimised. The participants felt that through sharing their expertise and their craft knowledge within

the school, and within networks or with other professionals, that they were making a positive contribution to the overall performance of their pupils. While the structure of the school day has not changed and teachers' contracts remain unaltered, those with leadership responsibilities accommodated the need to work with others to implement change through after-school meetings. This aspect of change added to the sense of intensification of work and to participants feeling that their personal and work lives were interlinked (Hargreaves, 1994).

Principal teachers have a unique role in the change process. They manage competing sets of realities including the national priorities set by government and the community location and the social needs of their pupils as well as the internal climate of the school itself. Principals' prioritised the long-term interests of their schools rather than centrally, mandated change. The personal missions of principals influenced their change agenda and some of their personal priorities corresponded to the national policy priorities. A significant finding of this research is that principals did not perceive their role as instructional or curricular leaders. This task was usually delegated to the middle management team of their schools. Principals acted as gatekeepers to the policies which were issued centrally. They endeavoured to protect their staffs from the perceived excesses of policy texts which were circulated to schools.

Teachers experience change and reform as an emotionally-laden process (Hargreaves 1998a, 1998b) and the factors which sustain teachers' engagement in innovations are integral to teachers' identity and revolve around the concepts of

teacher commitment and motivation. These findings are discussed in the following section.

6.2.3 Emotions and the Experience of Change and Reform

Hargreaves (1998) asserts that emotions are at the heart of teaching. The participants referred to the centrality of emotions in the change process and recounted the influence of the innovations on their emotional well-being.

All the participants felt that their self-esteem and efficacy as teachers were challenged at the start of each role change or innovation in which they were involved. Their role and their credibility among their colleagues were questioned. These findings resonate with Huberman and Miles (1984, p.72) who found that changing instructional and management practices frequently involves “confusion, self-doubt, temporary setbacks, plateaus that seem to last forever, new procedures for daily work...and other uncertainty-arousing events that most people would rather not endure on a regular basis.” When reforms became a more established feature of the work of schools, participants generally felt a growing sense of confidence in their abilities to manage the reforms and the various demands associated with them.

The experience of curriculum reform led to a sense of lost confidence for some participants (Helsby, 1999). For others it led to a sense of stress and frustration at not being able to implement all that was demanded from each of the curriculum subjects. None of the school-based participants spoke passionately about their experiences of curriculum change. As Goodson and Hargreaves (2003) reflect,

innovations that are devoid of passion and purpose can result in reforms that languish “often producing results which are minimal or even contradictory” (p. 67).

However, the participants who had engaged in self-initiated projects spoke excitedly about their work. They believed in the changes they were bringing about, and they were passionate about the effects of their work in classrooms. This finding supports Goodson and Hargreaves’ (2003) thesis of the “personality of change”. Curriculum reform only becomes personally meaningful for teachers when it is connected with personal change and development.

Teacher commitment has been identified as one of the most critical factors in the success of education (Nias, 1981) and it is a central aspect of teachers’ professional identity. This study indicates that teacher commitment is central to the success of educational change and that the participants who emerged as change agents articulated high levels of commitment to their work. They expressed care for their students, and they made a significant personal and professional investment into their work, their relationships with their students, the parents and other teachers. As a result, teaching was inextricably linked with their personal lives and their personal identity. This finding echoes Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999) theory that the concepts of commitment and emotion are interconnected in teachers. This research illustrates that teachers’ personal lives and their emotional well-being are central to understanding teachers’ perceptions of their work and the relationships they make at work.

This study foregrounds the importance of teachers' moral commitment to the success of educational reforms. Similar findings are reported by researchers such as Hargreaves (1998) and Day et al. (2006). The participants engaged in reforms which they felt had been in the best interests of their students and their sense of success and satisfaction were largely derived from their students' achievements.

6.3 Teachers' Perspectives of Policy and Policy Making

The participants' attitudes to policy are determined by their roles within the education system. Principals and curriculum advisors were generally more aware of policy and policy priorities than classroom teachers. The principals were very familiar with policy, understood the policies that were receiving attention and were able to contextualise their role in the policy-making process.

One of the most important findings of this research is classroom teachers' lack of engagement with policy. Given the unique profile of this cohort of participants, the majority of whom hold a range of postgraduate qualifications, it is surprising that the participants were so disconnected from the policy process. The research indicates that classroom teachers were unaware of policies, felt disengaged from the policy process and they perceived that too many policies were issued to schools. As a result, policies became fragmented and transitory, thus providing support for Spillane's (2002) view that policy implementation is severely impaired when there is policy ambiguity and overload.

The rational-technical model of policy making suggests that the introduction of change and reform requires teachers and schools to take an active role in interpreting

and implementing policy. The life histories indicate that classroom teachers had little first-hand knowledge or contact with policy texts and were unaware of the implications of policy for the way in which schools work and operate. Policy is largely ignored until some external influence spurs teachers and schools into action. Whole-school evaluations were perceived by some participants as a catalyst for engaging in policy but this engagement was usually short-lived. As a result, many of the policies remained, in Goodson's (2001) terms, more symbolic rather than substantive. These findings are consistent with Levin and Fullan's (2008, p.298) assertion that many teachers are "entirely unaware of their district's or state's priorities and strategies"

The scale of the changes introduced by the curriculum reforms and the whole-school planning process meant that the participants had to absorb changes in content and methods associated with an entire curriculum as well as engage in whole school planning. Darling-Hammond (1990) reminds us that "policies do not land in a vacuum; they land on top of other policies" (p. 346). The curriculum adoption schedule for the revised curriculum framework has kept primary teachers permanently in an implementation-of-innovation process for the last ten years (Little, 1993). As well as exhausting teachers' energies, the scale of the reforms limited their success. Teachers felt that they were given little time to embed changes in one curriculum area before a new programme was introduced. Some participants perceived that there is change overload and that it would be impossible for teachers to implement all the reforms. As Levin and Fullan (2008, p.293) warn, "Trying to improve everything all at the same time inevitably leads to dispersion of effort, burnout, and failure to achieve anything worthwhile."

Participants felt that they could influence the policy process within their own schools but their involvement in, and commitment to, policy-making was limited. Internal or external policies were not assigned priority in the teachers' lives or work. The participants, who have high levels of motivation and deep professional knowledge, were not unduly influenced by policies in their schools. Therefore, it may be reasonable to deduce that these policies may be largely ignored by other teachers or reinterpreted sufficiently to fit the participants' current practice resulting in little, if any, change. Policies were therefore re-interpreted and subject to evolution at school-level and at classroom-level.

Most respondents were unsure of how teachers could influence the national policy-making process. However, participants who engaged in teacher networks sometimes acted as interpreters of policy at local level and in one instance, influenced the national policy-making process. Networks provided an important site for policy interpretation and negotiation.

6.4 Teachers' Position within the Life Cycle

The literature on the career phases of teachers suggest that teachers progress through a series of relatively distinct stages in their careers, each of these stages is marked by different emotions suggesting anticipated behaviours and dispositions. The findings of this research suggest that Irish teachers do not progress in a linear or identical way through the different phases of their careers. They also indicate that the career trajectories suggested by the literature do not provide sufficient explanatory power for the participants' biographies. Some participants experienced several career

phases suggested by Sikes et al. (1985), Huberman et al. (1993) and Day et al. (2006). Others experienced longer periods in a smaller number of phases. The length and number of the phases are contingent on each individual's personal circumstances, personal traits and biography. They are also influenced by the critical incidents which the participants experienced in their lives, the success of their engagement in different roles and in change initiatives. Other important factors include the culture and micro-politics of their schools, the range of professional development they have engaged in and the specific networks and support organisations they have encountered in their work.

All the participants experienced an initial phase of discovery and survival. This was a busy time of personal growth and six teachers changed schools during this period. These changes were prompted by other factors in their lives such as getting married, establishing relationships, moving closer to home and bereavement in the family. Many of the participants experienced stabilisation and instructional mastery and comfort within the first two years. Some participants experienced a long stable period which was marked by routine, ease in the role, and when some of the participants had no desire to change.

Several of the participants experienced a phase of experimentation and activism much earlier than is suggested in the literature. Three teachers left their schools after the first two years. They were seeking challenge and variety and they wanted to increase their impact in their new school by assuming responsibilities and roles and by trying to introduce changes. For some teachers, role transition and further career experiences, together with participation in professional networks and professional

learning, contributed to a developing sense of control over their work and the school context. The ability to experience success in different roles enhanced their positive professional image. Many of the participants experienced several cycles of role change, postgraduate studies and membership of various networks during their careers.

The participants in this study are in the later stages of their careers. The career cycles described in the literature suggest that this stage may be manifested either in a loss of enthusiasm, a feeling of stagnation, and detachment with few opportunities for personal growth (Huberman, 1989; Sikes et al., 1985) or in feelings of high commitment and motivation where teachers derived satisfaction from their relationships with their pupils (Day, 2008). The various frameworks do not fully explain the participants' motivation for self-renewal, professional development, and role diversification in the later stages of their careers. Many of the participants continue to engage in reforms and change role. Several of the participants expressed a desire to avail of future job opportunities in primary education.

Commitment to teaching

The majority of the participants are committed to their personal and professional development. Participation in change initiatives provided them with opportunities for career changes and personal growth. The participants' life histories portray a cohort of teachers, in the later stages of their teaching career, who remain open to change. They derived significance from their educational activity and are driven by the need to develop their cognitive, professional abilities.

The absence of burnout and stagnation and the parallel feelings of increased commitment and motivation to experience different roles and to develop their professional knowledge are characteristics of the participants who have experienced feelings of efficacy and success in their teaching careers. All the participants were emotionally attached to their work and to the welfare of their students. The core personal values such as the ethic of hard work, the pursuit of high standards, and the fulfilment achieved through learning remained equally important for the participants as they enter the later stages of their careers. The participants willingly gave of their personal time and energies to ensure that they carried out their professional roles effectively. They invested in their careers by undertaking professional development courses outside of school time that contributed to their overall personal and professional development. The personal qualities that reinforced the need for renewal, personal fulfilment and advancement, as well as the personal biography that includes changes and success together with high-quality professional structures, are factors that shape strong and active teachers.

6.5 Broad Movements of Educational Change

Participants believe that there has been a seismic shift in the way that schools and teachers work. Sarason (1982) argues that the school system is not closed but is highly influenced by other systems in society. The work of teachers has changed irrevocably. Their classrooms are no longer self-contained, private areas where teachers work and exert control. Teachers' roles have been transformed and the familiar ways of teaching have changed. Classrooms have become fractured. They are transient sites for learning which are characterised by a flow of additional

support teachers and special needs assistants working with individual pupils. Teachers are beginning to work more closely with each other, establishing relationships with their peers and professional learning communities are beginning to take root.

Teachers feel that, as a professional group, they had lost status within society. Teachers' professional standing, which had traditionally derived from the esteem publicly accorded to their knowledge and skills deployed in their day to day practice, decreased in the later stages of the twentieth century. The participants believe that as the population becomes more educated, the status accorded to teachers will further diminish.

The participants felt that they were more accountable now than before. In the early 1970s and 1980s, teachers' moral and personal probity were the source of comment, review and evaluation by parents, the church and society in general. The emphasis on accountability has shifted from the virtue of teachers' characters to a focus on their work in the school. Teachers with moral purpose demanded a higher level of teaching skill from themselves now than before and they are more accountable to pupils, parents and their school community. These findings resonate with the work of Day et al. (2006) who argue that social movements place increased demands on teachers to improve their teaching expertise. These demands involve a concomitant increase in teachers' emotional commitment to their work.

In many countries, the persisting effect of increased accountability is to erode teachers' autonomy and challenge teachers' individual and collective professional

and personal identities (Apple, 1986; Valli & Buese, 2007). This research suggests that while there are increasing external demands on teachers to implement change, the participants exercised their professional capacity as teachers to take effective discretionary action in their classrooms. The impact of external reforms did not disempower or de-professionalise the participants who continued to exercise their abilities to work creatively and to devise local solutions to aspects of practice that required attention. The participants continued to make policy at street-level (Lipsky, 1980) and this discretion facilitated participants to take ownership of reforms.

The life histories provide rich data which demonstrate that teachers' work has intensified and that change has become a constant element of teachers' lives and in the organisation of schools. The data indicate that teachers' work is more complex and challenging than ever before. Teachers have a range of complex roles within their school organisation and within the classroom. Similar to other developed countries, teachers' work is becoming more intense. The study found that the participants also placed higher moral purposes on themselves and their commitment to professional learning and the pursuit of skilful teaching were central to their lives and careers.

6.6 Implications of the Research for Policy, Change and Reform

This research on teachers' responses to change and reform echoes some of the findings from the international literature on policy implementation, the intensification of teachers' work and the emotional demands of change and reform as described by Ball (2003), Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008), Hargreaves (2004) and Goodson et al. (2006). This study demonstrates that the Irish change environment is unique and is characterised by highly educated and vibrant teachers who are in the later stages of their careers. The research illustrates that the large scale reform of the last decade is occurring against the backdrop of a deeply conservative school culture. Irish schools remained largely unaffected by policy, change and reform until the mid-1990s. The significant changes in the organisation of schools, the introduction of curriculum and school planning processes and the growing diversity in the school population have ongoing implications for teachers' work. The findings of this research have consequences for the work of policy makers, support agencies, and schools.

The research points to the continued importance of attracting high-quality teachers into the teaching profession. The capacity of the participants is evident in their abilities to become change agents in a conservative climate and to mould and shape the innovations in which they have engaged. The participants' comments with regard to the need for personal and professional growth suggest that they engaged in reflective practice and endeavoured to develop as intellectuals as well as effective practitioners in their schools. Teachers who invest in their intellectual development throughout their careers display openness to new ideas and demonstrate a need to

understand the underlying principles of the reforms they are implementing. This finding has implications for the Department of Education and Science. All professional development courses, whether provided through national support structures or through universities and colleges, should facilitate teachers to acquire recognised post-graduate qualifications. There is a need to further incentivise teachers to complete post-graduate qualifications and to engage in life-long learning.

The participants' experiences of reform during the 1980s and 1990s highlight that many of the policies introduced were not fully defined before their introduction into schools. The life histories underscore the need for policy makers to devise policy texts which outline clearly the rationale for the initiative and which establish the roles of each of the policy actors involved in the implementation of reforms. They draw attention to the requirement to involve the whole-school community in the change initiative and to invest in the leadership of reforms within the school, which is the main site for implementation. They highlight the vulnerability of individual teachers who carry the primary responsibility for the success of a reform and the importance of providing well-devised supports for these teachers. At times, reforms have been catapulted into schools before the associated supports or professional development structures were in place. These findings emphasise that central government needs to give equal attention to policy texts, the implementation of policies in schools and the building of a shared understanding about the nature of the changes involved. There needs to be a greater understanding, as Fullan (2007, p.84) suggests, that educational change is technically simple but socially complex and that further central attention needs to be placed on the implementation phase of reforms.

The large scale national reforms introduced since 1999 have changed teachers' work in important and fundamental ways. Introducing change in a stable and conservative milieu poses specific challenges. The reforms demanded significant cultural changes from teachers who previously worked in an individual and isolated way. The reforms required teachers to work in collaborative structures, to engage in professional dialogue and to open the classroom to a range of professionals. These reforms demanded changes in several aspects of the schools' work including the way teachers interact with each other, the organisational capacity of schools, the style of school leadership and the transformation of schools into learning organisations. The reforms also placed increasing requirements on teachers to exercise higher levels of professionalism and demanded greater levels of voluntary and personal commitment from teachers to their work.

The research identifies that these reforms were introduced in an environment where that there was an absence of concomitant structural changes in primary education to facilitate the embedding of reforms. The structure of the school day and the school year has not altered significantly since the establishment of the National School system of education in 1831. Equally, teachers' contracts of employment remain linked to the patron of the school and encompass requirements regarding secular and religious instruction. Therefore, the involvement of teachers in team structures in schools to plan for teaching and learning was contingent, in most contexts, on their voluntary commitment. The introduction of a range of reforms which requires significant teacher engagement in non-classroom teaching activities must be accompanied by structural changes which broadens the remit of teachers and allows them to engage meaningfully in the reform. Therefore, these findings have

significant implication for teacher unions, the administrative sections of the Department of Education and Science, teachers and patron bodies.

This research has significant implications for national policy makers. The data illustrate that the introduction of too many reforms together results in policy overload. Policy congestion means that teachers are unsure of the national priorities and all policy texts appear to have similar weight and import within the education system. This finding implies that policymakers need to convey key policy messages clearly and consistently to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the policy's intent. The data point to the need for the Department of Education and Science and other organisations charged with a policy mandate to engage in a process of constant communication with the public and the various stakeholders to build understanding of, and support for, the change agenda. The dissemination of policy texts in a variety of formats to schools would facilitate more access to governmental policies. The data suggest that more public debate on the education system, that engages teachers as meaningful partners in the policy process, needs to be undertaken.

The research points to the need for policy-makers to re-consider the number of reforms they introduce at the same time. Currently, various sections of the Department of Education and Science and its agencies, each have an independent policy making remit. They devise policies separately and circulate these policy texts to schools. The outcomes of this research highlight the need for the establishment an overarching policy section within the DES that co-ordinates and monitors the number of policies disseminated to schools. This group would ensure the phased introduction of policies so that schools are aware of policy directions and priorities.

This section should analyse the risks attached to the implementation of a policy and the demands which a policy places on schools and teachers.

The life histories draw attention to the fact that the depth of teachers' emotional investment in an innovation is of great importance to the successful implementation of the reform. The findings indicate that teachers need to have a clear rationale for changing their practice and should have a clear understanding of the benefits that a change in practice will have for their teaching. Policy makers and implementing agencies need to invest significantly in facilitating teachers to understand why a reform is required and the benefits it affords, pupils, teachers and schools. This finding has implications in particular for the support agencies. It underscores the need for additional emphasis to be placed on the cognitive and emotional components of policy implementation.

The findings have implications for those involved in the implementation phase of reforms. They suggest that policy makers and support services need to re-appraise the strategies employed to bring about sustainable change in practice in schools. The development of more context-specific solutions, devised in collaboration with teachers, may have a deeper impact than generic supports that are currently provided for innovations. The importance of national support agencies engaging with teachers in a dialogue about the depth and level of supports that they require is highlighted in the research. The need for focused supports for principals in leading change within their specific school contexts is also emphasised by this study. It illustrates that policies such as DEIS are successful in many schools when the inservice support is designed with the specific context of the school in mind. The research shows that

reform strategies must be explained in a way that engages the idealism and professional commitment of teachers.

The research points to the need for the Teaching Council and other education stakeholders to prioritise the establishment of learning communities and to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and engage in networks and coalitions where teaching is discussed and debated and reforms are interrogated so that teachers can gain ownership of them and see their relevance for their classrooms.

The research has implications for schools and for teachers. While some success has been achieved in some schools settings in relation to building collaborative cultures, the findings indicate that teacher commitment is still an individual attribute that is rarely harnessed in a collective manner for the development of learning-enriched schools. The development of professional learning communities, where curriculum and instructional leadership are emphasised, remain an implementation challenge.

6.7 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The research design for this inquiry has some weaknesses which have already been outlined in Chapter Three. Other weaknesses emerged when the interviews had been completed and the data were coded and analysed.

The teachers interviewed for this study are drawn from one specific age group. By focusing on one group of teachers it was hoped that a career trajectory of primary teachers at one stage of their career would be generated by the research. The characteristics of this group of teachers in terms of their leadership abilities, their

commitment to lifelong learning, their pursuit of academic qualifications, their willingness to diversify roles and to engage in teachers networks, all point to a group of teachers that is unique in many respects. Almost all of the participants involved have completed postgraduate work or have earned Master's degrees. The distinctive experiences and characteristics of the teachers in this group suggest to the researcher that these attributes, qualifications and expertise may not be replicated in many other cohorts of teachers drawn from the same age range.

Finally, as outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis of participants' life stories is recognised in the literature as a construction based upon the researcher's interpretation of events (Denscombe, 1998). Therefore, while the data were analysed carefully and the analysis of the data written with the aim of presenting the life histories of the participants as objectively as possible, the researcher is aware of Denscombe's (1998) caveat that the data presented will necessarily suggest the researcher's "reflection of the reality of the situation they set out to study" (p.88).

Further research

In the remainder of this section some practical issues and theoretical questions that require further research and action are identified.

It is important to note that this research was conducted in 2008 during a period of economic prosperity and optimism when teachers, similar to other public service workers, were well remunerated and schools were well-resourced. This was an age of materialism and of capitalism. It brought with it professional opportunities in education, a range of societal and economic changes and a more global, confident

outlook that characterised every aspect of Irish life. The participants' responses, views and meanings which they ascribed to their experiences of change and reform were generated against a time of security, change and affluence.

It is difficult to conjecture whether the responses of these participants to policy change and reform would be as positive if the life history interviews were conducted in the midst of the economic decline which has shaken Irish society in 2009. Teachers, as well as all other sectors of Irish life, are required to work within limited budgets, with less staff and for reduced financial rewards. The replication of this research in a period of economic decline may yield different but equally important results.

A longitudinal study of teachers, that represent all ages and stages of the career trajectory and their experiences of change and reform, would provide rich data on the complexity of reform process and its impact on teachers' lives and work. In particular, gaining an insight into teachers' biographies, participation in continuing professional development, career phases, school cultures and classroom practices and the relationships between these different factors would provide an in-depth account of teachers' lives. The results of such a study would contribute to more effective support systems for teacher development and for the change process.

Further research on teachers' cognition of policies and their understanding of how policies impact on their work should be undertaken. In particular, gaining insight into the factors which contribute to policies being adopted into practice or rejected as irrelevant would provide further insights into the policy process. The findings of

this research would provide useful information to policy makers about capacity building for schools in the future and would outline the incentives which make a difference to schools.

A longitudinal collaborative research project involving teachers and researchers in exploring how teachers adapt and change their practices in the classroom during a change initiative should be undertaken. This would facilitate further insights into the experience of reform implementation in specific school contexts. The perspectives of other stakeholders in the initiatives such as advisors, principals, and significant colleagues should contribute to this inquiry. This research would clarify the emotional and personal challenges experienced during a reform and it would provide guidance on the different types of learning required of teacher and others implementing the change. In particular, gaining insight into why some changes take root and are sustained in practice would contribute to our understanding of the change process.

6.8 Conclusion

Change has become a constant element of teachers' professional lives and is altering the work of schools as organisations. The participants have engaged in a range of reform efforts and have become agents of change within their schools, their local teacher networks or in advising clusters of schools. The ability to become involved in role changes, together with their engagement in high-quality professional development courses, were crucial factors in maintaining the participants' motivation and contributed to their self-renewal at different stages of their career.

The provision of opportunities for teachers to experience diverse roles in the education system is important for retaining teachers with moral purpose and commitment to their students. The research clarifies the influence of the school context and the importance of school leadership, climate and ethos when introducing reforms.

The research concludes that teachers' identities and emotions are influential factors in the success of reforms. Teachers make a significant emotional investment into their work. While change and reform provides opportunities for personal and professional challenge, reforms also demanded a heavy emotional investment. The early stages of the reforms posed significant threats to teachers' professional confidence, identity and self-efficacy. For some of the participants, their professional identity was challenged by the range of reforms introduced and by the continuous demands for them to absorb new curricular emphases. Teachers were motivated to engage in change initiatives at different points in their lives as a form of investment in their personal and professional development and also as recognition of their professional competence. The factors which sustained their engagement during change periods included the need for professional renewal, the sense of self-efficacy and success which they associated with their agency in change initiatives and the broadening of horizons which accompanies their association with networks and professional development groups.

Teachers' work is becoming more intensified and more influenced by government reforms. However, the participants were professionally and personally confident to exercise their professional judgements over the reforms that they engaged in or that

they implemented in their classrooms. The participants' moral integrity guided their actions. They found that their personal missions, values and beliefs guided their practice and their response to change. They set high professional standards for themselves and they invested personal energies, time and commitment to the achievement of these goals.

Irish teachers' career trajectories do not progress in a linear or identical way through the different phases of their careers. Teachers' career paths are individual and formed by personal circumstances, traits and biography. They are also influenced by the critical incidents which teachers experience, their school factors, the roles they have undertaken in education and the range and depth of professional development activities which they pursue.

The research emphasises the disconnection which exists between policy texts and teachers' personal interests and missions. Classroom teachers, in particular, do not have an understanding of 'policy', are unfamiliar with policy texts and are not aware of central government's policy priorities. Teachers, even those with high academic qualifications and a range of professional expertise, do not engage with policy texts. A culture of discussing policy documents is not a feature of primary schools. Teachers perceive that they have a limited contribution to policy formulation and cannot influence policy development.

Several factors serve to constrain the response of teachers to policy documents. These include the structure of the school day, the demands of attending to their teaching roles as well as their management responsibilities. As a result the majority

of policy texts, including educational legislation, remain largely un-interrogated. Above all, policy is not perceived by participants as something which has a direct connection to teaching or which can guide action.

However, some policies make their way into the classrooms and reach sustainability in some school contexts. Policy relating to special educational needs is an example of a change that has impacted on teachers' practice and on the school organisation. Nevertheless, within this policy arena, the participants reported that they interpreted policies meaningfully in ways and directions not anticipated by their authors. Because policies are often loose and not specific, the micro-politics of the school, the divergent needs of pupils and the teachers' personal interests forced adjustments and modifications to the policy. The research concludes that teachers are 'street level bureaucrats' and schools are important implementation sites where policies are negotiated, modified and implemented to suit the contextual factors.

This research serves to contribute to an emerging literature from the Irish context on the effects of change on teachers' work and lives. The international literature presents a bleak and pessimistic change environment where teachers work as technicians and reforms constrain their professional autonomy. This research provides a more optimistic and positive perspective of this group of Irish primary teachers working in a change milieu. It confirms that while many social movements are beginning to impact on the Irish context, their influence has not diminished the role of the participants who remain committed to the concept of teacher as intellectual. These participants are largely autonomous professionals who exercise

discretion within their own schools on the extent to which they engage with the change process.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following is a menu of questions which guided the interviews.

General life history

1. What do you remember most about growing up?
2. What beliefs or values did your parents try to teach you?
3. Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child?
4. How would you describe yourself as a child?
5. What sort of past times did you have as a child?
6. Was education important in your family? Why?
7. What were the most important decisions you have made in your life?

Education

8. What is your first memory of attending school?
9. What do you remember most about primary school?
10. Did you have a favourite teacher in primary school? In post-primary school?
11. How did they influence you?
12. What was the subject you enjoyed most at school?
13. What do you remember most about college?
14. What motivated you to become a teacher?
15. What was the most important course you took in college?
16. Was there any book that influenced you most during your college years?
17. What has been the most important learning experience in your life?

Teaching career

18. Why did you choose to teach in this school? Is this the only school that you have taught in?
19. How would you describe the atmosphere in your school?
20. How did you feel about teaching during your early years (1970s)?
21. What sort of teacher were you? How would you describe your teaching style or approach? What would have influenced you at this stage?
22. What values have guided your own teaching?
23. Do you find teaching personally fulfilling?

Change and reform

24. When did you notice the first major changes or developments occurring in teaching?
25. How did these changes impact on your life? Your teaching career?
26. How is teaching/ teachers perceived in society? Has this changed over the years?
27. Have teachers' working conditions improved or dis-improved since you started teaching?
28. What have your experiences of change in curriculum been like? Has it changed schools, relationships?
29. Have you changed your role in teaching?
30. What courses have influenced your view of teaching?
31. How do you keep yourself updated on new initiatives or developments?
32. Have you noticed a change in teachers' relationships with pupils through the years?
33. Do you notice a change in relationships with parents?

Involvement in policy development

34. How are decisions made in your school?
35. What is your role in policy development?
36. Have you been involved in policy making at a wider level?
37. To what extent do you think teachers can influence the education system?

38. What policies have had a positive influence on your work?
39. Are there policies which might have influenced your work negatively?
40. To what extent would you be aware of DES policies? How do you keep yourself aware of these?
41. How do you feel about the DES and its role in schools?
42. Do you think that the emphasis on planning and policy development has been a worthwhile development?
43. Where is the pressure for change coming from? Is it coming from inside the school or from external influences? Have these changes and reforms had a positive effect on schools, children?

Motivation and efficacy

44. Do you feel that your contribution to education is recognised and appreciated?
45. Are you satisfied with your choice of career? Is there anything you would change?
46. What do you see as the greatest challenge in your work?
47. Was there any period during your career when you felt your commitment decreased?
48. What were the things which happened to make you feel less committed to your work?
49. Was there any period during your career when you felt your commitment increased?
50. What were the things which happened to make you feel more committed to your work?
51. Have you ever felt stress or burnout from teaching?
52. How do you get your rewards from teaching?

Values

- 53. What matters to you most now as a person?
- 54. What matters to you most as a teacher?

Policies

- 55. Do policies change teachers' views of teaching or on the work in the classroom?
- 56. Does the DES make their policy clear ?
- 57. Are the policies the school devise more effective than policies from the Department?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Title of study: Teachers' lives within the contexts of policy change and reform in Irish primary education

Researcher: Carmel O'Doherty

Date: January 2008

Purpose of the Research

You are invited to participate in a study to examine the extent to which teachers' lives and practices are influenced and shaped by policy, change and reform.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your significant level of experience as a primary teacher.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with the researcher or St. Patrick's College either now, or in the future.

If you decide to participate, we will meet to discuss your perspectives of policies and changes which have impacted on your professional and personal life. This interview will be approximately of one hour's duration. We will meet at a venue of your choice.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, or the university.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name or the school in which you teach will not appear in any

report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only will be accessed by myself or my supervisor, Dr. Mark Morgan. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Additional queries about the research If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me either by telephone at 087-6500698 by e-mail (carmel_odoherty@education.gov.ie). This research has been reviewed by the St. Patrick's College Drumcondra Research Ethics Committee and conforms to the standards outlined by the college.

Consent and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in this study conducted by Carmel O'Doherty. I have understood the nature of this research and wish to participate.

My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Participant

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Researcher

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix C

Overview of coding system developed to analyse the interviews of the participants

Code System

Changes

- Gaeilge
- Introduction of Learning Support
- Limited role of Church in schools
- Changing role of teacher
- Performance management
- Ethos
- Broad and balanced education
- Societal change mirrored in schools
- Increased staffing
- In-school management
- Market the school
- Class rotation
- Changing role of principal
- Pressure for outcomes, results
- Improve teaching strategies
- Legislation and responsibilities
- Reflective teaching
- Special Educational Needs
 - Reluctance to include
 - Alienation
 - Challenges
- Working with other professionals
- Organisational issues of school

- Parents as partners
- Change in Methodologies

Profile of Teachers and Schools that change

- Different roles in school
- Inservice supports
- Profile of school that changes
- Innovative teachers
 - Collaboration
 - Willingness to give time
- Strong leadership
- Leadership roles
- Personal commitment to teaching
- Role as change agents
- Reactions to change
- Young teachers
- Engagement in professional organisations
- Moral dimension
- Conditions for change
- Resisters
- Good teachers

Policies

- Local contexts for policy
- Policy disconnected from real life
- Need for centralised policy
- Ability to influence policy
- Policy overload
- Emphasis on Standards
- School-based policy making
- Learning
- Children as clients
- Conflict between policies
- Child centred education

- Awareness of policies

Disadvantaged

- Social justice
- School context
- Discipline issues
- Different methodologies
- Unaware of backgrounds

CPD

- Experience of CPD - curriculum
- Organising CPD
- Special Ed Course
- MASTERS

Principal teachers

- Working conditions
- Care of staff
- Staff conflict
- Leadership
- Personal difficulties
- Vision clearly articulated

Inspectors

- WSE - impetus for change
- Share good practice
- Validation
- Predators

Teaching experience

- Textbook based teaching
- Personal satisfaction and fulfilment
- Burnout
- Short school day

- Resources
- Large class sizes
- No interview required
- Status of teacher in society
- Discussion about education - staffroom
- Collaboration
- Staff meetings
- Positive school atmosphere
- Specific gender roles
- Control and Strict
- Relationship with parents

College life

- Aspects of course I liked
- Negative college experience
- Positive college experience
- Teaching Practice
- Wasted college experience

Career options

- Wish to work with children
- Financial possibility
- Always aspired to teach
- Uncertain of choice
- Teacher in family

Access to second-level scholarship

- Diligent students
- Poor provision, teaching and standards
- Alienation
- Poor expectations from other students
- Academic focus only
- Laissez Faire

Influential teacher

- Diligent teacher
- Positive experience
- Negative experience
- Unfair expectations
- Love for learning
- Corporal punishment
- Strict discipline regime
- Emphasis on Knowledge

Background

- High value for education
- Parental aspirations for career
- Hard work
- Socio-economic family status