European Schoolteachers work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing context

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Executive Summary

This research report has been produced as part of the EU Sixth Framework Programme research project entitled *Professional Knowledge in Education and Health: Restructuring work and life between the state and the citizens in Europe (Profknow)*. It aims to present research from seven European countries on restructuring in education and health care and the implications for the professional knowledge of teachers and nurses.

This report presents the results of workpackage 4: *European Schoolteachers work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing context*. As such it runs in parallel to workpackage 4 on the nurses work life under restructuring. The main objective of both workpackages is to gain a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ (nurses) personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well over time. That is, workpackage 4 aims to provide a bottom up perspective of how the transformations of the welfare states have affected teachers professional lives in terms of knowledge and expertise.

To achieve this objective, workpackage 4 deployed life history methodology. Twenty two (22) primary teachers across seven countries (3 per country, but 4 in one country) were interviewed twice and shadowed during 3 days. The results of the analysis was contrasted with a focus group of primary school teachers. Each research partner then produced a thematic report which has been used as the base of this report. In addition, a comparative analysis was undertaken in chapter 1, signaling the commonalities and differences between the 22 case studies.

When comparing the 7 reports from a birds eye perspective one can discern three common themes. Literally all teachers reported the difficulties they face through a more and more heterogeneous student population involving students with disabilities, immigrant students, or simply students with different learning needs. They also reported their students to be more rebellious, harder to control and discipline. And, thirdly, all teachers across the countries were distressed with a loss of prestige and respect of their profession. Loss of class barriers, a consumerist attitude towards education, or public blaming of teachers (in mass media) for the “failures” of the younger generation all contributed a sense of status-loss.

In contrast to these commonalties between the cases, teachers reported very differently on their working conditions. Virtually all teachers reported an increase in terms of documentation and paper work they had to fulfill. However, real impact in terms of accountability and evaluation were very diverse and ranged from “control by the educational authorities coupled to consequences” to simply “formal compliance and paper work.”

Educational, state initiated reforms occurred in all participating countries; however their effect and impact on teachers were very diverse. No simple, one dimensional process of professionalization or de-professionalization can be described. What appears to be common between the cases is rather a certain “tiredness” of educational reform by teachers.

Very different levels of infrastructure (equipment, building) were found and described in all cases as “improvable.” The most decisive factor for working conditions, however, remains tied to class size and competent, and professionally committed staff. The entry into the profession was reported by most teachers as being especially difficult and unstable due to the precarious types of temporary contracts.

Concerning teachers professional knowledge. Teachers appeared to be fairly confident in terms of their academic knowledge. However, they have to demonstrate expertise in many more fields that
go beyond the traditional subject matter of their discipline. Their main request for knowledge concerned tools and techniques for teaching strategies. This mirrors their preoccupation of being able to continue teaching when students have become more diverse and demanding. But teachers also voiced their lack of knowledge when having to deal with all the new players in the educational community such as the new managerial authorities, parents as clients, or teaching assistants and specialists.

Most teachers were not satisfied with their initial education. In contrast, they learn on the job during in-service training, by being with students and in cooperation with colleagues. Despite the importance of learning during work, very few formal channels are in place that would support and catalyze this process. Mainly it happens in a ad-hoc manner which somehow is in sharp contrast to the importance attributed to this type of learning by teachers.

What emerges from the case studies is also a certain duality between a notion of professionalism tied to successful teaching of competencies/skills on the one hand, and a notion of professionalism that gravitates primarily around a concern for the formation and development of the individual (pupil) as part of larger society. This implied different types of knowledge: skills in following government directives in the first case and more encompassing knowledge of the wider social and educational dimensions of teachers work in the second. It has to be noted, however, that both types of knowledges are equally embraced and valued by teachers.

Given the huge variety of school contexts and biographies across the seven countries makes it difficult to provide a list of general policy recommendations. What becomes clear from the research, are the differences that exist within the teaching profession and between teachers themselves. Easily, this diversity gets leveled out when speaking about “teachers” in general. Therefore, it is important for experts and educational authorities alike to take into account the specific identity of individual teacher (groups) instead of speaking about “the teachers” in general.

The Life Histories imply that teachers authorize themselves to speak up. This is important in times of social change because the very process of reconstructing ones trajectory opens new perspectives on one's reality and pays witness to the diversity and heterogeneity found within the teaching profession.

As the various cases have shown, working in the school is a privileged site of learning for many teachers. It is important to foster structures that allow teachers to learn at work. For example, in-service training can be tied to the emergent situations inside of the school as it was the case in Spain. Or formal structures and spaces of cooperation between colleagues can be firmly rooted into the school organization as it was the case especially in Ireland. This way it puts cooperation between colleagues on a firm ground and guarantees not only a collective learning process but also the transmission of existing knowledge from the more experience to the new and arriving teachers.
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Chapter 1

Comparative overview: European Primary Teachers’ Work and Life under Restructuring

Jörg Müller, Fernando Hernández, Juana Sancho, Amalia Creus, Max Muntadas, Verónica Larraín, Xavier Giró.
University of Barcelona
1. Introduction

The overall ambition of the Profknow project is to understand knowledge “at work” across education and health care in Europe. Both fields have been exposed to profound changes and restructuring measures from the 1970s onwards. Deregulation, marketization, privatization and commercialization have been a reality to different degrees for northern European welfare institutions in Sweden, Finland, Ireland but above all England. At the same time, welfare roll-out and democratization processes have marked the trajectory of the southern welfare states such as Spain, Greece or Portugal. Education and health professionals in each case have experienced those changes with the corresponding effects in their competences and skills, their professional ethos or work conditions. As they are situated between the state and the citizen on the one hand and exposed to larger current of social change (e.g. immigration or the rise of the knowledge society) on the other, teachers and nurses provide a door to investigating welfare restructuring and its effects on knowledge. The research thus aims at describing the professional worlds and culture of teachers and nurses with a special emphasis on knowledge “at work.”

Within the overall research process, this report will present a comparative analysis of Teachers Life Histories across seven European countries. It therefore runs in parallel to the work done in WP5 which presents an equal amount of material on Nurses’ Life Histories. The focus here is on the experience of teachers in order to get a deep understanding of the meaning and significance of restructuring processes affecting education. More specifically, the objectives as stated in the Technical Annex are the following:

- To get a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well as over time.
- To compare work life experiences and notions of expertise between generations of schoolteachers in European contexts.
- To present ethnographic descriptions and analyzes of primary school work and life in different European contexts in order to understand practical professional knowledge at work.
- To contextualize school teachers’ life stories relative to histories of the profession, restructuring of schooling, and social changes in Europe in order to achieve life histories of schoolteachers in Europe.

In more concrete terms, the main issue is to understand and contrast individual teachers experiences as embedded into a wider socio-cultural field. How are they affected and how do they experience not only direct state imposed restructuring measures but also other important transformations in society? And how does this affect their professional knowledge, the knowledge they need but also produce “at work”?

This overall research interest of Profknow bears within the context of WP4 a certain caution. Given the fundamental role of processes of restructuring a relative wide notion of this central concept should be guaranteed in the beginning. All too easily, “restructuring” is limited to a certain static model in which public or international bodies such as the WorldBank, IMF, OECD, or WTO act through the national governments as clearly identifiable agents of change. In addition, the concept of “restructuring” is also heavily contaminated with neo-liberal associations and certain social realities as they materialize in England. In a quite subtle way, this notion of restructuring then leaves little alternatives for understanding teachers in terms of passive receptors that endure the per se negative imposition of other (state, market) actors on their profession. However, as the literature
review has shown, there exist quite diverging perspectives on what “restructuring” means in every national and local context. Whereas “restructuring” seems to presuppose a clearly identifiable agent (the state or other organizations related to education) imposing reforms, we want to maintain a certain detachment regarding in what ways “change” materializes in teachers practices and how it is valued. This caution seems especially relevant given the objective of WP4 to arrive at a bottom-up view on restructuring starting from teachers' experiences. Which changes in general do they detect and mention even if they are not related to educational reform? Thus, instead of talking about “restructuring” we will focus on the changes teacher mention as important for them. This implies to clearly separate “restructuring” from “neo-liberalism” and not to confound the two with each other. To which degree the important transformations affecting teachers do indeed related to neo-liberal tendencies across the nations, to processes of marketization and/or commercialization will have to be tackled in an extra analytical step.

2. Methodological Approach

The following section will give a brief overview of the methodology used during wp 4 as well as the profile of the teachers and the schools that finally collaborated in the study.

Possible schools and teachers were contacted from October 2005 onwards. A common ethical agreement was prepared in order to establish a contract of collaboration between teachers and the researchers detailing the mutual responsibilities.

As described in the Technical Annex a Life History approach was used during WP4. Life Histories aim to connect the personal narrations of teachers within their biography and the wider socio-cultural and historical context thus arriving at what can be called their professional *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). According to Roberts (2002:2) biographical research “is part of the broader practice of qualitative methods”. Under this biographical umbrella, Roberts defines life history -following Denzin (1970: 219-257)- as the methodology referred “to the collection, interpretation and report writing of the 'life' (the life history method) in terms of the story told or as the construction of the past experience of the individual (from various sources) to relate to the story”. The distinctive borders between life story and life history have been a common place in the debate among specialists of this research approach (Goodson, 1998; Cary, 1999; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). According to Goodson (1992, p.6) the vital difference lies here between life stories and life histories. Life histories essentially contextualized the narratives (stories) in relation to wider structural changes.

We move from individual life stories to life histories by the contextualization of personal views and narrations into wider currents of socio-economic and structural scope. This move is justified by our understanding of structure and agency as two sides of the same coin. Agents and structures are intimately woven into each other. The social lives, and social structures, are constituted in and through social interaction between situated agents.

Because we are interested in changes occurring from the 1960s onwards, that is, changes occurring over an extended period of time, different generations of professionals were chosen: teachers with approx. 1 year of experience, between 8-10 years of experience and finally experienced teachers that have been working for around 30 years. These figures should be used as indicative as it might turn out to be very difficult in the given circumstances of school to find professionals with exactly those years of working experience.

In practice, teachers life stories were captured during two interviews each. Whereas the first interview was held in a semi-structured and open manner, the second interview was thought to

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1 See Norrie & Goodson (2005); Lindblad & Popkewitz (2004)
2 See Annex I on the thematic areas that should surface during the interviews and had to be covered at least during the
deepen emerging issues, detect discrepancies or capture omissions from the first round. In most cases, interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 1½ hours and were recorded. Each interview was subsequently transcribed word by word; the first interview was also translated completely into English; for the second interview, just a summary was translated into English.

In addition, each teacher was shadowed during three days in their normal work setting. The notes taken in the field produced “ethnographic descriptions” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Marques da Silva, 2004) in order to complete the life story narratives with exempla taking from practice and, as a consequence, to illustrate and contrast the thematic commentaries. This relative short stay in the field follows an observation's “compressed time mode” (Jeffry & Troman, 2004, p.538). In some cases, special arrangements were made to cover specific events in teachers weekly schedules. Therefore, the three days of observation were not necessarily held in a consecutive way. The overall length of being in the field was slightly longer than one week given that three teachers were shadowed for three days each. Although project resources and scheduling did not allow to cover a whole (year) school cycle, nevertheless the equally vital cycle of one week was covered.

The interview data and the observational notes were analyzed according to a thematic grid that was derived from the general theoretical position of the project and work carried out during WP1 & WP2. This thematic grid allowed to deal with the request of strict anonymity of participants in the case of England and in order to establish a common ground for the later comparison between the national cases. The thematic grid of analysis followed closely the themes to be covered during the interview and in principle provided the structure for the written reports to be delivered by each partner. In addition, it aimed to compare experiences between generations of teachers in the European context. However, as the reports will demonstrate, the results are rather fragmented in this respect.

During the ongoing analysis of the primary material (interviews and ethnographic descriptions), focus groups were held in each country, except Finland. The focus groups had the aim to expose the preliminary findings of our analysis to a selected group of professionals in order to contrast and discuss its relevance. In Ireland the focus group was conducted with the same three professionals so as to discuss issues that arose during the process of analysis and to lend 'trustworthiness' through triangulation to the emergent themes. The discussion was recorded, transcribed in a summary fashion and incorporated in the national reports.

2.1. Profile of Schools

In the following section a summary overview of the participating schools of teachers will be given. All schools were public primary institutions, located in urban settings. The socio-economic context were middle to lower working class environments. Whereas the school in Portugal had had problems of poverty in the past, the school in Ireland was witnessing a radically altering demographic in the community; a combination of rapid influx of immigrants and ‘white flight’. The Spanish and the Swedish school are quite similar in the sense that they attend a high percentage of immigrant students or other ethnic minorities. In comparison the schools in England and Finland constitute the upper end of the socio-economic scale within the participating schools. The teachers and students in the Finnish case made the impression to being “well off” and, as the English report states, their school has not been the target of New Labor initiatives for disadvantaged areas (e.g. Excellence in Cities). Schools size spanned a wide range: from approx. 160 students in Spain and

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3. See individual national reports and Annex II.
4. In the case of Finland, the difficulties to hold focus groups where compensated by interviewing and shadowing an additional fourth teacher instead of the three teachers in the rest of the countries where focus groups were held.
Greece up to 900 students in the case of Ireland. Despite the different numbers of teachers, what clearly sticks out are the possibilities of two teachers per class in the case of Sweden. Table 1 summarizes the main data on the schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK School</th>
<th>Greek School</th>
<th>Finnish School</th>
<th>Spanish School</th>
<th>Swedish School</th>
<th>Portuguese School</th>
<th>Irish School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500 pupils, age 4-11</td>
<td>165 pupils, Primary School</td>
<td>386 pupils, Primary School, age 1-6, and 7-11</td>
<td>165 pupils, Primary School, age 3-11</td>
<td>400 pupils, age preschool – 6</td>
<td>325 pupils, age preschool – 6</td>
<td>900 pupils, Primary School,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% ethnic minorities</td>
<td>21% immigration</td>
<td>Few immigrant students.</td>
<td>50% Gypsies, 30% other immigration</td>
<td>92% non-nordic, 33 languages spoken in school</td>
<td>15 teachers</td>
<td>31% immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 teachers</td>
<td>15 Teachers</td>
<td>25 teachers, 9 school assistants</td>
<td>16 Teachers</td>
<td>50 teachers, often 2 per class</td>
<td>Half of class entitled to social support, formerly “priority intervention”, poverty.</td>
<td>~41 teachers, 6 SEN assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well established community school in residential area; average social economic group. Good infrastructure</td>
<td>Industrial inner city zone, with residential area; Working class.</td>
<td>Peripheral region, lower than average living standard, but overall “people being well-off” and “prosperous neighborhood” Good infrastructure</td>
<td>Deprived neighborhood, Urban Socially Vulnerable School. Certain lack of infrastructure.</td>
<td>Higher than average unemployment &amp; social security, “heavy area” Good infrastructure</td>
<td>Lack of infrastructure</td>
<td>Rapid growth and change, destabilizing neighborhood Lack of space due to fast growing school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of Schools. Numbers are approx. and refer to school year 2006-2007
2.2. Profile of Participating Teachers

What follows is an overview of the participating teachers. Since all reports use pseudonym for the collaborating teachers, the following table will make it easier to connect the quoted experiences with the relevant name and thus profile. The distribution of sexes mirrors the general feminization of the profession. Out of 22 teachers participating, only 4 were men. Equally, it is worth stressing the differences between the teachers on how they entered their profession. Whereas the Greek participants took teaching as a second or third career choice, English teachers in contrast “always knew” that they wanted to become a teacher. As to the reasons for those differences one has to consider biographical as well as wider socio-cultural aspects. Among the factors that situate teaching rather among the less popular choices of profession in Greece, one has to see the negative public image and the relative late development of the welfare state. Becoming a teacher in Greece especially from the late 70s onwards was bound to the rural exodus in that it provided upward mobility and access to the cities which coincides with the general build up of the welfare state. Many teachers thus entered the profession as a “forced choice”, that is, one of the few alternatives to escape a rural life. Considering the same historical period of the late 70s, English teachers provide quite a different picture. They enjoyed their height of professional autonomy and were held in high esteem by the public but also the professionals themselves. This means, that one could expect a far more greater percentage of persons to enter into the profession out of “free will” because they perceive it as a desirable profession. As the Irish case makes clear, to these different welfare state scenarios one has to add a gender dimension. Not directly coupled to a rural exodus, the oldest Irish teacher states that becoming a teacher was among the few professional options open for women in the past. Although she didn't directly describe that she would have preferred another job, this may have been precisely because not too many alternatives were on the horizon anyway.

Furthermore, teachers represent different generational sections in order to respond to the different historical stages of welfare state build up and restructuring. Thus, teachers with 1-5 years of work experience, around 15 years and up to 30 years of work experience were thought. This didn't necessarily correspond to certain age groups. Especially in Sweden, teachers were in- and out of their work, with one teacher being 38 years old and working in her first year at school. The age of teachers spanned the “whole” range, the youngest being 22 years old (Ireland) up to 65 years in Sweden as Table 2 shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UK Teachers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria, late 50s, 40 years of experience. Always wanted to become a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane, age 34, 10 years of experience. Always wanted to be a teacher, in- and out of job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan, mid 20s, 3 years of experience, self-made professional, in part for secure job, in and out of her job.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Finnish Teachers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sirkka, age 59, 33 years of experience Teaching as first choice of career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuula, age 46, 16 years of experience. Teaching as first choice of career, difficult family situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martti, age 38, 11 years of experience, third choice teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niina, age 31, 4 years of experience Teaching first choice of career, first child with 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Portuguese Teachers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria, 32 years of teaching. Poor villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria, 18 years of teaching, poor family background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos, 2 years of teaching, lower/middle class, finding a job main concern, teaching as second choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria, ~ 50, 30 years of experience, always worked with children, strong inclination to knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa, ~ 40, 15 years of experience, First choice math, then “downgrade” to teaching math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia, age 25, 5 years of experience, music primary, teaching a possibility to pursue it. It is a job</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Swedish Teachers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina, age 65, 40 years experience. Clear vocation, care for children, but not a direct entry into profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilde, age 46, 16 years of experience. Worked in different jobs, teaching as second choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea, age 38, 1 year of experience. Had an early interest in teaching but started working in other jobs. Late entry into job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Greek Teachers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John, age 58, 30 years experience. Poor rural family background, economic needs and escape from land-life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary, age 41, 17 years experience. Tried Medicine but did not have the grades, teaching as second choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen, 32 age, 3 years experience. Tried different other professions, teaching actually third choice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irish Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teresa, ~ 53 age, 32 years of experience. Urban upbringing. Had ideas to become a teacher, out of teaching 1980-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah, ~ 26 age, 5 years of experience. Middle class, always wanted to become a teacher, made a career break for traveling, now back in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor, ~ 22 age, 1 year of experience. Rural, upbringing good working conditions, good memory of his time in school and secure job in the end.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Profile of teachers participating in wp4 case studies

2.3. Comparing Cases

Apart from summarizing the main results from the national documents, the main objective of this report is to compare the national cases. Comparison itself can serve quite different goals. According to a recent survey by Fairborther (2005), comparative research strategies most commonly have been deployed to (1) explore educational phenomena, (2) explain similarities and differences, (3) support or demonstrate a certain argument, (4) predict the future development of a educational system, (5) develop new recommendations and directions of change, or for (6) theory development. It is evident that most usages imply to different degrees point number (2). Working out the similarities and differences of the cases involved is essential – otherwise one could hardly speak of comparison at all.

We will concentrate on point (2) for the current report. This in itself is already a challenging task given the number of participating countries. Reviewing articles in the relevant publications for comparative research it is evident that most comparative projects concentrate on one (!) or two cases. Using the comparative perspective therefore in terms of theory development or recommendations concerning educational policy for primary teaching on a EU level is outside the scope of this WP4 report. It will be dealt with explicitly within WP6.

5 See for example Angela Little's survey of Comparative Education of the years 1977-1998 where the majority of studies focus on a single country (!), only three on 5 countries, and none on more than 5 (2000, p.284). Also, it should be noted that a recent study done by Alexander (2000) across five countries was managed centrally by one person and did not involve the additional complexities of a research collaboration.
Looking at the national reports, the task of comparing is still daunting. Despite the common thematic grid for analysis and writing (see Annex I & II, p.40) differences between the reports remain. Although all reports responded to the thematic grids there are huge differences in terms of level of detail, usage of secondary literature or statistical data, role and relevance granted to teachers biography, or theoretical analysis. This variety makes comparison in many cases questionable since data was not always available with sufficient detail.

This of course leads to a related problem deeply inscribed in comparative research, namely how to reconcile the particular with the general (Schriewer 2006). On the one hand we deal with an incredible amount of detail given by all the material gathered through 22 teachers life stories and ethnographic descriptions. On the other hand, comparing this data will aim at a common pattern for the similarities and differences that run across the individual cases. This is a fundamental problem of the comparative method: to overcome the gap "between the variety of culturally defined phenomena and the ascertainment of regular relationships; in other words, between evidence-borne documentations and theory-related analyses of a virtually global data and information basis." (Schriewer, 2006, p.307). Remaining on the level of "evidence-borne documentation” will not be able to take advantage of the material in terms of comparison; and searching for commonalities and differences inevitably reduces the wealth of empirical detail in favor of some homogenizing, comparable features. This is connected to the deeper antagonism between “history” and “comparison.” A historical perspective gives precedence to the individual and singular trajectory an educational system, a nation, a cultural context, a biological species, etc. has run through. To understand the situation in the present means to understand how it has come to be what it is. This historical approach establishes each situation as absolutely singular because it conceives it as constituted by a series of different events and contexts, none of which is identical to the other. Comparing in contrast signifies to find commonalities or differences between those singular trajectories. The very act of comparing signifies to reduce the absolute singularity of an educational system (or a person's biography or whatever is in need of comparison) in order to flesh out the commonalities and differences across many different cases. The question this produces, then, concerns the status of this knowledge. What do we know if we can single out commonalities and differences in a series of cases?

There is one specific danger we want to avoid: to misconceive the set of abstract commonalities in between a variety of cases in terms of an ideal type. We do not want to conceive in the best metaphysical tradition the cases in terms of class membership. Comparison does not produce a general category and its particular instantiations; it does not produce a static set of core properties which then comes to provide the blue-print for understanding further cases. This rejection of ideal types then reverses the objective of explanation: instead of being occupied with accounting for the abnormal variation from the ideal, what takes precedence is the explanation of the singularity in question. From our point of view the aim of comparison cannot consist in producing a certain “archetype” underlying all empirical variation on restructuring and professional knowledge; rather it should help to map the topology of a certain space of possibilities. This space establishes the boundaries where we expect to find our cases but it does not prescribe the history of each completely singular and individual case.6

As Schriewer indicates, this gap between history and comparison is far from being unanimously closed (ibid., p.316)), the working “solution” adopted here takes its inspiration from Charles Ragin's approach of diversity oriented research (Ragin 1998; 2000). Before assuming “false” homogeneity between cases based on phenomena described (e.g. pupil behavior) or causes mentioned (e.g. changing family relations) the diversity-oriented view operates with qualitative differences.

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6 This is not the place to extend on this point, however, as an exemplary recent case for the social sciences Manuel DeLanda's *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006) could be cited, where the social realm is precisely composed of different levels of interlocking individual singularities.
Demonstrating what all cases have in common does not necessarily mean that they are the tokens of a general type/category. Ragin's method allows to extract commonalities across the material while maintaining the individuality of each case. This is achieved by working with “qualitative differences:”

"...This qualitative difference captures the essence of viewing cases as configurations: Two cases may be similar in most ways but because they differ on one or more key aspects, their difference may be one of kind, not simply of degree." (Ragin, 2000, p.71)

Although similarities may be observed across the 7 countries, small differences are not understood in terms of deviations from this “norm” but in terms of possibly harboring a qualitative distinction. The comparison between the national reports therefore doesn't aim to flesh out the smallest common denominator but rather to expose the inherent diversity. It aims to arrive at a space of possibilities that maps the decisive actors that configure teachers work live and experiences. Similarities and differences between the cases thus equally contribute to establish what Ragin calls a “property space” (Ragin, 2000, p.76) of teachers work life.

Speaking of types of configurations or “property spaces” has the further advantage of circumventing a representational problem. Instead of treating empirical material as instances of an abstract model (distilled deductively), it merely constitutes the possible (empirical and hypothetical) dimensions of our typology. Thus, even if certain hypothetical cases never materialize in one country, their very absence will tell something about the situation as well. Empirical evidence does not invalidate or confirm an abstract ideal model here (of welfare restructuring and professional knowledge for example) but rather contract or expand a space of possibilities (of the decisive factors and dynamics that come to shape teachers work knowledge). In sum, a diversity oriented comparative approach across the 7 reports would mean to establish first of all the decisive dimensions to be found across all cases (Annex II p.41 gives a good orientation). Second, it would mean to evaluate the variation across the cases in terms of a historical and cultural perspective in order to detect qualitative differences. Thus, our topology as the result of our comparison does not interfere with the historical process that constituted each case in question. It remains sensitive to the “small”, “qualitative” differences that are essential for understanding each singular case.

Two further cautions should accompany such a task. First, although the comparison operates across a national map, of course each case study cannot be taken as representative for the whole national situation in primary education. Part of this problem descends from the formal requirement of EU research projects where the consortium and thus cooperation is basically conceived along national lines (instead of a thematic interest independent of country of origin for example). An international EU perspective is then simply understood as the sum of national interests and points of view. It is therefore important to note that speaking of “national” cases refers first and foremost to the identity of each partner in the consortium and not to the situation across the national ground. Second, this cautionary note on what we mean when referring to the “Finnish, Swedish, Portuguese, ... cases” points to the deeper issue of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Although the national context is of course still decisive – especially in terms of primary education – it is important to reflect on its naturalizing function. Since comparison operates between 7 countries it is easy to take the nation as the most evident level on which to detect and explain similarities and differences. The nation acquires a quasi “natural” status as the most appropriate boundary of social action. But already looking at the political map of the countries involved it becomes apparent that comparison on the national level is risky. Sweden, Ireland, or Finland are relatively small countries in terms of population; political- and educational authority is pretty much centralized. But this picture changes radically when compared to Spain and its highly decentralized structure of 17 autonomous regions where most have a certain autonomy to decide on their educational matters including finance. Thus, although the central government is a decisive player in shaping working
conditions and the whole educational (policy) context across the cases, other (regional, local, global) dimensions need to be considered as well. In which way national aspects are illuminating or confusing for coming to grips with teachers' experiences across Europe is therefore an open question.

3. Teachers Experiences

The following section will be governed by two movements. First, the common themes that run through all teachers' accounts will be presented. What are the common concerns of teachers as they surface throughout all the reports? Without neglecting the detail of each teachers' case, at which point do their main preoccupations converge? Second, apart from those common concerns many more topics have been explored throughout the research phase. According to the interests of the project and the thematic analysis (Annex I & II, p.40), the main results will be presented. In contrast to the first movement, it will become clear where the main differences between the cases are to be found (e.g. role of central reform or curriculum).

3.1. Common concerns in relation to working conditions

Illustration 1 gives an overview of the three core themes that are present throughout all reports. What becomes apparent from the start is the relative importance of the teacher-student relation compared to other analytic dimensions specified in Annex II (analytical grid, p.41). Although teachers relations with their students is one point among others treated as shaping their working conditions (and thus equally ranked with teacher-teacher, teacher-parent relation or with organization of work), it is a vital one which takes up considerable space and time in their accounts. Advancing research results one may say that no matter which other influential factors of reform impinge on teachers work life, a primary vector of their experience is constituted by the relation with students. Relatively independent of their age, gender, or working experience, the participating teachers all described this relation to students as fundamental. What is most likely to affect their working experience – apart from other aspects – and the resulting conceptions and needs of knowledge are changes in the relations to their pupils.

This if of course not surprising given the fact that teachers spend most of their working hours together with students. What are then the more specific aspects of the student population that affect teachers? Among the most decisive points is, first, the fact of having to deal with a very diverse student population. Second, teachers constantly struggle with guaranteeing a certain necessary (but not sufficient) “base” for learning – to keep order and discipline in the classroom. And third – and this has nothing to do with their relation to children per se – they are concerned about the loss of status and prestige of their profession in the eyes of the wider public.
Diverse Student Population

The problems inherent in having to deal with a very diverse student population runs across all the reports. Diversity is here understood in terms of immigration, different learning needs, and Special Education Needs (SEN) legislation. Thus in the England, Portugal, Spain and Ireland teachers have to incorporate SEN students into normal class. As one teacher from England describes, this doubles her work on the one hand, since she has to prepare two different types of material for each type of student, and on the other hand it puts her into a unpleasant situation with respect to parents who judge the presence of SEN students basically as interrupting “normal” class routine and attainment goals. The Finnish teachers also mention the decisive increase in SEN pupils but critically annotate that this easily might be due to more fine grained methods of discerning special needs. Pupils are more diverse and bring very different levels of proficiency to class which consequently leads to more demanding situation for the teacher (teachers do not analyze the reasons for this diversity in the report). Although in our case study teachers did not comment on this issue in more detail, the qualitative study of Webb et al. (2004a, 2004b) confirms this impression. Inclusive education is seen as problematic; teachers complain about the lack of training to handle and integrate pupils with special needs into their classes. This lack of knowledge and skills in supporting SEN pupils needs and the inability to cope with the situations in the classroom were undermining teachers' perception of themselves. The inclusion policies and the cuts in special education budgets were seen as major sources of stress. In the Portuguese case, the instant change that introduced from one day to the next SEN students in normal classes was mentioned as especially important and stressful because teacher were lacking any resources on how to affront the new demands by special needs students. Also, heterogeneous classes are primarily understood in terms of different learning levels of the students.
and not in terms of having to deal with students from different cultures and with different languages. In the Greek case, immigrant pupils (who are in general grouped with students having “learning difficulties”) are mentioned as a main source of difficulty for the teacher. Although they would require special attention and individualized teaching the resources for that are missing. The Greek case resembles the situation in Ireland where teachers also often mentioned the challenge of immigrant students parallel to the challenge of students with learning difficulties. The case of the Spanish and the Swedish school is slightly different because as specialized schools they attend by default a very diverse and “difficult” student population. Instead of being mentioned as one among other points, attending culturally and socio-economic very diverse students belongs to the core of the job and therefore permeates the accounts as a whole.

Given this huge overlap in terms of what teachers describe as their main concern, it is interesting to discern in a second step how this very same problem is articulated very differently according to the local and national contexts. The Irish teachers talked of the additional preparation time required to differentiate lessons in order to cater for a diversity of needs (including language and cultural needs). They emphasized the difficulty of attending to the needs of all children in the context of a large class and limited resources. The teachers criticized the system of allocating resources to immigrant pupils and the lack of provision for teaching SEN pupils in the initial teacher education programme. The Spanish teachers confronted a similar challenging situation. They have to deal with immigrant pupils and thus with the language problem as well as severe cases of violence or quasi autistic behavior. However, external counseling through a psychologist frames the problematic primarily in psychological terms combined with a socio-cultural perspective on the role of the dominant ethnicity in the school (Gypsy). Although the Swedish teachers work in a school with a high percentage of immigration they did not describe this is especially problematic or impeding the advancement in class. Despite 33 languages being spoken in the school this was not especially problematized during the interviews. Rather, in the Swedish context learning difficulties were seen in terms of the relationship between the school and parents. Given the voucher system where parents can opt in and out of different schools teachers searched for new ways to incorporate immigrant parents into their educational tasks in order to affront the problem through collaboration. In summary, one can say that even though there was the shared concern of having to teach a very diverse population of students, depending on the local situation, this was not articulated in a uniform fashion but mirrored through other dominant players in the school context.

Order and Discipline

Most teachers also mentioned quite extensively the difficulties they face in order to maintain order and discipline in their class-rooms. In part, as in the Spanish case, this was seen in relation to the cultural background of the students. Similar to the Swedish teachers, the lack of discipline and the effort to establish a sort of “ordered” and “calm” atmosphere in class where learning can happen is assumed as a primary professional goal. Quite on the contrary in the English case. Teachers there attribute the deviation from the “normal” academic teaching by disruptive students to the disintegrating family structures. “Emotionally damaged children”, increase in divorce rates, or the lack of time that parents spend with their offspring are mentioned. The Greek teachers, primarily refer to the lowering of class barriers as the main cause of a changing student profile. Especially in Greece, were parents play a decisive role in the educational configuration, the lack of discipline is seen as forming part of the larger picture of public blaming of teachers. The once taken for granted authority and high status of teachers has become questionable, last but not least through a public bashing of teachers by the government and a general atmosphere of seeing parents/students as consumers/clients of education. In Portugal, these differences in student behavior are mapped in terms of urban-rural dichotomy. Whereas students in the remote parts of the country are still seen as docile and respecting the figure of the teacher, in the urban context this has become much more complicated. As for the Finnish case teachers as well did not fail to mention that students have
become more talkative and demanding on them. Again, the Webb et al. study (2004a, 2004b) confirms this impression. Finnish teachers perceive an increasing anti-school culture intensified by pupils' personal problems and precarious family situations due to social exclusion. Disruptive behavior was regarded as the second most important reason next to low salary to consider to resign from teaching.

Comparing thus the different context in which teachers make sense of disciplining pupils, the relative absence of questioning the very traditional model of learning and teaching might be noteworthy from the researchers perspective. That student discipline may be connected not only to changing family relations and falling class barriers but also may be due to the fact that schools fail to cater for the interest of today's generation of students was rarely mentioned.

Loss of Status, Prestige, Respect

A third common theme that was often seen in connection with lack of discipline and the changes of the students in general concerned the falling prestige and status of teachers. To different degrees the majority of the interviewed teachers expressed their concern regarding lower respect towards their work and prestige of their profession.

The most extreme situation was reported from Greece. Teachers analyze the situation in terms of a rising middle class, modernization of society and the waning of traditional (family) values besides the expansion of “consumerists ideologies, fueled by public discourse on the malfunctioning of public services”. Parents, in their role of contributing financially directly to the education of their children even though they are in public schools have secured certain “rights” to intervene and question teachers work and knowledge. The national government in conjunction with mass media easily blame teachers for any youth related problem with the consequence of lowering the social status of teachers.

Ireland ranks at the other extreme. As a recent OECD report indicates, Irish teachers are held in relatively high esteem (see OECD, 2003). However, it is possible that recent industrial conflict (involving prolonged and difficult negotiations over salaries) and a changing economy have damaged the public perceptions of teachers, especially in the secondary sector. The Swedish and the Spanish teachers were the least explicit on this topic. Although there was a general sense that society advances at in increasing pace without being aware of the temporal scales that real learning and educational reform requires, this was not directly related to a loss of status for teachers. The similarity between both cases might be telling in that both schools deal principally with parents from a lower socio-economic background. Teachers did not experience a loss of prestige or respect in relation to parents; however, the Swedish school nevertheless had to take parental opinion into account in other ways dealing with the voucher system. The Finnish teachers also mention a loss of prestige where their social position was relatively high in the past. Again, the falling of class barriers and the rising educational level of the whole population implies the relative decrease of the historically privileged situation of teachers (for additional notes on the Finnish case see section 6.4. Further research, p.38). The Portuguese case, then adds again the specific urban-rural dimension, where teachers status was perceived higher in past times in rural areas and is perceived to be under attack currently in urban environments. Again, public blaming adds to the situation of Portuguese teachers where the media do not account for the complexity of the educational tasks they have to perform. The English case coincides with very unfavorable accounts of teachers propagated by politicians in the media; in addition, the public fear of pedophilia further adds to the negative view of teachers.

Overall, the loss of status and prestige described by teachers across the cases was the most uniform in terms of “local” interpretations. No matter which school or country, one could say that the media implicitly and explicitly sat at the center of the problem. With its systematic failure to represent the
complexity of educational matters in favor of buying into “cheap” blaming campaigns no matter from which direction (government or parents for example) significantly contribute to the general impression that teachers prestige is in decline. In addition, this loss of status and prestige is bound to a general higher educational level of society where the once privileged social position of teachers has been relativized.

3.2. Diverging Concerns of Working Conditions

So far we have described the common concerns as they are voiced by teachers. Of course, teachers work life entails many other aspects which will be outlined in the following paragraphs. The main difference to the previous section consists in the possibility to establish a common pattern. When it comes to the role of “curricular reform” or “evaluation/accountability” for example, teachers report quite differently. The emphasis on teachers experiences is important. Each report mentions those elements (since they correspond to the common guide to structure interviews and reports), however, the emphasis that teachers attribute to those aspects vary strongly. Therein lies the clear difference to the previous block presented: whereas all teachers are concerned about affronting a very diverse student population for example, this sort of homogeneity is lacking in the points to be described below.

Evaluation / Accountability

The topic of accountability and evaluation is of prime importance for processes of restructuring in education. In general it forms part of a qualitative shift in the role of the state: the control of teachers practice, of what they do, is replaced by the control of results. Control is exercised in terms of attainment results which shifts the responsibility of how to achieve those results away from the public sector onto the schools and teachers. However, this generalization only captures in a very limited way the experiences of the participating teachers.

Portugal, Spain and Finland could be cited as examples where teachers do not describe notable pressure by official inspection, supervision, monitoring, or evaluation. Although, already here the differences have to be stressed. External evaluation by the educational authorities or by the school head do not influence teachers in their practice which first and foremost grants teachers a high professional autonomy. The “evaluation” most relevant for the Finnish teachers was through “peer-pressure” of colleagues but not by external agencies that would imply formal consequences. The control of the head-master is gradually replaced by the control of the school community that sets the common goals and values. Self-evaluation, self-control, and self-development have thus become important mechanisms and issues for teachers. A similar trend could be observed in the Irish school, where evaluation and accountability mechanisms do exist formally but not by external agencies that would imply formal consequences. The emphasis is put on self-evaluation and evaluation between colleagues instead of monitoring through external agencies. Spain and Portugal are similar in the sense that school inspection theoretically exists but has no effect on teachers practice. Often it is qualified as paper work one has to comply with but which remains without consequences and can safely be ignored. As long as one fulfills the formal paper work there will be no negative repercussions. Although in the Spanish case, an increase in documentation was reported by the head of the school, it did not affect their work life other than by “stealing” valuable time much needed in other tasks.

The inverse situation was described in the English case. Ofsted inspection and national tests have installed a tight regime of evaluation and accountability. The public comparison of schools performance across the nation in combination with the choice of parents to send their kids to high achievement schools materialize as real pressure for teachers to “do well.” Whereas their Spanish or

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7 Ofsted stands for “Office for Standards in Education” the official body for inspection in public schools. See http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/
Portuguese colleagues shrug at school inspection if existent at all, for English teachers evaluation reports have real consequences, in terms of public exposure and being stressed. The Swedish teachers just described the way new documentation has been introduced in their school. Although they are still able to “ignore” those measures it is evident that the foundation for interleaving the performance of the school, the voucher system, and teachers practices has been laid.

The Greek case is somehow different again. Official inspection or accountability to external educational authorities is missing as in the Spanish case. In this respect, the Greek situation can also be compared with the Portuguese. However, the existence of a very prescriptive curriculum and the role of parents as source of control establish nevertheless a very tight regime of accountability. The curriculum establishes a common measure on progress. Certain learning goals have been achieved or not, certain themes covered or not. This in itself probably would not constitute a source of pressure yet. In combination with the strong role and influence of parents, however, it is converted into an instrument of control of teachers performance. Teachers feel not accountable to the educational authority but to parents in terms of progress according to the curriculum.

Another context in which the theme of accountability and documentation surfaced was not in the context of performativity and control but in relation to pupils with special educational needs. Teachers clearly have to document if and why certain pupils need special attention. In these situations where students become a “risk” for other students or for teachers (“why does a student not advance or learn?”), the increase in documentation and thus accountability has been especially noted by Irish, Swedish, Spanish teachers. In all those countries, teachers often have to follow tedious bureaucratic processes, or fulfill certain documentation procedures before they can claim additional support and resources. Thus, accountability and documentation has a dual purpose: teacher protection and child protection.

In sum, all teachers agree upon the fact that the need for documentation has increased. However, the purpose, effect, and the addressee of these measures is very diverse. For the English teachers documentation is inserted into a tight chain of performativity control by the educational authorities. The same happens in Greece with the difference that the performance of teachers is controlled not be the state but by parents. The Spanish, Finnish, Portuguese, Irish and Swedish teachers also report an increase in paper work, which is either “in-effective” when it comes to the control of performativity by the educational authorities (or parents) or taken seriously when it comes to documenting special needs and claiming additional resources for pupils. This very variety indicates that one should not take our cases studies as representative of the situation in the respective countries. What we nevertheless can say, in contrast to England or Greece for example, is the fact that teachers and schools have considerable margins to adapt or accommodate the new documentation requirements. It depends for example on individual persons such as the directory?? which role and type of evaluation is practiced in a certain school or not. Or, the very purpose of documentation can change. Although unanimously experienced as a time consuming additional burden and stealing time much needed in other tasks – it either can be “ignored” when not considered useful or taken seriously if seen as beneficial for the child for example.

Curricular Reform

Curricular reform is another central theme where teachers experiences diverge to a large degree. If already the European map on educational reform in primary education is characterized by quite different temporalities and objectives, teachers’ experiences all the more. As an example for the differences on the level of policy one may take England and Finland. In England the Education Act of 1988 ended a period of unprecedented professional autonomy aiming instead at a standards driven profession. National Curriculum with achievement targets and testing at ages 7, 11 and 14 and league tables of schools were among the most important new realities installed in schools. New
Labor introduced the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998 and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) in 1999 which dictated apart from the curriculum also pedagogy. Recently, however, policy has become “full circle” again emphasizing the Creative Curriculum recycling ideas in practice before 1988. The case of Finland exhibits in contrast a different schedule of curricular reform. The comprehensive school reform (1972-77) established primary education (from 1-6, and 7-9). A strong centralization accompanied this internal re-organization of the educational system. Since 1994 with the decisive introduction of the Framework Curriculum, teachers, schools and municipalities have to prepare their own curriculum based on national guidelines. Whereas in England the latest trend is towards a Creative Curriculum, the latest Finnish initiative in contrast favors a return to a more centralized approach where a more binding core curriculum has been planned (2004). Thus we can establish certain diverging trajectories of curricular reform on the national levels. Taking now teachers personal stories of these respective reforms into consideration further complicates the picture. Whereas one might expect a correlation between positive vs. negative evaluations of reform depending on the level of professional autonomy implied, the empirical evidence points into other directions. The English teachers for example, appreciate retrospectively the increase in professionalism when it comes to the National Numeracy and Literacy strategies. The very prescriptive curriculum helped to establish a common vocabulary between colleagues at the same time that it brought real “skills” improvements for pupils. This finding echoes other studies where teachers are equally quoted to embrace the positive contribution of these Strategies to their professionalism in the sense of “…giving them the confidence and awareness to explain precisely what they were doing and why.” (Webb et al., 2004, p.92; Earl et al., 2001). The Finnish teachers on the other hand described the curricular change towards a more open and flexible framework in quite neutral terms. The increase in autonomy also means an increase in additional tasks such as elaborating the curriculum, additional documentation or intensive collaboration with parents. However, this increase in professional autonomy was at least not enthusiastically embraced by the Finnish teachers. The decisive point rather seems to be that the Finnish teachers enjoyed sufficient personal autonomy to either engage in those tasks or not. The case of the Greek teachers provides yet another configuration. The curriculum is highly prescriptive but is neither experienced as especially empowering or having a negative impact on the working conditions. Rather, it is quite naturally accepted as it is, despite the fact that most teachers of the case study emphasize the stress they suffer during their work day. It is not entirely clear from the report that the curriculum is the sole cause of this hectic working atmosphere in the school but the constant preoccupation for the pupils progress, the corrections and preparation of curricular material nevertheless point in this direction. Ireland again, provides a somewhat different picture in the sense that the recent curricular reform is embraced by the teachers (from the youngest to the most experienced). There are varying interpretations with regard to the extent to which the current Revised Curriculum converges towards a more flexible and open form. Although, the teachers (including the most experienced teacher) did
not voice any negative concerns about an overly prescriptive curriculum.

If there is some convergence between the different cases including especially Portugal and Spain, then it is with regard to “tiredness” of reform. Portugal teachers in theory have a flexible and open curriculum, adaptable to their local school needs. However, the reforms are qualified as “just words” in the same way that Spanish teachers reject recent reform as misconceiving the real needs of schools. In Spain, teachers reported a high of impact of educational reform for the LOGSE\(^\text{11}\) but subsequent cosmetic changes are described as not reaching down to school and teaching practice. Equally, the English teachers reported that reform has become “full circle” and that if one holds still for long enough one actually is an innovator.

In sum, how curricular reforms are experienced by teachers depends to a strong degree on the history of the profession and the relevant cultural context of each case. There is no uniform, one-to-one relation between the type of reform and teachers experience.

\textit{Relation with Parents}

The relation with parents constitutes another important point of change for teachers work. Parents in general have become more assertive, a fact which often was articulated in conjunction with the falling status and prestige of teachers. The Greek case surely is paradigmatic for this neo-liberal trend of parents role. Despite this general atmosphere of parents as clients who know the rights but do not fulfill their obligations (as one English teacher expressed it), only in Finland and Ireland teachers collaboration with parents was inscribed and backed up by legislation (in Ireland this is even tied to a remuneration scheme). Indirectly, the Swedish legislation obliged teachers to explore new strategies to involve parents in their school project in order to establish more intimate links between student, parents and schools (and thus counter the voucher system). In the Spanish and Portuguese case, parents form part of school life but do not come to fill any decisive role in teachers practice.

Again, how parents come to materialize in teachers work depends highly on the local conditions already in place in the specific schools and countries. Teachers in Ireland, Sweden, and Greece – despite very different situation of parental roles – all mentioned to equal degrees that parents are a source of stress and help at the same time. Collaboration was experienced as being potentially very helpful but at the same time a source of additional skills to acquire, things to learn, strategies to develop. The Irish, Finnish, English, and especially Greek teachers felt accountable to parents despite varying degrees of real collaboration.

\textbf{3.3. Economic Conditions that Influence Teachers Work}

Scarce resources, although existing in many different manifestations, was a common matter of concern. Only in England and Sweden more direct concerns in terms of marketization were actually influencing teachers practice. In the other cases, economic factors operated rather as the framing conditions – manifest in terms of class size, number of teachers per class, or infrastructure – under which their practice had to develop for the better or the worse. Given the fact, that those economic conditions set the stage for working with students, they appear also as tightly related to teachers daily preoccupations as mentioned under point 3.1.

\textit{Contracts}

Especially for beginning teachers just entering the profession, the contractual insecurity could be

\(^{11}\) LOGSE – Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (Organic Act on the General Arrangement of the Educational System) approved in 1990.
observed across several countries. Portugal probably provides the extreme case where new teachers have to travel the whole country just to find a temporary position. High mobility is required which is experienced as highly negative in terms of setting up a stable personal life. The Spanish data suggests a similar mobility, albeit less in geographical terms. Frequent changes between schools within the same area is quite common – and quite differently experienced. Two teachers qualified their change of work places as positive in terms of giving them a wide variety of professional experience not to be missed. The Swedish teachers on the other hand also lament the instable working conditions at the start of the career which prevents setting up a stable relation with pupils. These accounts have to be seen in the context of “normal” teachers relationships with students which easily span up to three years.

Material Infrastructure

A certain lack of infrastructure was mentioned by the Finnish teachers where books have to be reused. Budgets are tight, or at least have been more extensive in the past. However, the level of infrastructure available to schools across the countries is highly relative. Whereas for the Finnish, Swedish or English schools in-door sports facility and ICT were quite normal, the Spanish or the Portuguese teachers reported a sever lack. Some teachers in the Portuguese school were unsure if the Internet connection was installed, working, or already broken again. Students in the Spanish school had to stay in their classrooms during breaks in case of bad weather. In the Irish school, due to its expansion, classes were relocated into prefabricated “buildings” and some classes shared the same room only separated by a mobile blackboard. However, since September 2006, staff and pupils have moved into a new state of the art school building. In the Greek school, material resources and even basic consumables such as the heating are not sufficiently provided for by the public authorities, obliging the headmaster to continuously search for additional funding and sponsorship liaisons. Given the financial difficulties of just keeping the school running, additional infrastructure such as overhead projectors are not an option. Again, in a sharp contrast, the English school had electronic whiteboards and laptops for their teachers.

Despite these differences in terms of material resources across the schools, teachers didn't give the availability or the lack of certain things too much importance. In the same way that Finnish teachers lament the reuse of books, the Greek teachers describe the difficult financial conditions for their school, but none reported those things as a fundamental handicap to their work and teaching practice. They are the framing conditions which of course could be better but are not as decisive as other aspects such as class size for example.

Class Size and Support Staff

The number of pupils per class varied greatly between the reports. The Spanish teachers working in a Socially Vulnerable Urban School theoretically work under favorable conditions in that their class size is reduced but as one of the teacher says, with 25 three year olds, there is not much she can do. The school currently receives two social workers as interns which helps them to get two “teachers” in certain classes, but this does not form part of the officially foreseen staffing of school. Whereas the Spanish teachers set the upper limit at 15 pupils for class due to the type of students they have to attend, one Finnish teacher sees classes with up to 25 students as quite normal and not influencing his practice. However, they also criticize classes that are too large, having taught up to 38 students. The Swedish school was the only where two teachers actually shared their classes. These differences get also apparent from table 1 where the school size and teachers can be seen in relation. In the Swedish case, 400 pupils are attended by more or less 50 teachers, whereas the English school with around 500 pupils has 16 teachers and additional SEN or language assistants. The Portuguese teachers (approx. 15 for 325 pupils) expressed along the same lines the lack of human
resources. In Portugal this is especially noticed in the decline of hiring of support teachers and even if a school has support staff, they frequently cannot fulfill their official function because they are appointed to substitute for regular classroom teachers who are absent. In the Irish case, the average class size consists of approximately 30 pupils. While the teachers mentioned the lack of space, they were not overly concerned (possibly because the new school building was nearing completion). The English teachers do not mention class size in any way but interesting aspects emerge in the sharing of work with other staff (see collaboration below).

To sum up this section: the material conditions influence in a variety of ways teachers work. The least problematic are issues of infrastructure, teaching materials and the like. Not that they are not noted but in relation to other aspects, they are not at the center of teachers concerns. However, when it comes to staffing and thus the number of students teachers have to attend, or the availability of specialized staff, economic resources become decisive for teachers' work conditions. The indicators as provided by the OECD or the EU on public expenditure in education provide a good comparative snapshot of the relative well-being of public schools across the countries.12

3.4. Concluding remarks: teachers' experience and restructuring

This concluding section will comment on the relation of teachers' experiences as collected throughout the reports and “restructuring”. As already mentioned, the picture of national agendas on restructuring of the educational system are not really homogeneous. There exist differences between the countries especially in terms of timing. Whereas in England the Education Act (1988) marks a watershed in terms of neo-liberal reforms under Margaret Thatcher, Spain was still occupied by the buildup and structuring of the educational system. Especially during the years previous to the LOGSE (1982-90) teachers reached a high of implication and autonomy precisely at a time when their English colleagues started to experience the first neo-liberal reforms. On the other hand, decentralization of educational authority including finance was from the start part of the development of the welfare state in Spain but not in Greece or Portugal which are still centrally organized. This again, has to be contrasted with “decentralization” in the context of the northern welfare states such as Sweden or Finland where it occurred in the context of restructuring measures that relegated educational authority to the municipalities which is different from the Spanish context where it was primarily politically motivated as part of the democratization process after the end of the highly centralized Franco regime. Thus, there are many different timings and significances attached to what restructuring of the educational system means.

At this point it may be helpful to distinguish between concrete reforms that no doubt have occurred especially form the mid 1980s onwards across the participating countries and a certain neo-liberal discourse and public perception. What can be extracted from the different reports is not so much a homogeneous pattern of how teachers experience concrete policy reform but in the way they describe their public image as “loss of prestige, respect, status.” Almost all teachers mention that they think their status and respect has declined. This is extreme in the case of Greece. In Ireland the work place is becoming more challenging. Hence, the status and respect of teachers is at best stable and certainly not being enhanced. But none of the teachers failed to mention at least this loss of respect or “public blaming.” This suggests to pay more attention and to take more seriously the role of the media when analyzing teachers work lives.

Despite the varieties of reform mentioned in the first paragraph, which are of course not exhaustive, teachers report quite unanimously that material conditions are far from ideal. This is remarkable uniform across the reports but it may be worth to point out the different reasons and different consequences related. Wheres teachers from Finland, Sweden, England all describe in one way or another a lack of resources or at least remember a “wealthier” past, in Spain, Greece, Portugal the

described insufficiency in school buildings or staffing is inherited from the past. As the reports of WP1/2 also have shown, the southern countries are still well below EU average public expenditure in education and have thus never reached the standards of the northern and “older” welfare states now affected by “restructuring.” These different historical trajectories then may be responsible in part for the diverging degree of marketization that was observed. Whereas in England or Sweden schools clearly have come under the sway of the market in order to make up for public deficit, in Spain or Portugal – despite the lack of public spending – none of the teachers nor earlier Profknow reports described market forces moving into schooling. Greece is an exception and interesting case, where parents indeed have acquired an influential position in public schools – influential in terms of financial support which allows them to see their relation to schools primarily as clients.

If we try to see the relation between official policy and teachers experiences, then two scenarios emerge from the case studies across the countries. On the one hand, teachers experiences with relation to curricular reform are very diverse. The opposite reforms may produce the same experience simple because accustomed ways of working change; and, the same reforms may produce opposite experiences as well. This is to say, more than in other areas of educational policy, the individual histories, the accustomed practice in schools and previous reforms come to bear on the impact that a certain curricular policy may have. It is highly depended on historical and cultural factors already in place. On the other hand, reforms that change the composition of the student population for example have quite similar impacts across the different schools, teachers, and teacher generations. This emerges quite clearly when considering SEN policies. Ireland, England, Spain, and Portugal could be cited where state imposed policy for incorporation of SEN students cause the same “existential” problems for teachers. The Swedish or Spanish school which deal per se with a very varied and lower than average student profile do not see their problems related to direct policy measures; however, they nevertheless describe the same difficulties: catering for individual interests and abilities to learn without having the right material-, human-, and pedagogic resources. 13

And last but not least it should be mentioned that although teachers response to policy reform is very varied, most teachers expressed a certain tiredness of reform. Except for Greece and Ireland – out of very different reasons however – teachers qualify reform increasingly as empty gestures that do not really reach the important dimensions of their work (class size and staffing for example).

4. Professional Knowledge

The central question of Profknow is how restructuring affects teachers professional knowledge. The national reports conceptualized knowledge in quite diverging ways and levels of detail. A shared idea that runs through all reports consists in a basic duality of espoused, formal, theoretical, explicit knowledge vs. a tacit, personal, knowing in doing. Explicit knowledge is given through teacher education, legislation, scientific literature, curricula whereas other forms of knowing are inscribed in cultural, historical, biographical aspects of teachers lives. Thus, knowledge is not just what is written in books but at the same time embodied in a “silent” knowledge of “how to do things” that has been acquired through experience and that reflects the personal, cultural, and historical dimensions of teachers.

The reports thus echo a dichotomy conceptualized in the literature between knowing that versus knowing how (Ryle, 1947), propositional knowledge versus procedural knowledge or comprehension (knowledge about) versus apprehension (knowledge from direct acquaintance) (Kolb, 1984). Knowledge is also seen as tacit (Polany, 1967; Eraut, 2000) versus explicit.

13 In which way the different SEN policies connect to wider (and also diverse national) agendas of restructuring has to remain open at this point.
Following this basic dichotomy that runs throughout the reports, we will first of all describe the explicit ways teachers describe their knowledge and their lack thereof. Where do they see their needs for learning and what do they want to know? These requests are often defined in relation to the failures of initial teacher education or in-service training. Then, in a second step, we will also describe their professional culture and specifically their relation with colleagues as an implicit form of knowledge.

4.1. Teachers knowledge

Looking at commonalities on how teachers describe their knowledge (or lack thereof) it should not be too surprising that this basically mirrors their main concerns described earlier (see 3.1). Most teachers are quite confident concerning their subject matters. Depending on the age in service, teachers also have acquired a certain stock of techniques to discipline students. Younger teachers are still lacking experience in how to affront students, a fact often bemoaned in relation to the insufficient initial education (see below). However, the line between what teachers know and what they want to know points to the wider problem of how they understand their profession: in terms of a standard and skill driven practice or an agent of change in the wider social field.

Teachers in Ireland, Portugal, Greece, and Sweden describe their lack of tools and teaching techniques that would enable them to provide very diverse students with the same possibilities of advancing and learning. Especially in the case of Ireland, the recent introduction of SEN pupils and the lack of special needs sessions during initial education was sharply criticized by the younger teachers. In Greece, teachers want practical tips of “what” and “how to do in class” in order to achieve and maintain a predictable work routine explicitly rejecting theoretical knowledge. The teachers in the Spanish case where more specific – they saw that more knowledge of child psychology probably would help them to reach more children better. They also were quite explicit that more knowledge in how to conduct group dynamics and social cohesion would be helpful. The Swedish and Portugal teachers voiced their concerns for effective teaching strategies for special needs pupils. All those voiced needs clearly refer to the main problem described earlier, on how to affront a very diverse student population.

But teachers also mentioned the need for new strategies in relation to other “new” members of the school context. In Sweden, for example, strategies to deal with the municipality management were sought to the same degree that teachers were concerned how to involve parents. The Irish teachers as well as the Greeks described the relationship with parents as a new aspect of their work, which made them feel insecure. Especially in the Greek case, teachers seek new strategies to handle parents that act like clients questioning the teachers' professional competences. The Irish teachers referred to new challenges in dealing with parents. Such challenges required teachers to take a reflective turn and be more defensive and litigation conscious in their practice.

The case of the English teachers is exemplary in that policy reform (Numeracy and Literacy Strategies) have a direct influence of teachers professional knowledge. As already described in the literature (Elliot 2002), former knowledge of child development, psychology, or the sociology of education has been replaced by skills on how to comply with reporting documents, curriculum-based planning sheets, or how to implement the Numeracy and Literacy Strategies. As the English teachers describe, knowledge now means basically “planning, preparation, assessment.” Whereas their English colleagues already have assumed those new skills, the Portuguese teachers explicitly request in-service training in order to deal with the new organizational structure of primary schools. Many teachers came into contact with a new form of administrating schools and therefore felt unsure on how to comply with the new bureaucratic procedures. In comparison with the English case, however, it seems questionable to which degree this will lead to a “restructuring” of their knowledge or rather just reflects teachers response to a specific historical event.
Few teachers across the case studies reported a lack of knowledge in relation to ICT. Only one teacher in Portugal insisted on this point. Considering the level of ICT present in the English school (teachers have to use a laptop and digital whiteboard) not much importance is given in the report on this issue, except from the fact that adapting to ICT has been harder for older teachers. The Irish, Spanish, Swedish, Finnish report do not mention ICT; one Greek teachers uses the Internet as source of information.

In general, what emerges from the different reports is the fact that teachers consider themselves proficient in their subject areas. What they lack is how to transmit this knowledge to students especially taking into account the many changing factors that define their working conditions: modernization of society, diverse student population, more and integrated SEN students, immigration, etc. Of course, teachers – and the reports mention this – have to know a very wide variety of things: curriculum and lesson planning, administrative tasks, evaluation and assessment strategies, child development, ICT, the role of parents, and communicative strategies among many other things. But their main concern is still how to assure teaching and learning under those very wide and diverse tasks. In danger of oversimplification, one could say that teachers struggle to know what teaching entails, once its border has become fuzzy beyond the too simplistic transmission model of knowledge. Especially the Finnish teachers but also the Spanish or the Swedish posed this question quite explicitly in terms of where to draw the line. Teachers need to know “a little bit of everything” but does this entail “educating” pupils morally, social values, and how to lead a good life? Does it entail functioning as conflict manager and instilling a sense of mutual respect in students? Is it just technical skills that should concern them or wider social problematics?

4.2. Conditions of Knowledge: Where do Teachers Learn

The fact that teachers are in need of knowledge draws the attention to the places and situations where they learn.

Initial education

The value of initial teacher education differs across the countries but in general teachers' experiences haven't been too satisfying. All teachers stress the fact that the actual learning happened on the job, in the practice of working with pupils. This not only refers to actual class work but also to organizational procedures and administrative issues. The judgments vary of course between the individual teachers but always rather within the negative spectrum than across the whole range. Particularly bad experiences were reported in Ireland in relation to the lack of provision (in the initial teacher education programme) for teaching SEN pupils. Similarly, the youngest teachers in Spain and Sweden criticized their initial education.

Initial education of primary teachers, although it has been firmly anchored in the universities across all countries, enjoys a relative low status except in Finland where entrance examinations are very competitive. Similarly, in Ireland the standard of entrants to teacher education programmes is quite high (top 25% of those who sit the Leaving Certificate Examination). As the Portuguese report but also the Spanish material suggests, having a degree does not guarantee a job nor was it experienced as especially helpful in class. Initial education was always contrasted with the importance of learning from experience. Telling in this respect is also the case of the oldest teacher in Greece who – highly skeptical of theoretical knowledge – visits his old teacher in order to get concrete practical tips of what and how to do things in class.
On the job and in-service training

Congruent with the rather low opinion on initial education was the description of learning primarily on the job. What differs across the countries is not the importance that teachers attribute to learning on the job but rather the degree to which this was facilitated or backed up by formal procedures. For example, in Portugal, teachers learn a lot by having to cover certain special roles such as the leadership roles, cooperating teacher role, or pedagogical animator. However, this type of learning does not involve any established guiding procedures. Rather teachers “jump” directly into the new assignment without preparation – learning while doing. In the Irish case, in contrast, the school appointed more experienced teachers to fulfill certain tutoring roles for beginning teachers. Thus, learning by solving encountered problems on the job is embedded into certain formal collaboration strategies between more experienced and less experienced teachers that can count on temporal and other resources. While, it is important to note that such a strategy is not practiced nationwide, there is a commitment in a government White Paper (GoI, 1995) to have a national induction programme for all newly qualified teachers.

All teachers mentioned that they learn a lot at work. However, despite the importance this form of learning obviously enjoys there was little explicit discussion what this type of learning precisely implies. Teachers usually understand learning here in terms of acquiring chunks of information at will. Quite representative in this respect is the case of Greek teachers for whom learning means primarily exchange of “ideas.” The important point here is, that “ideas” are understood as concrete, practical teaching strategies explicitly excluding experimentation, innovation, research – activities that potentially endanger the stability of school practice because they would lead to unpredictable outcomes. Learning means not confronting the unknown but rather exchange of effective tips. The Portuguese report mentions that teachers in the past had a more reflective approach to learning and knowledge at work, but that this has been increasingly replaced by an unproblematic concept of knowledge as “information chunks.” The most experienced teacher in Ireland as well as in Spain provide two exceptions in this general picture where learning is conceptualized as reflective process, involving self-study and a constructive process that is embedded into a social field. Especially in the case of the Spanish teacher with more than 30 years of experience, this learning on the job is qualified in a very precise sense: it involves a willingness to question and explore one's own personality as a fundamental half of the relation with students. Knowledge means here self-knowledge – and, according to her, on this path of knowledge only few teachers are willing to embark. However, considering the overall pattern across the different teacher voices, new knowledge is acquired “on the job” in a rather unproblematic way, as exchange of tips or individual trial and error processes.

In-service training was experienced as supporting to various degrees this learning on the job. The English teachers maybe provide an extreme case where all too frequent skills training actually interfered with having- and being in class. The Greek teachers disqualify in-service training as not very useful. The Spanish teachers describe the difficulty of receiving in-service training that doesn't fit the standardized courses at the same time as they underline all the more the necessity and importance of external experts coming into the school instead of sending of staff to individual courses. Portugal is a case apart since a massive national upgrading program is in place since the year 2000 in order to update the training of those teachers in the system that lacked a “licenciatura” university degree. In parallel, a certain lack of in-service training in the past has now been covered for – with teachers criticizing not the unavailability of courses anymore but their low quality and irrelevance for their teaching practice. In Finland, three days of training are required by the collective labor agreement. So it is compulsory for the teachers to participate in the training that the employers (municipalities) arrange. Teachers often complain that this type of training is not necessarily practically useful. What the Finnish class teachers urge for is, as they put it, ‘applicable’ and ‘useful’ knowledge. On the use and rule of in-service training, highly diverse opinions can be
found throughout the reports.

The role of collaboration between colleagues

Often, teachers state that learning on the job is bound to some forms of collaboration with colleagues. Again, the difference is not to be found in the degree of importance teachers attribute to their colleagues as source of inspiration and knowledge but rather to which degree collaboration can build on more explicit and openly acknowledge structures. Even where new staff roles such as SEN specialists, teaching assistants, Learning Support Assistants, or Leisure Time Pedagogues (Sweden, England, Ireland) among others have come into the schools, collaboration with teachers is reported as remaining on the level of ad-hoc exchanges that do not really manage to make any dent in this still very individualistic profession.

Clearly, among the 7 case studies, the Irish teachers had the most developed form of formal collaboration in place. It is likely that the increased co-operation has been prompted by the rapid pace of change in the Irish context (including curricular and legislative reform and increased immigration). As previously mentioned, senior teachers fulfilled tutoring functions for beginning teachers and collaboration was clearly inscribed in the recent curricular reform. Protected time (within school hours) to hold class level meetings with colleagues further facilitate the teachers’ efforts at collaboration. But here again, there is enormous variation within schools and much of the collaboration is informal or in some instances contrived. The Finnish teachers also showed a high degree of collaboration between colleagues. It forms part of their professional culture, albeit it is not required. Teachers enjoy the freedom to engage in close planning, preparation and teaching but they do not have to if they do not want to. The Spanish situation made it clear that collaboration depends highly on the persons involved and doesn't count on formal procedures (a similar situation was described in the case of the youngest and the more experienced teacher in Sweden). But the Spanish case also made clear how hard it is to break the privacy of the class and the individual approach to teaching in favor of a shared, common school project in which all teachers would be implied – let alone to count on public, formal procedures that would support this kind of collaboration.

These ad-hoc and sporadic forms of collaboration also throw some additional light on the role of “genericism” in the organization of teachers work. According to WP1 (Norrie & Goodson, 2005, p.18 citing Beck and Young, 2005) “genericism” moves into all areas of education and training. It is characterized by terms such as key skills, core skills, or team work which supposedly should guarantee interchangeability of personnel in a working world of changing careers and “short-termism.” Knowledge and the knower get separated, thus implying knower’s external relation to knowledge and easy circulation of knowledge and knower, which entails markets for knowledge and knower. What emerges from the reports, is the fact that genericism has a chance mainly due to a very prescriptive curriculum (such as in England or Greece) but seldom out of established team work procedures. Little formal mechanisms are in place that would guarantee the continuity of work from one teacher to the next; in reality rather the opposite seems to be happening where highly individualistic approaches to teaching still dominate.

Besides these different types of collaboration and their formal backup, one can also distill from the reports quite varying atmospheres of collaboration. The most competitive situation was described in the Greek report. Whereas the Finnish teachers report a very flat hierarchy with the headmaster based on collaborative discussion and shared responsibilities, in the Greek school decisions by the head-master are hierarchical delegations in administrative matters. The general climate is one of competition as one teacher explains: “Each one tries to make whatever he can from his own side, to show himself as a good teacher, and he doesn't collaborate with the other colleague, in order to make a name just for himself.” This sort of superficial cooperation was also observed in the English case. Standardized teaching strategies for Numeracy and Literacy Strategies have implemented a
common language between teachers facilitating exchange of teaching units – but as one teacher remarks, this should not be confused with solidarity within the teachers collective. The English teachers also allude to the tensions that can build up between teachers and different assistant positions where age can clash with qualification (younger but higher qualified teachers vs. older but less qualified assistants).

Summing up the findings of this sub-section 4.2, a certain cleavage can be noted between the importance teachers attach to learning on the job and the very limited models according to which this happens. Teachers learn a lot in their class or by working with students. They also learn a lot from their colleagues but always this knowledge remains highly personal and doesn’t travel within the wider institutional context of the school. The Spanish case made this very palpable through the repeated and explicit attempts of the school principal to get teachers to document what they do in class and thus to share with their colleagues their experiences – without much success. Only in Sweden and Finland, and to some extent in Spain there was a sense of collective effort notable where teachers defined themselves and act as a unity on the level of their school. And although the Irish school had good structures of collaboration in place, certain structures were not operating at a whole school level. Thus although individual teachers may learn, this knowledge largely remains locked at the personal level; it does not get inserted into the formal mechanisms of teacher education or in-service training where experienced teachers feed back into the education of the new generations of teachers. Only one teacher out of 22 was teaching other teachers and thus involved in a formal procedure where she passes on her knowledge. But we must be careful too, not to valorize ‘best practice’ as it may not always be the best preparation for the future. How does practice get changed in such circumstances?

4.3. Knowledge, the Profession and Professional Ethics

At this point, the wider implications for the profession will be drawn. How do the different forms of knowledge and the different conditions of knowledge relate to professionalism and professionalization? Responding to those questions will weave a further layer into our understanding of knowledge at work.

An argument that has been present in earlier workpackages disclosed the difference between professionalization and professionalism. As WP1 showed through the literature, there is a certain agreement on the current trend in teaching work as being deprofessionalized, de-skilled, and intensified (Norrie & Goodson, 2005, p.20). Professions within this context are often analyzed along professionalization which serves the interests of the group, its occupational status and prestige vs. professionalism which refers to teachers responsibilities such as control and development of their knowledge in relation to the benefit of their “clients” (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Helsby & McCulloch, 1996).

Two notions of professionalism

Niemi’s (1999) account is useful in the context of the present research which argues for the internal conflict inherent in a given profession. Rather than assuming consent between teachers on what constitutes an ideal professional, there are considerable tensions between those who orient their ideal around a more traditional vocational, social service model vs. those who adopt more openly a performative view of their occupation with an emphasis on efficiency and managerial skills.

Clearly, the English teachers confirmed that their knowledge is being shifted from a more holistic approach including the multiple facets of education towards compliance with government directives and documentation. However, as has been described, this move was precisely experienced as an increase in professionalism. On the other hand, as Niemi (ibid.) points out, this concept of professionalism tied to standardized practice has to be contrasted with an alternative model of
teacher empowerment. Teachers are “trusted” by the educational authorities to be able to take their own decisions and become an active agent for educational reform and societal change. The Finnish and the Irish case could be cited as examples where teachers enjoy a “certified” high level of autonomy for organizing their work. Also, their (and policy’s) concern with extending their work responsibilities to include collaborating with parents suggests that they assume a broader role in the task of educating children. But at a more general level in the Irish context there is creeping prescription and thus also growing performativity and accountability.

These differences on how teachers understand professionalism are also mirrored in the way they define their professional ethics and ideals. In the case of the most experienced teachers in Spain and Sweden, work had a strong vocational aspect. Care for children, for their physical and emotional well-being stands in the foreground. This of course has to be seen in the context of the specific schools they were working, but similar stories emerged in Portugal, where teachers described as the most important aspect of their work to have a class on their own. They see their work as part of larger social picture where the deprived neighborhoods and thus the difficulties of the families and kids, the poverty form the center of their work. This social spin to their work is clearly seen in opposition to higher demands of documentation and the whole discourse on performativity. Since the needs they affront and encounter are not of academic- but of social nature, being a good professional lies in embracing fully this “caring” side of work. In sharp contrast, teachers in the English case study defined their ideal professional in a higher degree of accountability. It is tied to the professional capability to transfer knowledge and skills. As already mentioned, teachers see their primary goal rather in compliance with government directives rather than being a agent of social change.

In summary, through the case studies there emerges a certain duality between a notion of professionalism tied to successful teaching of competencies on the one hand, and a notion of professionalism that gravitates primarily around a concern for the formation and development of the individual (pupil). Professionalism in our research was not articulated along the line of higher/lower degree of autonomy and self-responsibility but along the lines of teaching competencies/skills vs. social work, pupil well-being, and individual development.

Professional configurations

Within Profknow the different views on professionalism were anticipated and conceptualized as contributing to “professional configurations.” The aim is to capture how the notion of profession changes over time, revealing more complexity than simple trends of de-professionalization or professionalization.

Indeed, what remains rather underexposed in the reports are accounts that tackle trends and changes on the level of the profession as a whole. There are little to no direct accounts of teachers on how the profession as a whole can be empowered. As mentioned, all teachers rather would agree that their profession has lost in prestige and status irrespective of the fact that some would consider themselves as highly professional. Although teacher initial education has entered university, this...
was never mentioned as a source of status and prestige. A professional, “collective consciousness”
rather depends on historical facts such as strong unionism as in Ireland and Finland, the break of
teacher unity ever since the failed strikes of 1988 in England, or the “loss” of memory of historical
struggles in Greece. What also emerged in the reports was a general a-political stance. Teachers in
Greece, in Spain (youngest), or in England explicitly reject a political approach to their profession.
This does not mean that they do not hold personal political views but rather that they do not see
their profession taken as a whole as a serious agent in the political arena. For the oldest teachers,
these are struggles of the past and the lack of a collective consciousness in the reports surely is
significant in this sense.

What emerges from the reports are therefore not teachers that form part of large ambitions of
professionalization but rather individual strategies operating on the personal level, in the classroom
and the wider school community. To think in terms of “profession” beyond a common sense notion
of “type of job” definitely was not the norm in the reports. Nevertheless, one can describe a certain
array of professional strategies that come to define teachers' responses to the challenges they face.
What are the commonalities and differences on how they affront changes?

In the case of the Greek teachers, the dominant response could be described as disillusioned
acceptance of the status quo. As the report mentions, anxiety of practice and pressure of time do not
leave much space for theoretical reflection – and it is questionable to which degree teachers
therefore can perform a more active role for innovation in education. This impression of silently
enduring the status quo gets also confirmed by the most experienced teacher who cites the persistent
culture of clientelism as undermining aspirations of real change and progress. As already
mentioned, the working atmosphere in the school did not seem too favorable either in terms of
encouraging the discussion of problematic aspects between colleagues and the headmaster.

Considering the English case next, what certainly sticks out right from the beginning are the heavy
changes that teachers have experienced. The legislative transformation since the late 1980's and the
more recent reforms (Strategies) are certainly present in teachers accounts. Reviewing the reactions,
however, it is surprising that those reforms of the educational system do not provoke much
resistance (anymore). Thus, the interpretation of national testing, marketization, or National
Strategies mainly settle between approval or diagnosing a certain personal insufficiency but rarely
result in formulating an open critique. Inspection and national testing make the case in point. From
the quotes it is clear that English teachers reject the SATs tests especially for the 7 year olds. They
do not see much sense in submitting children at that age to exams. They voice the enormous
pressure that is put on them through those test (the results of which get published on a national
scale). However, the tests are nevertheless accepted in the sense that the experienced pressure is
interpreted as “self-made.”17 What is singular in the English case is the incredible tight linkage
between Government policies and classroom practice of teachers. Whereas in other countries
legislation often never reaches teachers practice, in England it certainly does. Judging from
teachers' accounts, this leaves little room to affront change in an autonomous and/or collective way.

In contrast, the Finnish teachers enjoy a high degree of professional autonomy which grants
teachers enough freedom to decide when and how to respond to change. Teachers showed a high
degree of collaboration ranging from class work to dealing with parents but at the same time,
refraining from these forms of collaboration – although required according to legislation – was
equally possible. The good working atmosphere and trust between colleagues, the very horizontal
relation with the headmaster who is eager to imply all staff in decision processes furthermore
contribute to a very balanced life at school that allows to buffer change. The example of additional
documentation comes to mind. Even though teachers unanimously reject those additional burdens it

17 See especially the quotes by T4n (p.83)on “self-made pressure” and T6 (p.83)on “I'll get off my soap-box” of the
English report.
doesn't pass the threshold of a “real” concern. Rather, the teachers count on the ideological support of the headmaster which makes a sort of “silent” compliance acceptable for all involved. It doesn't appear to be an issue in the school and between the teachers themselves, at least not in terms of “fighting state imposed restructuring” or similar. The changes happening to teachers are therefore re-negotiated within the field of autonomy granted to each teacher and the schools. As mentioned earlier, the important fact is that this margin of accommodating formal requirements exists at all; in the end it depends on the headmaster in each school how government directives are implemented and used.

The Spanish school sticks out for its very proactive approach to change/difficulties in school. From the outset, however, it has to be stressed that this depends highly on the recent change of the school director and her ambition to move the school community towards a more “relaxed” state of being. Official documentation on the school project is used and re-evaluated to articulate the school project for all teachers involved; external counseling is claimed to set-off an internal learning process within the teaching staff; continuous self-reflection on the personal and collegial level is required, etc. However, this high profile of social implication also comes at a price of personal burn-out, and an emphasis on the vocational aspect of teaching.

As already mentioned, this emphasis on a caring aspect of teaching was very similar for the Swedish teachers, especially the more experienced ones. But, apart from these common concerns described under point 3, the main challenges that the Swedish teachers face refer to the decentralization and the marketization of education. These restructuring measures affect teachers in an existential way: classes will be broken apart or not, staff will be reduced or not, working conditions will improve or deteriorate. The demands of management and of pupils/parents run counter to their professional ideal and community of practice which is pupil-centered and build around a long-term relation with students. The distinct aspect of the Swedish schools however that distinguishes it from the other participants, is the level of collective effort shown to affront those changes. First, there are concrete measures that provoke resistance, and this resistance is organized on the level of the whole school. The teacher collective discusses and proposes strategies to contact/negotiate with municipality and the parents. This is not the individual concern or personal handicap of single teachers.

The Portuguese report mentions teachers positive response to being in contact with higher education institutions which helped to develop a more critical stance toward their profession. The extensive roll-out of in-service training by the government is appreciated by teachers and welcome as a valuable resource. However, when it comes to the high pace of reform and the inconsistencies between the different players in the educational system (teacher training, school philosophy, centralized curriculum, etc.) teachers nevertheless feel mainly disoriented. The constant legislative changes that do not respect the time for legislation to translate into practice, seem to make teachers impervious to educational reform. Especially curricular reform is regarded as “just words” with no actual relevance or implication for professional practice. This disapproval of reform probably can materialize (in contrast to England where teachers express similar opinions but nevertheless comply) because little measures are in place that would control and sanction non-compliance (see accountability above). Although personal concerns on dealing with a diverse student population surface in the report, it is quite telling that one teacher complains about her indifferent colleagues that do not take those problems seriously and make fun of her.18 There is relative little need nor the culture for the normal class teacher (in opposition to the head-master) to actively engage with change (policy or socio-demographic).

The case of the Irish teachers is yet another story. There have been rapid policy changes since 1998. WP1 report tellingly speaks of “floodgates of reform” (Norrie & Goodson, 2005, p.199). In

18 See quote T2, p.235 of the Portuguese report
addition, the changing demographic (in terms of increased immigration), the integration of SEN students, and the emphasis on cooperation with parents introduce additional challenges. In order to deal with these challenges, teachers look primarily to each other for social and emotional support, feedback and encouragement. The formal backup of collaboration has been mentioned and it appears to be effective in the sense that little or no critical voices can be found in the report. Teachers report a lack of support, feel stressed and guilty for pupils that do not receive the attention they need – but these demands are usually buffered by a strong sense of collegiality, certain formal collaboration procedures in place and a historical memory and practice of primary teachers of ‘making do’ with current resources in a system that was very sparsely funded.

In sum, the profession has become much more diffuse for teachers. It cannot be restricted to political struggle between the profession and the state but has come to involve other players. Facing the multiple challenges that emerge through wider socio-demographic transformations, teachers within our case studies turn at best to their immediate school colleagues for support or blame themselves at worst but rarely articulated their urgencies on a wider scale. The professional is the one who either complies with government directives or defends pupils more holistic needs sometimes even in a sacrificial manner, but rarely the one who would see these changing roles and demands as a struggle fought on the level of the profession and “restructuring.”

5. Teaching Profession & Generations.

The explicit objective of WP4 is furthermore to “compare work life experiences and notions of expertise between generations of school teachers in Europe.” Before venturing “generations” and “comparison” some cautionary notes seem appropriate to the inherent limits of this undertaking. First, wp4 “only” concentrates on three individual accounts. Therefore the three cases cannot be representative for a whole generation. Even though our three teachers form part of certain typical generations in the sense that they have experienced (or not) decisive policy, demographic, economic, or political changes, their statements cannot be taken to “represent” these generations as a whole. A much more broader sample would be necessary, as it has been the objective of wp3. For the interpretation of our material this issue often appears in difficulties of interpreting statements in terms of “generation” or the teachers' life cycle. Some of the national reports (Ireland, England) also highlighted the difficulty to discern generational differences when all three teachers were working in the same school; a high degree of homogeneity seems inevitable and reaffirms the problem of representativeness.

Second, since the objective of WP4 is especially on comparing generations across Europe, the question of how “generations” are operationalized becomes important. What do we compare? According to the Karl Mannheim, there are two (three) ways to conceive of generations (Mannheim 1997). On the one hand in terms of biological cohort. A specific generation is delimited by age groups. In terms of comparison this operationalization would be preferable because it establishes an easy criteria to juxtapose the different teachers across Europe. However, the distribution of teachers in different age cohorts neglects the national specificities of what it means to belong to a certain generation in each country. On the other hand, therefore, experiential generations are based on key events or a shared cultural experience which works irrespective of the age a certain person has. Clearly, for the teachers involved, what molds them into a unified generation is not so much their age but rather certain key events, as for example the transition from dictatorships to democracy (Spain, Portugal, Greece). However, working with such a concept of generation that pays attention to the location of its members – historical and cultural – makes comparison all the harder, for what are we to compare when the very defining criteria of a certain generation is unique and thus incomparable?19

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19 In this sense Edmunds & Turner (2005) argue also for leaving behind the national bias of generations. Global media
Within the Profknow project, the focus is on years-of-experience cohorts: 1-5 years, 8-10 years, and 30 or more years of working experience as teacher. This does not correspond directly with age-cohorts. The difference between the Swedish and the Irish case makes this quite explicit where we have a teacher of 38 years vs. 22 years of age both with 1 year of working experience. Comparison, where possible, will therefore operate solely between years of experience. An added difficulty is the very diverse level of detail with which the individual reports analyze this topic. Ranging from a short paragraph (Finland, Greece, Portugal) to a more exhaustive analysis as in the case of Ireland, England, or Spain make it hard to do a comparative analysis at all. Just some main commonalities and differences will be outlined in what follows.

What runs more or less explicitly across the national reports are the difficulties of the less experienced generation of teachers in terms of entry into the profession. This was especially pointed in Portugal as already indicated in this report. Teachers had to travel the whole country just to find a job. In addition they usually get to “chose” the most difficult classes after senior teachers made their choice – a practice that appears to be common in Sweden as well. The Swedish case is in this respect a bit more exhaustive in that the youngest teacher qualifies this cleavage between the younger and older teachers in more general terms. It is not just harsher conditions of work that have to be met by the younger teachers but there is the wider problematic of using different languages, styles and knowledge that mark the generational conflict. A similar picture of having to affront very instable working conditions at the entry years also appeared to be true in the case of Spain, for the youngest and the middle experienced teacher. Thus, it is not just a typical situation for the young teachers starting to work now but already 15 years ago, teachers had a hard time to find a fixed contract in Spain. This instability then later on vanishes. None of the senior teachers with more than 30 years of experience faced instable working conditions anymore.

In the case of the Greek study, the dominant theme of parentocracy also was present when reading the generational differences. As the report stresses, the more experienced teacher clearly felt less under pressure from parents than his younger colleagues. The young teachers feel exposed to the demands of the parents, and constantly have to prove themselves as being knowledgeable. However, it may be interesting to also question these differences not only on a generational- but a gender bias, since the oldest teacher is male whereas the younger teachers are both female.

An interesting aspect for further study also emerged in the context of the Irish study. Whereas the oldest teacher reports that the teaching profession was a sort of “forced” choice with not many other professions being open to women in the past, the younger generation clearly indicate that they chose teaching consciously out of a range of other professional options. For them, as it was the case in the Spanish report, teaching is not for life but rather a job, a temporary occupation that could be switched in the future.

6. Concluding Remarks

6.1. Concerning the objectives of WP4

WP4 aimed to get a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well as over time. When reading the

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rather have us acknowledge the emergence of global generations, constituted by cultural events (or trauma) that do not stop at national frontiers.

20 As already indicated, although unstable working conditions are the norm for example in Spain and in Sweden for the novice teachers, this is not necessarily interpreted in a uniform negative way – it also was seen as providing valuable experience and learning in different context and cases (see Spanish report).
interviews and national reports it is evident that this objective has been achieved. The 22 case studies open up a wide variety of different experiences, exposing the highly individual and personal stories of each of the participants. At the same time, however, despite the very diverse biographies involved it was also possible to single out a common pattern across Europe. As described in detail in the report, the changes teachers had to face varied highly from person, to school, to nation. Nevertheless, teachers seem to share a certain range of core concerns which indicate transformations in their professional expertise. How to secure learning when faced with an increasingly heterogeneous student population, how to maintain order and discipline, and how to deal with the “imagined” or “real” loss of a previously taken-for-granted status traverses all cases. This result will proof helpful in future research on teachers using biographical methods, since it works as a sort of “hermeneutic circle” where individual practices and idiosyncrasies gain in sharpness when contrasted with more general patterns across the teaching profession. This double movement between the particular of each case and the general was further bolstered by the ethnographic descriptions of primary school work and life. What came to the fore again, where the huge differences between the local school cultures. They confirmed the individuality of each school context but again, also demonstrated unanimously that the material conditions and the infrastructure for example were considered secondary compared to the primacy of teacher-pupil relations, class size, or staffing.

The whole research process in Profknow has been conceived along a certain duality of “system” vs. “work/life” narratives. WP1 and 2 reflected upon the transformations of the educational systems within the participating partner countries. WP4 and 5 then produced the endemic perspective of how those changes occurring in the welfare state have affected teachers and nurses work life and professional knowledge. The different testimonies of participating teachers and nurses add indeed a very necessary level of vivid detail to the macro-social perspective on restructuring. The way policy directives affect teachers varies strongly across the cases. England might be exemplary for a especially tight knitting between authoritative intervention and concrete work practice. Policy travels fast and direct to teachers practice. On the other hand, we have cases such as Portugal or Spain where policy exists but does not travel to teachers practice as neatly. There exist considerable margins to interpret and accommodate state policy. The variety and differences with which teachers recounted their experiences on “restructuring” make it questionable to speak of “a” single process. As described in this report but also in the previous national contributions (WP1 & 2), what becomes visible are very different temporalities of change that do not fit as neatly under one general term such as “neo-liberal restructuring” or “globalization.” If each nation must be said to “refracture,” instead of simply copying a global tendency, then it is safe to make even more radical claims on the level of concrete teachers and nurses stories. As outlined, similar reforms do not always produce similar results but actually can provoke exactly opposite reactions (in terms of expertise, sense of professionalism, etc.) depending on the context and history in which they operate. As a consequence and important result of our research, professional expertise and professional configurations are more varied than being reducible to homogeneous de-professionalization or professionalization trends.

What remains difficult to assess after having completed WP4 are the generational dimensions of notions of expertise. As already described in the preceding section 5, little can be said about generational differences from WP4 alone. Where the survey of Profknow has been undertaken, richer data is available. However, within our case studies alone, not much can be said about a generation as such.

6.2. Concerning the research process

With WP4 (and 5) an important part of Profknow has been achieved. Besides the results on teachers work life experiences, this of course invites some critical reflections on the research process itself.
What have we as researchers learned in terms of collaboration, methodology, and comparison?

One of the more problematic aspects actually concerns comparison itself. As indicated in the previous sections, doing comparative research between seven countries and 22 case studies is a challenging task. In this sense, it probably would have been beneficial to problematize at an earlier stage in the project national “comparison” beyond its straight forward form of fleshing out similarities and differences between participating countries. Especially since we explored processes of “restructuring” which precisely confront the nation-state with global factors, a more critical approach to comparison and “methodological nationalism” would have been desirable from the beginning. This impression is enforced by the fact that the state for many teachers and nurses was a rather remote agent for their professional work life and knowledge. A common theme from Sweden, to England, Portugal and Spain was a certain sense of being tired of educational reform; although reform and policy might shape teachers’ work conditions, it basically has ceased to inspire their imagination, hopes & resistance, ideas, minds. But this means – coming back to the issue of comparison – that one has to look for alternative dimensions of what and when to compare. Comparison here would not aim to bring out similarities and differences between the partner countries but rather pose and address specific thematic questions. Although of course it is possible to address “professional knowledge” bound to “national comparison”, it still would be different to plan from the beginning on how concrete/hypothetical cases could contribute to illuminate the construction, change, role of professional knowledge for teachers.

A further point certainly worth capturing in relation to “comparison” concerns the different work life realities of teachers’ and their interpretation in the light of the Profknow research agenda. What we mean by this can be illustrated by a similar case on welfare state typologies. Esping-Anderson (1990, 1996) among other has argued for the existence of different types of welfare states throughout Europe and the rest of the world. In the case of Spain, Rhodes (1997) and Ferrera (1996) claim the existence of a special southern type of welfare state where one key difference to northern and older welfare states consists in the inferior levels of public spending. Since the Spanish welfare state took off relatively late, its relation to northern models then can easily be misread as forming a historical line of progress, where the Spanish situation would become more and more similar to the English for example. As argued in WP1/2, this is not necessarily the case and Rhodes and Ferrara point out the distinctive features of the southern models that most likely will persist in the future despite possible rising levels of public expenditure. What this means for our work carried out in WP4 is simply the fact that the situation of teachers in Spain, Portugal or Ireland is not necessarily accessible in terms of the interpretative patterns that work in England or Sweden or Greece. As just mentioned, the differences in educational reform and welfare state roll-out follow their own timing and contexts. And one should not reduce other welfare state configurations by embedding them into a common narrative of historical “progress” or “regress” towards one final (most neo-liberal) state such as the English. In this sense it was an insight to see that key concepts such as “privatization”, “marketization”, “commercialization,” etc. mirror the situation on the ground in England but do not fit very well in the Spanish or Portuguese case. What this means for the role of the welfare states in their relation to capitalism and globalisation is probably an area of future research.

6.3. Possible consequences

One important result of our research is the fact that it throws into sharp relief the continuing insufficiency of initial teacher education in some countries. Where the main requirements voiced by teachers concern dealing with heterogeneous student groups, with a lack of status and respect and the difficulties of maintaining order in class-rooms, the over-emphasis on academic content seems to miss the reality in schools. In most countries, access to the profession is now tied to a higher education degree. However, except Finland, the content of higher education and the selection
procedures do not necessarily work in favor of preparing future teachers for the very challenging and demanding situations found in schools.

Public schools have changed profoundly due to the changes of students. This could be a consequence of restructuring, but students come to school now with social problems which teachers did not have to take care of before and now they do.

Schools are not prepared to take care of this new necessities of children, and policy reform does not treat those problems because they are problems which cannot be resolved purely in schools.

Teacher education in primary schools had to focus on content and did not allow teachers to develop neither the knowledge nor the skills to affront the new social challenges that now are present in schools.

The professions of care such as teaching which knew for some years their professional mission (to teach reading and writing and to facility selection and social mobility) now feel that these demands have changed (that they have to integrate immigrants, to reduce social conflicts, to foresee risk situations, to educate for a insecure future with respect to work and knowledge, and the knowledge that will be required to affront it).

All this has consequences for educational policy as well as teacher education. For politics because as so many times before, one cannot concentrate in schools all the responsibility for affronting the effects of social change. In- and outside of schools there has to be foresight for support networks which count on the help of other professionals and services that affront in a more global manner the social emergencies. With respect to initial education and in-service training: it has to prepare to affront change and not stability; it has to help to intervene in complex realities instead of being reduced to the acquisition of competences; it has to take care of relations and the comprehension of the Other; and it has to take care of the connections between learning contents and idiosyncrasies of the learners.

6.4. Further research

The main background of Profknow are processes of restructuring taking place in European welfare states from the 1970s onwards. This process has been scrutinized through two concepts: the state as promoter of educational reform and changing notions of the profession. However, the wider question this leads to concerns the degree to which “restructuring” really needs for its operations clearly articulated institutionalized forms. Our research focus during WP1/2 sets its spotlight on the profession and scans for its “cement.” This implies that cohesion becomes visible in organizational infrastructure and the like: examples would include provision of certification, organization in trade unions, visible protest movements, etc. The same level of analysis is manifest when describing the relation between the profession and the university, or the privatization and commercialization of knowledge that seems to take place across all countries and especially the UK. Its focus is primarily organizational, that is, on the already institutionalized forms of (public or private) knowledge production and consumption. However, one may ask if this macro-perspective on the profession as a global entity and its relation to other key institutions like Universities or the State is really the most adequate form for capturing how teachers are immersed in a knowledge economy. As the case studies suggest, teachers describe other areas of their work as being more influential, such as new social demands they have to face. This implies, to use a term used by Lazzarato (1996), that they have to become “active subjects.” In contrast to just enduring commands that reach the worker from a higher level, now a worker has to be autonomous, active, engaged, taking responsibilities. Being a pro-active, caring professional requires them to invest – to imply – their “subjectivity.” In the teachers’ discourse this figures prominently under the theme of getting “involved” and caring for the pupils (also discussed under the trope of vocational, angelic self-image). It means to coincide as
person with your work where the full fledged social relations to students and teachers has become the actual task. But this emphasis on the dynamic, ephemeral relations that operate more on the personal level suggest to do further research on how restructuring not only operates on the institutional level but also on the level of producing certain “subjectivities.” It is not only that certain types of knowledge become inserted into the market, that certain types of control and accounting get installed in schools, that parents act as clients, etc. but that these changes actually reach deeper in that they promote new types of “subjects.” What is the “subject” implied once labor does not consist anymore in the production of knowledge but rather in keeping it circulating, that is, to establish and to assure primarily its communication? This question does not target types of expertise and knowledge, nor working conditions but rather the critical, intellectual “subject” it requires and re-produces.

A second area of future research concerns the role of the mass media and the public imagination of- and about teachers. What does this mean? A common concern of teachers was the declining status of the profession. This was tied explicitly in some cases to the role of mass media. Teachers reported to be tired of the systematic failure of the media to account for the complexity that characterizes their work. Many demands are put forward by very different agents in the educational arena that all intersect in the teacher. Teachers are the interface between the state on the one hand, the educational authorities in general and the pupils and parents on the other. However, this very intricate relations only seldom gets into fuller view in the media which are notoriously known for their sensationalism. This shortage is inherent in the very logic of newsworthiness: media and especially the news have to present the exception to the rule, the sound bites and outstanding events. And because they sell basically audiences to advertisers, demanding analysis and attention to detail and ambiguities become easily displaced in favor of content that is light and entertainment oriented which makes news consumption easy and fun. As a result, teachers perceive that there is a certain skewed public image of what their work entails.

But then, on the other hand, this negative public image seems to be rather self-made. Teachers, especially in Finland have a more negative view of their profession than the public actually does. Although Finnish teachers complain about their loss of status, according to Simola (2005:458ff.) they are rather well appreciated by the public, enjoy their social trust as well as that of the political and economic elite – quite to the contrary of their own self-perceptions. Although the public appreciates well their work, they don't see it that way.

The role of the media, these strange mis-fits between teachers self-perceptions and the general public put forward two related questions for future research. On the one hand, the logic of media is far from clear beyond individual case studies. This is to address the long-term relation and logic between media and the public imagination on teachers inside and outside the profession? How, when, why do other players (politics, professional associations, etc.) enter the picture? What are the consequences of a ever present sensationalist media sphere and individual interest groups especially for the teaching profession? But at the same time, this also makes clear that teachers' response to the loss of status would involve equally mass media oriented strategies. The struggle for the profession and its prestige not only depends on initial education, in-service training, adequate working conditions, etc. but at the same time on serious advice of “spin-doctors.”
ANNEX I – Thematic Grid for Interview Guidelines

1st area: Working conditions, professional status and autonomy
- employer, place of work and site, work organisation or unit and setting
- job title, official rank, hierarchical position in the work organisation or unit
- main tasks, duties and responsibilities
- skills and knowledge at work
- degree and content of independent decision-making
- supervision and control of work, instructions, orders and regulations
- interaction with colleagues and other staff, patients and other people
- how positions oneself, i.e. how sees oneself relative to others
- use of machines, instruments, tools, materials and other artefacts

2nd area: Historical content
- I am not quite sure what does this mean, but I presume that we try to ensure that the interviewee describes her life-course and career path in the context of historical change

3rd area: Work life balance
- family relations (spouse, partner, children, relatives at home)
- housework, duties at home
- atmosphere and support at home
- free time, hobbies, interests, friends
- way of life, rest

4th area: Key experiences – critical incidents
- in any area of life and activity, not only at work
- turning points in life, problems, crisis
- solutions, lessons, effects and significance in the life course

5th area: Gender
- I presume that gender passes through all the other areas

6th area: Knowledge sources (opportunities to learn)
- in any area of life and activity, not only at work or at formal education and training
- shortcomings and needs
- significant other people

7th area: Relation to clientele/people, sense of their professional mission
- actually this area consists of two divergent, though related topics in Barcelona minutes
- I moved the relation to clientele and other people in the 1st area
- thus here is covered professional ideals, mission, vocation, reasons and motives to work
- how these have changed throughout the career
- this area relates partly to the next area

8th area: Job satisfaction
- satisfaction with various aspects of work, such as tasks, autonomy, salary, atmosphere etc.
- good and bad features and things
- has ever considered changing occupation, work place or unit
- has ever regretted the choice of a career or profession

9th area: Important to consider “knowledge at work” in all areas and in relation to restructuring
- knowledge is defined broadly (not only technical and functional knowledge), but also knowledge about values, norms, people, symbols etc.
- knowledge at work is often tacit and situational, therefore difficult to convey
- try to keep in mind the country specific restructuring processes and events, such as major changes in policy, regulations, laws, economy, education, work organization etc.

10th area: Other information
ANNEX II – Agreed Structure of the WP4 Report /Thematic Grid

1. Introduction (researchers’ conceptual position, research process)
2. National and local context useful for interpreting the findings in the case study
3. Each collaborators life course in a nutshell (family and professional career)
   • Social background (childhood family)
   • Educational background (primary and secondary)
   • Choice of a profession, professional education, qualifications obtained
   • Professional career and current job
   • Family relations, hobbies, friends and networks
   • Work-life balance in its own chapter 4.4
4. Thematic Analysis (combining observations with interviews and other data and WPs)
   4.1 Working conditions
      • Organization of work (arrangements)
      • Management of work (control, supervision, autonomy, decision-making, meetings, planning, evaluation, documentation etc.)
      • Social relations and co-operation with colleagues, pupils, parents, patients, doctors and other people
   4.2. Professional Knowledge (What is your conceptual position here?)
      • Tasks, requirements, demands
      • Knowledge
      • Skills
      • Learning (formal and informal, practice and experience)
   4.3. Social position
      • Symbolic aspects: respect and prestige
      • Material aspects: earnings
   4.4. Work-life balance (related to the themes at chapter 3)
   4.5. Emerging themes
5. Conclusion
   • Restructuring and 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5
   • Restructuring and professional strategies
   • Restructuring and generations
   • Restructuring and periodisation
Chapter 2

Swedish Primary Teachers’
Work and Life under Restructuring:
Professional experiences, knowledge and
expertise in changing contexts

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Introduction

This report deals with issues of restructuring of the school as a welfare state institution, and Swedish teachers’ professional knowledge at work, situated between state and citizens. In accordance with the PROFKNOW workpackage, the aim is to:

- get a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well as over time
- compare work life experiences and notions of expertise between generations of school teachers
- present ethnographic descriptions and analyses of primary school work and life in order to understand professional knowledge at work
- contextualise school teachers life histories relative histories of the profession, restructuring of schooling, and social changes

In this paper I will address these aims from the point of view of three teacher-portraits, each is a result of life-histories and observations and each is written with a hope to help future elaboration of relations between work life changes and teachers’ professional expertise.

Planned changes in governing of public institutions described in terms of marketization, including clients’ freedom of choice, decentralisation, and deregulation etc, are often characterized as restructuring. In this paper the focus is on such measures that effect teachers’ daily work and on the dynamics that appear when such measures are in use within a teachers’ community of practise, but also how they effect individual teachers.

In order to understand work life changes, the analysis started with a focus on what the teachers regard as important aspects of their work and on what they try to accomplish in their meeting with pupils. What characterises a “normal” work process? Another question is about ‘things’ that can be related to restructuring measures, where do they appear and how? Such measures can sometimes be difficult to observe, they very soon become a part of an ongoing stream of mundane events. A point of departure here is that such changing measures can appear as disturbing and difficult situations. Therefore the analysis also has focused on disturbances and other difficulties teachers face in relation to what they try to accomplish in their meeting with clients/pupils. Individual and collective strategies including tools available for the teachers to handle “normal” and “disturbing” situations have been another important aspect of the analysis. In short, what do the teachers struggle with in order to do their work and which tools are involved? Some of these tools could be of an infrastructural nature. Others could be used for more particular purposes. Also learning strategies and formal education are included here.

Three primary school teachers who work in an urban multicultural area have been interviewed twice and shadowed. In the first interview the question to the teachers was: can you tell me about your life as teacher? The second interview was used to clarify aspects from shadowing and the first interview, and to deepen themes.

I told the teachers that I was interested in their story, not an official one that would look good. I also asked them to not avoid telling me problems they have encountered, and that I would not value what they say in terms of bad or good. They could talk rather freely about what they regarded as important. The three teachers have got their own transcription of the first interview to read and
The first interview was made between December 2005 and January 2006. The shadowing took place between January and March 2006; I followed each teacher in total three workdays. My attention was directed towards typical and problematic situations as expressed by the teachers in the first interview and related to meetings with pupils and to demands “from above”. Organisation of work and infrastructural conditions, tasks, interplay with clients, colleagues and others, and resources used by the actors has been an important focus of the shadowing. A main focus was on use of tools and possibilities to handle the problematic issues. During the shadowing I also had opportunities to small talks with the shadowed teachers and their colleagues. Situations from the shadowing are mainly classroom work but also playground, staff room, library visits, and formal meetings of different kinds between other teachers and between the teacher and the headmaster. The second round of interviews was carried out in February and March 2006. The aim was to deepen and clarify emerging themes from the first interview and the shadowing. I also participated in three formal teacher meetings. All meetings should have taken place even if I wasn’t there. I had the possibility to ask questions to the participants, before, during and after the meetings, and so I did.

I have given the teachers names on T: Tina, with around 40 years of experience as a teacher, Tilde with 16 years of experience, and Tea with six months of experience. The actual semester, Tina teaches in a grade three class, and Tilde and Tea in grade two classes. They all work in a school situated in an urban multicultural setting.

Four primary school teachers, between the ages of 53-58 years, from another urban municipal primary school, the Forest school, have also participated in a group interview. Two leisure time teachers also participated. The teachers belonged to teacher team and had pupils between the grades two to five. The interview focus was on themes developed in the analyses of the individual interviews and the shadowing. However, this school is not situated in a multicultural area. The reason is to get teachers with different work experiences. All teachers that participated in the group interview had very long experience as teachers, around 30 years. No teacher with shorter experience was part of this primary school teacher team in this school. The group interview took place in October 2006.

**National and local context, a brief introduction**

This section gives a brief introduction to some Swedish school reforms since the 1970ies. The studied school has here got the name the Rowan School and is situated in Göteborg, the second largest city in Sweden. The section also introduces the city and the school, with their official presentations as a point of departure.

**The education system**

The Swedish nine-year compulsory comprehensive school is for all children between the ages of 7-16 years. The three-year upper secondary school is non-compulsory, but around 98% of all children enter the school form after completion of the compulsory school. Until recently there were almost no independent schools in Sweden and the amount of students are still relatively low within this sector.21

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21 The school year 2004/05 around 7 % of all Swedish compulsory school pupils and their parents had chosen an independent school (Skolverket, 2005).
The researcher Lisbeth Lundahl (2002) characterises the Swedish education policy up to the end of the 1970ies as centralised and regulated. She argues that the education reforms included regulating mechanisms such as detailed national curricula, earmarked State subsidies, and other regulations concerning organisation, resources, staff etc. In the following some education reforms and State strategies are listed. The chronology of education changes follows Lindblad & Lundahl (1999):

1. In the late 1970ies, the initiatives for what was regarded as necessary renewals became a responsibility for the schools. The State was still a strong actor and initiator of change but the teachers now got what often is described in terms of “possibility” to influence the local developmental work. In 1976 the SIA-reform, the internal work of schools, also gave the schools a wider responsibility for pupils. Changes within the gender structure of the labour market, with an increase of women, became an incentive for prolonging the school day and take care of pupils even after the class room hours.

2. In 1980 a revised national curriculum guide for the compulsory school (Lgr 80) emphasised decentralisation. New systems of auditing was taken form and each school was from now on obliged to present a work plan for how to achieve the centrally formulated national education goals. Every school should be organised in work units and the teachers were expected to meet regularly in these work units. Local developmental work became the new model not only for development and renewals, but also for controlling school.

3. In 1989 the municipalities became responsible for the school, and accordingly the teachers from now on were employed by the municipalities and not by the State.

4. In the beginning of the 1990ies, the government decided that the State subsidies to the municipalities should be given as lump sums; the municipalities themselves should allocate the money to different sources. The researcher Sverker Lindblad has argued that the relationship between the State and the teachers was weakened when the municipalities became the responsible authority (Lindblad, 2005). The previous steering documents had prescribed how the teachers were expected to do their job. Now the State set the goals but the teachers and the schools were expected to find their ways to fulfil these goals. The new curriculum guides (Lpo –94, Lpf –94) encouraged teachers to use the teaching models they found necessary related to the need of the individual student.

5. The school monopoly was broken up in 1992 when a system of competition between schools on a quasi market was introduced. Independent schools on primary and secondary levels were established with tax money. The independent schools are open for all and there are no fees, a voucher system implies that all pupils and their parents can choose between different schools. Almost no private schools had existed in Sweden until now.

6. In 2003 the Swedish National Agency for Education gets an official mission to develop quality indicators. A school development plan presented in a government paper (2001/02: 188) points out that the quality audits should focus “…on the school level, the mission of the professional level is at the centre”. The audits can thereby also be regarded as tools to create (teacher) learning subjects. The teachers should change there is positions to act and think in relation to evaluation results. A reflective way of acting and thinking is depicted as important (Foss Lindblad, Lindblad & Wärvik, 2006).

**The municipality**

As mentioned, since 1989 the 290 municipalities are responsible for the school. This study is
carried out in a school situated in one of the largest municipalities in Sweden, the city of Göteborg with around 485 000 inhabitants.

Göteborg is often officially described as has been dominated by trade and shipping ever since the city was founded in 1621. Industrialisation, another aspect of stories about the city, was started in mid 19th century, first dominated by textile industry but later also shipyards and engineering industry. Some of the companies that were started in the beginning of the 20th century soon became world leading, for example SKF, a somewhat later example is Hasselblad. In the official homepage of Göteborg, the city of today is presented as “a city of industry and expertise, with two universities and many service companies” (www.goteborg.se).

Presentations of Göteborg are often given an international context. Early Göteborg was build by Dutchmen, and Swedish, Dutch, English, and German were official languages in Göteborg during the 17th century. In the 18th century the Swedish East India Company began trading with China. Scottish businessmen came to Göteborg and were a part of the early industrialisation. Some of them became very rich.

If we leave the historical Göteborg and take a step to Göteborg of today we could still attribute an international context to the city. The school in focus of this study is situated in a city district, here called Haglunda, where many people have their origin from another country than Sweden. It took me about 15 minutes to reach the school by tram from the city centre. My impression was that this short trip took me to almost another world. It was not that the buildings or the nature were different in Haglunda. On the contrary, the building style was typical Swedish 1950s and 1960s apartment buildings, the nature was very Swedish, and in my eyes many areas in the city district looked very nice. But the language spoken on the tram was different. Or, I should say, all the different languages that were spoken. And it was like the tram tour changed character near the big shopping centre in the centre of the city. Before the city centre the Swedish language dominated, after the city centre the Swedish language became a minority. When I visited the school many pupils, and even a teacher, asked me from which country I was. To me the question felt very reasonable; of course I could have been from many countries in the world. But if they had asked me the same question on the tram, before it had reach the city centre it would have seemed very odd to me, even if I have brown hair.

In official documents, the international context of today is presented differently in comparison with descriptions of the immigrants of the glorious past. For example, the annual report of 2005 from the city board (www.goteborg.se) says that there are big differences between Göteborg’s 21 city districts regarding the citizens’ social well-being. In comparison with average Göteborg, Haglunda is an area with more people who are unemployed, get compensation from Social Insurance Board and receive social security. People who live here also have less income and lower education than people in average Göteborg. Therefore Haglunda sometimes is described as a heavy area. The school in this city district is chosen because it meets the demands defined by the project: an urban, multicultural area.

The Rowan school

The Rowan School is a so-called F-6 school, which means a compulsory primary school with pupils between preschool class and the sixth year. Around 92 percent of the slightly more than 400 pupils come from non-Nordic countries. 33 languages are spoken among the pupils, the largest language groups are Somali, Arabic, and Turkish. The school also has leisure time centre units, an open preschool, close collaboration with a football club, and the Culture and Music school.

All children are entitled to a place in a pre-school class from the age of 6 years.
Around 50 pedagogues have the Rowan school as their work place. Three of them are full term employed as mother tongue teachers. A headmaster, who earlier was one of the teachers, is supervisor. The headmaster is subordinated a city district manager with specific responsibility for the schools, who in his turn reports to the city district manager, the highest city district official. In this line of authority only the headmaster is a teacher. According to the activity plan the teachers are divided in teams. Most of the classes have two teachers.

The Teachers

This section introduces the three teachers, their family background, why they decided to become teachers and their way to teacher education. The later differs between the three teachers and can be related to educational reforms in Sweden. For example in 1962 the nine year compulsory primary school was implemented, replacing a dual system with one path to upper secondary education and higher education. The former dual system had consequences for Tina’s way to teacher education.

Tina

Tina is 65 years old and has around 40 years of experience as a teacher. She is married and has two grown up children.

Tina grew up in Göteborg during the 1940s and the 1950s, often regarded as a period when people got better and better living conditions. She tells me that her parents gradually increased their standard of living during her childhood. When Tina was around seventeen she moved with her family to Haglunda, the new suburb. The area was a part of the so-called million programme, i.e. the housing policy of the Swedish government between the years 1964-1975 with the aim to build one million dwellings in ten years. She tells me about here youth as a changing society with changing living conditions:

Tina: The television came, we got more programs on the radio, entertainment for the family on Saturday evenings. We made a cake and we listened to “Lilla Fridolf” and “Karusellen” and other programs. A lot of music on the radio, the Gramophone Hour between five and six in the evenings, we could read in the newspapers which records they were going to play /…/oh, this is a record I like, and then you had to stay at home and listen.

Gun-Britt: How long did you live (there)?

Tina: Until I was 17. It was an enormous lack of housing. When I was five we moved to a modern apartment with bathroom, most people didn’t have a bathroom at that time. It was a very nice apartment with two rooms and a balcony, but no refrigerator. They started to build new apartment buildings in Kortedala. And when I was seventeen they started to build Haglunda. We moved and got an apartment with four rooms and a refrigerator.

Tina says that she early in life decided to become a teacher:

This was something I had decided since long ago. I wanted to help children.

But she also tells me another reason why she has chosen the teacher occupation, related to her own social group in society and what kind of teacher she wanted to be:

Tina: But this is also a reason why I wanted to become a teacher. I wanted to be a person who was one of the common people. Not someone who came as a doctor’s wife and needed something to do. /…/ I wanted to teach those I grew up with, the same group in society. When I came to the teacher training college I realised that there are different social groups in the society, I had never understood that before.
Gun-Britt: It was different, among the teacher students?
Tina: No, they talked about it. They talked about those who belonged to group three, that there were three social groups in society, one and two and three. And I could see were I belonged, I was angry, it was humiliating.

However, Tina’s way to teacher education was not straightforward. Her primary education, the eight years elementary school, did not give her the required qualifications. After the elementary school she took a two years supplementary course but this was not equivalent with junior secondary school, at that time the path to higher education. She says that she should have chosen junior secondary school from the very beginning but also that this was not possible, in reality there was no other way than the way she took. Her marks were not good enough for the junior secondary school because she had to help with housekeeping at home and look after her siblings. She also had a job in a shop after school from the age of 12. There was not enough time left for her to do the homework.

I was the oldest of four siblings, I had to look after the others. I didn’t manage to do that and to get good marks at the same time. I was good but not enough. I had to do all the cleaning when I came home from school, my mother worked in a shop all day. And all the cooking. So I knew a lot but nothing of what was counted as knowing.

However she wanted a better education. Her way to teacher education was evening school, and after that school year six and seven in the girl’s school. Then she finally could enter upper secondary school to get the qualifications to enter teacher education. She tells me that her mother helped her find out ways to get the required qualifications.

Tina was accepted as a junior level teacher student around 1962/63. The education was 2,5 years long. She got her first child during the teacher education, took a two weeks long parental leave and could continue the studies with her group. This was possible with help of her mother in law. After her second child she stayed at home a little longer, there was no day care to get. But when a young relative needed practice in a family to get qualifications to enter preschool teacher education Tina could take a job as teacher. We helped each other says Tina.

A long professional career as Tina’s can easily be described as a list of different positions: First job as an uneducated teacher in a B-school in the archipelago with admission every second year. As newly graduated from teacher education: a job in Haglunda, the new suburb with many children and lack of teachers. “There were many positions as teachers, you could just point and choose something. There were so many children here”, she comments here entrance on the teachers labour market. After ten years a break, as she calls it, for work in the trade union. Back to school work again, but in another city district. Got bored, back to another school in Haglunda. Moved to another school in Haglunda. This school was closed down, moved to the Rowan School where she still works.

The list indicates that Tina has spent most of her teacher years in Haglunda. However, Tina’s story about her life as teacher also tells us about a changing society and changing conditions for teachers’ work. Her present school class is a grade three with 22 pupils and she shares the class with another teacher. The pupils have a background from nine different countries and most of them are Muslims. Some of them take part in a Koran school after the ordinary school day is over. The situation with multicultural school classes is something she has in common with Tilde and Tea, the two other teachers from the Rowan School.
**Tilde**

Tilde is 46 years old and has around 16 years of experience as a teacher. She grew up in the countryside, in a small village in Värmland, a province in the middle of Sweden. Her mother worked as home helper and at a nursery garden. Her father was a porter. He died when Tilde was around seven years old. After finishing school Tilde moved to Göteborg where her two elder sisters lived.

Her primary education is the nine years compulsory school. Tilde says that she loved school as a child and knew early that she wanted to become a teacher, but she also says she got tired of school in her early teenage and was close to drop out from upper secondary school and the two years social line. The school work was easy for her and she finally graduated with rather good marks.

After some years with different jobs such as au pair and book keeping she applied to the university. But her first choice now was economics, teacher education only the second. She was, however, accepted at the junior level teacher education in Karlstad. The education was 2, 5 years long. She started in 1985, 26 years old. During her education she got a child and took one year of parental leave. After that she continued her education in Göteborg where she lived with her husband. She graduated from teacher education in 1989. She got her second child quite soon after she had got her first job and worked part-time for some years.

Tildes first job as teacher was in Haglunda and she has stayed in the city district ever since but worked in different schools. In her early career many schools were closed down in the city district. Tilde, as one of the youngest teachers, had to work as a substitute teacher in the different schools. As an example of what this could imply she tells me about a situation where she had a class in their first school year, and next school year she had to leave the class to be a substitute teacher in other classes. Finally she came back to the class in their third year. The teacher who had the class in the second year held a permanent position and needed a school class. Therefore she could replace Tilde, but she retired one year later and Tilde was needed again.

*Tilde: /.../ I started at the Lime Tree School, yes I got my first school year one class, I worked the first year, I felt well at the end...but...I became redundant. I was rather new then, there were reduc-*

-Tilde: And I think it was, the teacher who had had the children in their second year retired and she asked me to come back to the class, and I was also allowed to. It was nice to come back, but it felt strange, it was strange. First a year and then don’t come back, then I was back again. And after that I had no job again, I was moved to the Willow School. This was a period when they started to close down schools, the Oak school-school, the Birch School and different other schools, I think there were eleven schools here when I started but now we have the Willow School, the Lime Tree School, the Maple School, the Ash Tree School, the Aspen School, and that’s all.

In the mid 1990s Tilde came to the Rowan School where she still works. Here first class there was a mixed-age group and work in a teacher team that she describes as well functioning. In 2000 she started to work with children who had got the diagnoses DAMP and ADHD. She had this job for four years and describes this period as tough but also interesting. Here present class is a year two with 17 pupils, seven boys and ten girls. She is alone as teacher in the class but cooperate with a leisure time pedagogue. A couple of days every week a teacher’s assistant participate in the classroom work.

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Tea

Tea is 38 years old and was born in Göteborg. She is married, and has two children aged eight and ten. Tea is a primary school teacher and graduated from teacher education around six months before the interviews and the shadowing took place.

After the 9 years compulsory primary school Tea entered the three years natural sciences line at the upper secondary school. Then she took a complementary course to become an upper secondary school economist. But Tea also says that she early in life had an interest in the teaching occupation. Her mother worked at youth recreation centres and as a child Tea spent a lot of time with her mother at the centre. She relates her interest in teacher education to this experience:

*I was often there, I didn't have to go to the preschool but followed my mother to her work, and I was inspired of course.*

But, she says:

*When I started to think about my career, in upper secondary school, to become a preschool teacher had a very bad reputation, at that time you should become an economist.*

After upper secondary school she got a job at Volvo and stayed there for one year. Then she got different kinds of jobs, mainly office work. But she also says that she soon found out that job as an economist was nothing for her. She applied a couple of times to the preschool teacher education and was on the reserve list but not accepted.

However, it was not only difficulties to get accepted that made her way to the teacher occupation not so straightforward. Her husband got a job abroad between the years 1998 and 2001, after the children were born, and she spent most of her time taking care of home and children. Therefore, she says, education was not an alternative at this period. Back in Sweden again she applied to teacher education and was accepted. In January 2002 she entered teacher education and graduated in June 2005:

*And I should have done this much earlier, because this is something I've always wanted to do. To become a teacher have been my vision from the very beginning.*

Her education was 3, 5 years long. During the teacher education she made her practical work in two schools in Haglund. The Rowan School was one of them and after graduation she got a time-limited employment there, the first term at the leisure time centre and now as a primary teacher. The later job is in accordance with her education. She tells me that her current work better corresponds with her education than the work at the leisure time centre did. Owing to cut downs, she had to leave the job at the leisure time centre but could instead replace a junior level teacher who was ill over a longer period. When we first meet in January Tea knows that she has a job as a teacher until February, she did not know what would happen after that. But the other teacher was not able to come back and Tea could continue to work in the class for the rest of the term. Her present school class is a second year class with 21 pupils, 11 boys and 10 girls. She shares the class with another teacher.
Organising work

“Professional ideals”

What do the teachers talk about as important aspects of their work? Tilde goes back to experiences from her own school years. She says that she started to reflect on intelligence and knowledge during her years in upper secondary school. What is intelligence and what is knowledge and who decides if someone is intelligent or knows something? In upper secondary school the teachers looked at me as clever and nice, she says. But I had a very good memory. Maybe I was not so intelligent as my marks said? One of the stories she tells relates to her early school years. Tilde had noticed that the teachers treated some of her classmates very unfairly. Even if they worked hard they were not valued. I loved my teacher in the junior level, she says, but she treated other children in a terrible way, for example talked humiliating about the family. “But I knew that this girl didn’t have a good life at home and was in need of security”. Tilde also says that she as a teacher wants to help children with difficulties. Children must feel well when they are in school and not be scared. They should not come to school and know that they will be teased, made fun of and beaten.

Tilde: /.../ I am very concerned about the children, that they should feel well, and feel happy in school. I have seen this as number one, and I still do, indeed, that they should feel safe, and go to school without fear, dare to ask me things. Try to create an atmosphere. I feel well here and I want to be here. I still feel that this is the most important.

Gun-Britt: Nothing has changed?
Tilde: No, because, if you don’t have this, you’ll get so many other problems. Yes the problems become bigger if you don’t work a lot with this, the social, and care for the children a lot /.../.

A care for the children, that children should feel well is also dominating in the stories told by Tina and Tea. But of course children’s wellbeing is not the only aspect of their work. Children should also learn something when they are in school, and Tilde has already told us in her story about her own schooling that school can be about assessment of children.

The teachers also describe what can be called a tension between the children’s social relations and the school work to be carried out in the classroom. Tea talks here about what she here calls “the pedagogical”.

Yes, the children fight in the classrooms, and outside the classrooms, in the backyards, they are fighting all the time. Because they have so much inside. I mean, the pedagogical comes fourth or something. Because first you have to solve all conflicts, and then you must take care of all broken children, and then you must fix all the clothes, and those who not have all clothes they should have a cold winter day. And after that you should teach a little maths, kind of. I think the first half-year in a new class because I’m in a new class now /.../ it has taken this time for them to work as a group. So the thing with learning new letters and such things goes very slowly.

Tilde describes the first meeting with her present class as “help”:

I left the SU class (=special needs education) and got this class, and I only say, help. I got 18 children. I went to the preschool and took a look at them, it’s many children to handle alone. But I thought, first year, and I felt like I wanted to have them, at least I try, alone. Help I say. It was totally impossible to have a lesson. /.../ I wanted to have concrete mathematics. I had bought pearls they should work with, and it was pearls everywhere. The children ran around, they were fighting, they did everything. I was totally invisible.
An ambition that children should feel well and learn something can of course mean a lot of things. The two teachers above talk about the children’s social relations and that this aspect demands much attention in the classroom. During the shadowing I could also notice that the teachers spend much effort to get the group of pupils to work according to the plans of the scheduled school day. In the following some of these situations are analysed under the heading “organising pupils”.

**Organising pupils**

Tilde works alone as teacher in her class. However, most of the teachers at the Rowan school share the class with another teacher, like Tina and Tea do. The teachers often have more than 20 pupils to pay attention to at the same time. Many classes have access to two classrooms and the two class teachers often divide the pupils between each other. The three interviewed teachers say that this arrangement makes it easier to pay attention to the different needs of the pupils. Some pupils can for example read novels in the third grade, other pupils still struggle with the letters and the Swedish language. Some pupils are quiet and work in their exercise book; others need a teacher by their side almost all the time to help them and explain things. A school day consists of many other daily routines with the intention to direct the attention to the single pupils: to the pupils’ behaviour and what they do in the classroom. The shadowed teachers emphasised the importance of certain routines to get things work out as they wanted.

One example is the following morning procedure: In Tina’s class the two teachers shake hand with every pupil in the morning when the school day begins, look them in their eyes and say good morning. Tina says that this is a way to give every child attention at least once a day. The first day of my visit in the class I stood in the middle of the classroom, I did not know about this procedure but some of the girls also came to me, shook my hand and said good morning. I answered them of course. The other days I stood beside the teachers. The same procedure took place every morning in Tea’s class. During the second interview Tea says that it is important to notice every pupil. “This is the reason why I shake hand with all of them every morning. I have seen them today and they should know it”. She also says that this is something she learned from Tina who was her supervisor during her practical work period in her teacher education.

The pupils worked with their own piecework most of the time and tasks that were called “the pace of the week”. The situation implied that the pupils worked with their own books, exercise sheets etc in relation to what the teacher had decided they should do the actual week. The teacher was a promoter and controller, and a manager of logistics of pupils in the classroom.

Walking around in the classroom from pupil to pupil, and body contact (for example holding the arm around a pupils shoulder) are tools teachers can use to handle the logistics in the classroom. I arranged my field notes so that I could follow the teachers’ movements in the classroom and the lines I draw were clearly concentrated around some of the pupils. Other tools the teachers use are the voice (for example sch…), division in smaller groups, and for Tina and Tea the two teachers system. Textbooks and worksheets are other tools available to handle the logistics. The teacher can also sit in her desk, or on a chair near one of the pupils who need most help (or are the most noisy pupil), and the other pupils who need help stand in a line.

*(notes from fieldwork)*

10.00 Half class in the little classroom downstairs. Maths.

10.06 Walks to a girl, shows her how to do (whispers), needs a ruler, can’t find one. Makes a ruler of a piece of paper.

10.10. Walks to a boy, stands beside him, controls his work. A girl has her arm in the air and asks
how to do - Do as you think. Continues to help the boy - rubs in his book.
10.12 Walks back to the girl, but you are ready, shows her in the exercise book. Now you must work alone because I have no time now.
10.13 Walks to another boy. Helps him.
10.15 A girl comes and says something. The teacher nods, the girl goes out.
10.17. Walks to a boy, it looks good, here, do you know how to do this?
10.19 Walks to a girl. How does it work for you? May I have a look? Controls her work.
10.21 Walks to a boy. I’d like to give you some homework, I want you to do this at home.

(Notes from fieldwork)
In the library, half class
9.05. Puts her arms around a boy -let’s see if we can find you a desk book, walks with him around the shelves, stands beside him when he looks in the books.
Sits beside a girl, looks in the books the girl have chosen, tells the girl to go to the librarian and borrow the books.
A girl is coming, follows her to a shelf, chooses among the books, finds a book.
Asks another girl, - Sofi, do you have a book? (no). Gives the book to the girl.

(Notes from fieldwork)
Half class and maths (in the small classroom downstairs)

Sits in her desk.
13.36 Three children in a line, Shows them how to do the task.
13.37 Two children in a line. Looks in their books. Draws R.

(Notes from fieldwork)
9.59 Puts her arm around D, shows what the girl can do in her book.
Puts her arm around A and says something to her (and the girl goes to her desk to get something). Goes to the store to get a pencil-sharpener.
10.00 Sits at the desk. Shows a girl (another girl is sitting at the teachers desk, working with her book, a boy is standing beside).
Looks in the boys file.
10.02 Puts her arms around D, may I take look in your book?
Asks a boy to give her the planet (the boy is playing with the (model of a) planet).
10.04. Shows S in her book (still sitting at the desk).
10.05. Puts her arms around the girl (a girl comes to the teachers desk, says she has got a toothache
D and F, please be quiet.
Walks to a shelf (a girls has dropped the content of her box on the floor).
Picks up the things (S still sitting at the teachers desk).

Teachers often spend very long time with pupils, three years of almost daily contact is not unusual.
This means that the teachers become familiar with the pupils, and the class, and who could need some extra help. The writing of R and the cutting of corners in the exercise-books are examples of daily documentation that can help Tina to handle the logistics in the classroom, and to individualise the teaching. But also a way to know how well the pupils work in the classroom and if they need extra attention.
The classroom work consists of many routines and mundane situations, well known for all who once has been a pupil in a Swedish school. Arrangements such as the classroom, a schedule to follow and the division of the day in different themes even if flexible, the division of pupils in classes, the desks, textbooks and blackboards etc are in one sense very ordinary. So are also actions like teacher’s movements in the classroom, the use of paper and pen, and the writing of R in the pupils’ exercise books. The tools are, we can say, part of practically all teachers’ toolbox and used every school day. They are also a part of the organising of pupils. Thereby they become important infrastructural elements in a teachers’ community of practice.

But even ordinary situations are highly complex and many rules for behaviour are in use. A new teacher can enter the classroom and use the toolbox in one way or another, even without teacher education, particularly if she or he has been a pupil in a school. But the teachers often emphasised the importance of a long term relationship with the pupils. They know for example that some of the pupils often “disturb” the other pupils in the classroom. Because they know them they can also move the children to another desk when they think it is necessary, before the pupils have started to disturb:

(Notes from fieldwork)
8.12. Knocks on the door. The teacher opens. Two children arrive (the school day begins at eight).
Teacher: (to a boy) Now, let’s see, were can we find a place for you?
The boy: I want to sit here.
Teacher: No, that’s not good. I don’t want you to sit with your back against me.
The boy: I want to sit here.
Teacher: Because you disturb the other children.
8.15 The teacher continue to show (another) boy what he can work with. The boy that was late stands beside her with his file. She follows him to his desk.

In the classrooms the pupils had their own desks but I noticed that the teachers often moved some of the pupils to other desks during the lessons.

It is reasonable to believe that the daily work in the classroom can be very demanding for a teacher who are new in the class and do not know how long she could stay. The following is from an interview with Tea:

Gun-Britt: Is the teacher occupation what you thought it would be or is it something different? You said that it was a dream to become a teacher.

Tea: I don’t know. I think so. But I have changed as a person, all the visions I had then. But I feel that I have much more to give, but it will come. I have just started. But I must be careful not to work two hundred percent. I feel that it affects my family at home. Like yesterday when I came home, I had a terrible headache, I was so irritated on my own children. And that is not the point. But there were some incidents during the autumn and I woke up at three in the night and was laying there for a couple of hours thinking about how to solve things.

Gun-Britt: You must find a way to handle this? But maybe the first year is the worst?

Tea: Yes before I find out routines, before I know the children, before I have found myself in my teacher role. After six month at the leisure time centre I felt that I had found myself, but then I had to leave. And that’s the way it’s going to be until I get an ordinary position. A class of my own. But I don’t know, I hope that I can stay here but I don’t know, it’s budgets.

What Tea points to here is the importance of an own class and a long-term relationship with pupils
to handle the situations in the school class. She also talks about the own class as something important in relation to her life with her own family.

The daily procedures, the routines related to the logistics in the classroom are not just there, teachers use the tools available in interaction between the teacher and the group of pupils. When used by teachers, the tool become part of a teachers community of practise. But front-line welfare workers like teachers have responsibilities. It is never only the teacher and the group of children. They got their commission from the state, but also from citizens. These responsibilities are regulated in laws and ordinances but also in municipal and school routines of different kinds and purposes, and also make teachers accountable. In following some aspects of teachers’ accountability are analysed, mainly in relation to classroom work.

**Accountability**

The teachers have access to tools and routines in the classroom that helps them to create facts about the pupils in the class, for example how well they are doing. Teachers also become familiar with the pupils’ behaviour and if some pupils need extra support. Other teachers, for example outside the “two teachers system” at the Rowan school, do not interfere and utilise documented aspects of teachers work with pupils for their own work with the same pupils. One of the teachers from the Forest school said in the group interview that: “The teaching is like it always has been, we do all the planning of our own work”. No other professional groups really compete with teachers and want to do their work in the classroom. This seems to be true even if the teacher is new educated or even uneducated, i.e. not have graduated from teacher education. In Sweden there are no regulations concerning teacher qualifications and who can hold a position as teacher.

But there are also situations where this statement is wrong, i.e. where the teacher’s planning and work in the classroom are made public:

*a. Collaboration with teachers outside the classroom*

The three teachers at the Rowan school and the teachers in the group interview all describe a clear specialisation between teachers and leisure time pedagogues. They talk about barriers and different working conditions such as salary and working hours. But the two teacher categories also work together. One teacher for example refers to the so called integrated school day and talks about the importance of closer collaboration between them. According to the researcher Jan Gustafsson the discussion about cooperation and integration started already in the 1940s but did not gain impetus until the beginning of the 1990s with introduction of flexible school start (Government Proposition 1990/1991: 115). 23 Gustafsson writes:

*This was a starting point for the idea that the compulsory comprehensive school, pre-school and recreation and leisure centres should become integrated that was fully asserted in Proposition 1996/1997: 112, as one aspect of improvement of the first years of schooling /.../.*

Tilde and Tea say that the leisure time pedagogue is responsible for the children some part of the day and that the teachers and the leisure time pedagogue have to coordinate their activities. But they both argue that the integration between the two staff categories could be better.

The following illustrates a situation where Tilde and Lars (the leisure time pedagogue) plan together and make some of their work public to each other.

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23 The national curriculum guide Lpo 94/98 is common for the compulsory school, the preschool class and the leisure time centre.
11.30-12.00 I sit together with Tilde and Lars around a table in a little music studio at the leisure time centre. It’s time for planning. Tilde says that this is the only time they got together during the whole week.

There are two topics on the agenda: 1) children’s evaluation, and 2) discussion about some of the children. Lars has made an evaluation form with three questions which the children answer every week:

- What have I done that is good this week?
- What have I done that is not so good this week?
- What can I do to be better next week?

The children write the answers by themselves but Lars says that he sits with every child and discusses what they have written. He has told the children that he will show their writing to Tilde. This is what he does now. Lars and Tilde go through the forms and talks about the children. The children have written things like “be quiet”, “don’t be noisy”, “talked”, some children write that they have done something bad against a classmate. Lars says it is important that the children learn how to solve conflicts. They both say that they also see this as an exercise in writing; they can see how the children express themselves. Tilde notices that a girl seems to have started her writing. Tilde says that all the children in the lilac group are in need of extra support. Maybe they should notify three children on the pupil well-being meeting.

Tilde and Lars discuss the pupils and their achievements in relation to classroom work. They also talk about the pupil wellbeing meeting, another instance where the teachers work can be made public. The situation is an example of cooperation between different categories of teachers. It is also an illustration of quality work on the teachers’ own initiative.

b. The pupil wellbeing meeting

I asked a teacher how she works with parents. She tells me that she arranges parents’ meetings and development talks beside all the telephone contacts with some of the parents. “You have to follow up things with parents” she says and continues by telling me about a child she thought would need some extra resources during the school day. Our conversation switches over to the pupil wellbeing meeting, here also referred to as EVK.

Tilde: It was a boy, he acted like a ‘BamBam’ in the class with his fist, like this, hit the other children in their heads. And he was big, much bigger than the others, it was dangerous. So I asked for an investigation. /.../

Gun-Britt: To whom do you turn when you want an investigation?

Tilde: You ask for EVK as we call it, pupil wellbeing meeting, the headmaster and the school nurse, the psychologist, the parents and I participate in a meeting. First I must have made a program of measures to be taken in the class, before I can ask for an EVK. What I do and how I’ve tried to change things, and the result. And next step is the EVK. But often you don’t get any visible effects like more resources or at worst, no help at all.

/.../

Gun-Britt: What would you need then?

Tilde: I think that a psychologist /.../ should be able to say that this child has difficulties with this and that. But as he said, you know the child’s problem.

Gun-Britt: It turns back to you?

Tilde: Yes I have to handle the situation in any case. I cannot say that this child cannot stay with me. He’s in my class anyway yes.

Gun-Britt: Yes.
Tilde: Despite the problems. I must learn how to handle the problems, the class, I try different ways. A lot of contacts with parents, different plans. The effect of EVK is that I have taken my responsibility, to show that here is a child with problems.

She talks about a responsibility to report measures she has taken if she thinks a pupil are in need of extra support. But she cannot hand over the responsibility to someone else. She also talks about making her work public as a responsibility.

c. Individual developmental plan

A third arena where the teachers work is made public is the individual development plan (IDP). I did not participate in any activities related to these plans but the teachers explained their working procedure and showed me the forms they use. The teachers collect the pupils’ tests, drawings and other achievements in a file and also agreements made with the pupil and the parents during development talks. In the end of the school year the teachers summarises data concerning the single pupil and this summary follows the pupil to the next school year. The documentation is presented as a tool to communicate with other teachers and with patients/parents.

In the following Tilde shows me how she has used the IDP-forms. The city district board had just recently decided that the school should use IDP. Some teachers have visited other schools to find out how they have used IDP. The forms they use at the Rowan school is taken from another school.

Tilde: As you can see, we have got new, our city district has decided (shows me an IDP file) how this should be done. This is taken from, I don’t remember which school it was, but some people have visited other schools and then decided to use this one. We are going to learn how to use it.

Gun-Britt: It’s a whole file.

Tilde: Yes.

We are looking through the file:

Personal data
Social development (categories: seldom, sometimes, often: self confidence, empathy)
Swedish: different steps
Tilde: The pupil and I for example talk about step six. Then he should tell me if he thinks he knows about this or not or if he is on his way to manage. And then I fill in what I think, and then I sign with date of the day.
Maths
English
Tilde: /…/ I haven’t done this yet. I have not written anything here because it’s difficult for these children to use correct sentence structure, they will never be finished if I do.
/…/
Tilde: Sometimes I wonder how long this model will last, I’m not quite sure this will be the one we will use in the end.

Gun-Britt: Have you had something like this before?
Tilde: No, there are different methods for documentation, but this one is questioned by my colleagues.
Gun-Britt: Is it difficult to use, is that the reason why it is questioned?
Tilde: It takes a lot of time, and the steps are questioned.
/…/
Tilde: The idea is that the steps should lead to the goal. It’s our school governed by goals, I don’t like our school governed by goals.

Gun-Britt: What is it you don’t like?
Tilde: I think that the children come to the school with different preconditions, they are different people, different human beings, they should leave the school differently /…/
Tilde here also talks about accountability in terms of standardising procedures. She also says that she is not quite comfortable with the procedure, that it should be developed in relation children’s different need. Another teacher says that she does not really need the IDP. She says that she knows what the single pupil needs without all these plans.

**d. Balanced scorecards and other evaluations**

The balanced scorecard and evaluations made by the Swedish Agency for Education is a fourth arena discussed here where teachers are made accountable.

On the city homepage Göteborg also presents balanced scorecards for every school in the city. Four aspects should be measured, but only the underlined categories present data from the Rowan school:

- **Pupils and parents**: satisfied pupil, satisfied parent (no data from the Rowan school); parents confidence (no data from the Rowan school); presence of pupils; near-accidents and injuries (no data from the Rowan School),
- **Co-workers and development**: (no data from the Rowan School),
- **Function and economy**: (no data from the Rowan School), and
- **Activity and processes**: norms and values (no data from the Rowan School), Learning, Goals (no data from the Rowan School), ICT competence (no data from the Rowan School) (www.goteborg.se).

The lack of data from the Rowan School could indicate that the use of balanced scorecards is not fully developed yet. During the group interview at the Forest school I ask the teachers about the balanced scorecards. They all laugh a little, “yes the balance is important”. They discuss for a while how often they have to fill in the questionnaire but conclude that this is not a big issue for them.

An official evaluation report from an inspection in 2004 by the Swedish National Agency for Education (www.skolverket.se) says that the Rowan school has too many pupils that do not reach the national educational goals decided for the fifth school year. The agency states that the school should analyse why there are so few pupils who do not reach the goals. Both the activity plan and the quality plan of the school, presented on the schools homepage, refer the problem to the pupils’ lack of knowledge in the Swedish language. This could also be regarded as an answer to the agency. Further more, the Agency report states that the school should give the pupils further possibilities to influence and also that the pupils should be offered a more varied and individualised teaching. However, the ground for these claims is unclear in the text.

**Education and learning at work**

This section is about strategies to use and create knowledge, as told by the interviewed teachers. Their stories are about being a new teacher at work, possibilities to continuing education and also about teachers’ strategies to create knowledge about pupils in the classroom. The described situations also include tools to handle “normal” and “difficult” situations.

**Mentoring – on one’s own initiative**

*Tilde’s first experience of teacher work made her rethink if she really should work as a teacher or not, she didn’t feel quite capable for the job. But a more experienced teacher gave her support. The new teacher was Tina.*

*Tilde: /.../ the other teacher in this my first class, it was an older teacher, or older, but she had been a teacher for many years, and she was very decent, she gave me support and helped me a lot, because I was about to leave teaching.*

**Gun-Britt: What was**

*Tilde: I felt that I, I was so unsure and the job, the responsibility is quite big, at the junior-level. If you destroy something for the children already in the first year /.../ I felt that I was not capable enough.*
She calls her first colleague a mentor.

*I have her to thank for so much. Someone who is a kind of mentor, we didn’t use the word mentor, nobody said that this teacher should be your mentor. But she became one anyway, by herself so to say. And I think it still works like that. Today people talk a lot about that we ought to have a mentor but as far as I know we still don’t have a system that works.*

Also later in her career, when she was alone with a so called difficult class, she got help from this teacher colleague and mentor. Tilde was one of the youngest and less experienced teachers but had to take the “difficult” class alone, nobody wanted to share the class with her:

*Tilde: Later, when I came to the Willow school /…/ all the resources for Swedish as a second language, and special needs education were drawn together. And because of the large number of pupils with immigrant background the resources were so big that you could work two teachers in one class. /…/ When I came, there was a class that had no teacher at all, so I got my own class but nobody to work with.*

*Gun-Britt: You were alone?*

*Tilde: Yes I was alone. I got the list of pupils, and I could not pronounce one single name. And I thought that I will not be able to call the roll. But it turned out so that the teacher who had been my mentor said to me that ‘I will come with you to the new school’, so she came.*

*Gun-Britt: Yes.*

*Tilde: And we had the class together…and once again, thank you to this person. We could together handle a rather difficult situation. The class was quite difficult to handle. /…/ And afterwards one can think, how did they treat a new teacher?*

It was Tina who was the more experienced teacher, she also comments what happened:

*And the Willow school was closed down. And who were the persons who couldn’t keep their positions? The youngest of course. And who should have the most difficult positions? The youngest. The others chose to have it better and the headmaster, the management, was weak. The whole schools system is weak in this aspect I think. /…/ I asked her, what would you say if we work together with the class? I asked her carefully because maybe she thought that the idea was terrible. But she said that I know that there was a meaning with all this. So she wanted me to come. So we moved to the Willow school together.*

Tilde describes a difficult situation she could not handle alone. She was one of the youngest teachers but had to be responsible for what other more experienced teachers had described as a difficult class. There was no school leadership backing here up with support or routines for support from more experienced teachers. Tine took the initiative and changed workplace to another school, which was possible within the former so called headmaster area. Several schools then belonged to one headmaster area and it was probably easier to change school like Tina did, than it would be today with one headmaster – one school.

The teachers describe a situation where they cross the borders of the institutional setting, that is, the teachers do not wait for initiative from the supervisor but handle the situation by themselves. But thereby they also describe a teachers’ community of practise lacking tools concerning support to new teacher.

**Seminars and course – according to choice**

The three teachers from the Rowan school tell me that a new teacher gets no introductory period; she or he has to take a class from the very beginning, without any formally organized introduction.
But new teachers, like other teachers, have access to continuing education in different forms and often is a part of the working day.

The teachers got an amount of money every semester for competence development. They also have teachers’ seminars every semester when there are no pupils in the school and pedagogical development meetings a couple of hours every week. The teachers have evening seminars, for example offered by the trade unions. The notice board in the staff room was full of different brochures offering courses, some free of charge and some very expensive. Sometimes I also could find brochures offering courses on the table where we had coffee, often commented by teachers and ironically if they where expansive. The latter could indicate that the amount of money allocated to competence development was regarded as not enough.

Tea talks about the problems with conflicts in the classroom and I ask her if she can get supervision or continuing education:

**Gun-Britt:** Do you as teachers get any supervision or continuing education to handle these situations?

**Tea:** No, I must apply. I have money for competence development, that I can use, around 1000 crowns a year or term.

The basic teacher education gives the teachers their specialist education, this holds true even for Tea who has got the new teacher education from 2001 with one entry and one exam for all teachers. This also means that the teachers do not have years of specialist education after they have graduated from teacher education. Teachers are mainly specialised and organised in relation to the pupils’ ages. Even if a teacher has deeper studies in for example Swedish or History in relation to their teacher education the ages of the pupils goes before the subject as organising principle of the school. But teachers can of course study Swedish or History at the university if they want to extend their formal competence. Both Tina and Tilde have taken longer courses related to their work as teachers, for example about DAMP and ADHD. Tilde participates in a five weeks long university course on a distance bases in special needs education.

Tea, the youngest teacher, have small children at home. She says that she would need more education, there are so many things she should have studied during teacher education but the time was of course limited. She also says that it is difficult to take the time from the family; she has to wait until the children get older.

**The new teacher education and teaching-methods**

The education of teachers has changed in many respects during the last decades. A higher education reforms in 1977 integrated teachers for the lower levels (grades 1-6) in the higher education system. A ‘link to research’ was introduced in the curricula. Only the secondary school teachers had a higher education degree before the reform. A new higher education reform in 1993 should further strengthen the academic base and the link to research in educations with a non-academic tradition.

Teacher education has always been very closely connected to the different school levels and each level has had its own category of teacher: Junior level, intermediate level, and secondary/upper-secondary subject level. In 1988 a new teacher education programme was introduced around two

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24 I participated in some of them during my visits. Rules for the pupils behaviour was very much in focus.
25 Two trade unions organize teachers.
26 2.5 years, focusing on grades 1-3.
27 3 years, focusing on grades 4-6.
28 4 years, focusing on grades 7-9 and upper secondary school.
new teacher categories: compulsory school teachers for grades 1 – 7\textsuperscript{29} and compulsory school teachers for grades 4 – 9\textsuperscript{30}. The first integrated teacher education was introduced in 2001. Instead of having different teacher education programmes for preschool teachers, leisure time pedagogues, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers etc, there is only one entry into teacher education and one exam for all teachers.

Tea’s education is the new teacher education. The other interviewed teachers have got their teacher education before the 1988 reform. Only Tea refers to her education as a problem. She says she has got a good education but also that the other teachers in the school do not understand her education and that many things they discussed during her education is different from what she experience in the meeting with the teachers in the school. One aspect is the division between teachers and leisure time pedagogues. I could also notice that Rowan school teachers refereed to themselves as junior lever teachers and intermediate level teachers respectively. They also often had separate staff meetings.

In particular Tea points out her lack of knowing in teaching methods as problematic and that it is not only to imitate the other teachers. She tells me that she studied theories about children and reading for example, but also that the teachers’ at the university seemed to avoid the useful hints concerning how to deal with the issue when meeting pupils in the classroom. A problem is therefore that there are no other alternatives than to imitate the more experienced teachers, she says.

*Gun-Britt:* Teaching methods for you is then.
*Tea:* How to practically do things.
*Gun-Britt:* How to do things.
*Tea:* How to do things. Because in the teacher education, they want us to, as I understood it, develop our own teaching methods model. But it’s difficult to start from zero /.../ You must have something to start with, small hints and advice.

During her education she wrote down exactly in her notebook how the teachers/supervisors did during her practical work. She wanted to have something to start with. She also says that the effect can be that she takes over ways of working with pupils that are old-fashioned and should be changed.

However, the “teaching methods” can obviously not be regarded as standardised procedures that make the teachers exchangeable. Even if Tea tries to find out about teaching methods she says that the planning of her work is related to a specific school class. The long term relationship with the class is described as important, to have a class, and the teachers plan their work with the class on a long term basis.

Tea has no class when I first meet her:

*I have felt, how much energy should be spent? Maybe I have to leave this class within a couple of weeks and take another class.*

In the second interview Tea knows that she can stay with the class for the rest of the semester:

*In a way I think this is good, we can look forward. We (she and the other teacher) must plan our work. I can use more energy.*

Tea seems to be more satisfied with her life as teacher when she can stay with the class and the

\textsuperscript{29} 3,5 years programme.
\textsuperscript{30} 4,5 years programme.
other teacher.

Long-term relationship appears as an important aspect of teachers’ community of practice.

**Analysing effects**

A conclusion from the previous section is, that even if teaching methods can be regarded as procedures teachers use to handle particular situations in the classroom, and in a specific way, they are not tools with an inbuilt fixed procedure. When used by the individual teacher, and in interaction with pupils, the methods get their form.

The following illustrates a more evidence-based approach to knowledge production in the classroom. However, evidence is here not related to creation of standardised procedures, but to teachers exploring pupils’ performances.

Tina had noticed in a test session that many pupils did not know how to tell the time. One lesson during my shadowing she gathers these pupils in an extra classroom. She helped the children to make a clock so they could practice at home how to tell the time. Then she could give them a new test and thereby find out if the clock and the homework was enough for them to learn how to tell the time.

We talk about the situation with the making of the clock during the second interview:

> *When I want them to do something special I must see to that they have the stuff they need to do this. When we made the clock, I had written to the parents that they should practice this. And I can’t write to the parents about this without giving them anything to practice on. I have to be so good and find something out. Because I cannot trust that every single parent fixes a clock. And start the practising. And it has given effect, almost everybody knows how to tell the time.*

Tina comments the writing of R and cutting of corners in the books (see above) when I asked her to explain the situation to me:

> *I correct the books, it’s a way to control that they know. Many teachers give an answer book to the pupils and let them check by themselves. But I don’t understand how (the teachers) know. Because if a child makes many mistakes I sit down with the child and go things through one more time. It’s like an answer to me, this is how I managed to do my job. Oh, here are many mistakes, we must do this once more, if it’s a child that normally understands. Or else I can send home some more exercises. Or do something else, or do it in the whole group again if several of the pupils make mistakes. So this gives me different signals back.*

The making of the tool and the analyses of the result, for example that the pupils know how to tell the time, can be described as a more systematic approach to the work with pupils in the classroom. It is a kind of self-regulating technique but in relation to evaluation of her own efforts, and not something management have ask for, but in relation to achievement of educational goals. These situations can also be regarded as related to long term relationship with pupils.

The IDP (see above) is present in the session with the clocks, even if it is not made explicit. Tina must report if the pupils know how to tell the time if it is written in the reporting forms that a pupil should know this in their second year. The pupils do not get marks until their eighth year. However, they have to take national tests in the fifth year and are compared with a national standard, see also...
above and the section “accountability”.

**Demands as described by teachers**

As has been mentioned, the PROFKNOW project deals with knowledge at work, situated between state and citizens. This section deals with teachers’ stories about demands they have experience in their meeting with the management and with pupils and parents.

**Demands from management**

Demands from management are in this section related to the teachers’ ambition to get a dialogue with the city district management. The teachers protest against reductions of teachers and other resources. They argue that the pupils are so demanding that they need all the resources they could get. The teachers here fail to get the contact they want:

*From field notes (teachers meeting):*

*During the Bamba-break I sit in the staffroom. It’s empty. A paper signed by the teachers, addressed to the highest school responsible manager of the city district, hangs on one of the notice boards. It says that the teachers are dissatisfied with the dialogue between them and the school management outside the school. It also says that the pedagogical work in the school is characterised by constant conflicts because of cultural differences and language difficulties. The teachers invite the manager to come to a meeting at the school, they suggest two dates in the letter.*

*Another paper on the wall is from the (invited) school responsible manager. It says that he has got a new job and soon will leave the city district. When the school day is over a shadowed teacher mentions the paper from the teacher. She says that the teachers protest against reduction of the number teachers.*

However, the invited manager did not come. A teacher said that the argument was that he wanted to communicate with the headmaster (notes from a teachers teaches meeting). Later the city district executive came to a meeting with teachers on his own initiative. But then he wanted to discuss the qualifications of the new school responsible manager and not the situation experienced by the teachers (notes from a teachers teaches meeting).

The teachers want to invite him again:

*From field notes (teachers’ meeting):*

*All (grades 1-6) teachers from the school are gathered in the staff room for the weekly Tuesday afternoon meeting. The teachers discuss an invitation to the city district manager. They want him to visit the school and discuss the situation.*

*The teachers are talking about which day he should be invited.*

*Teacher: Should the invitation come from the management (here: the headmaster)?*  
*Answer from several teachers: No.*

*Teacher: Refers to mail from the city district manager where he welcomes viewpoints from everybody.*

*Teacher: He doesn’t see this as line thing.*

*Teacher: Should the invitation come from the trade union?*  
*Teacher: No, this is not a question for the trade union.*

The teachers continue to discuss the time for the meeting and if the preschool teachers and the
leisure time pedagogues should participate. They decide to invite the city district manager on a Tuesday afternoon meeting, which also means that the preschool teachers and the leisure time pedagogues cannot participate; they have pupils to take care of this time of the day.

I asked a teacher about the invitation and that the leisure time pedagogues were excluded:

**Gun-Britt:** You talked about the leisure time centre and the leisure time pedagogues, that it was us and them. I noticed this in the meeting, that this is us, the teachers and should they participate too?

**Teacher/.../** no matter if they only have one child, they have to work, the two who are there. It’s us, not us and them. The teachers must realize that they (the pupils) learn something from what we did, it’s not just play and nonsense. /.../ I know that they felt slighted when this came up. But it was no use for me to stand up and say that this is wrong. I am still new and younger than the others. So I am not part of the gang yet. And because I have worked on the other side I cannot stand up and protest, because then I will be even more an outsider. But I really don’t know if I want to be inside. But the headmaster was very good I think. He said that we cannot act like this /.../ so the meeting will be in the evening.

**Tina** talks about consequences of the reductions of teachers in the following lengthy quote:

**Tina:** It was a big change when the school changed from the state to the municipals. And even bigger when the divided the city districts in Göteborg and made city districts boards. /.../ The municipals could employ teachers as they liked, larger parts of the rules system disappeared.

**Gun-Britt:** For the employment?

**Tina:** Not only the employments but for the demands in school. The pressure is not the same and the children don’t get the same education everywhere, any more. It depends on where they live and this became more obvious when dividing into city district boards. The city district boards don’t know so much about the school as the old school administration did. They are mishmash, they do as good as they can, but they are not able to do so much. Maybe the former municipal school administration didn’t do so much either. The school is governed by the economy. And it is much more governed by economy today than with the municipal school administration. And there are no rules you can claim, about the children’s right. This is much weaker in the new curriculum guide. The new curriculum guide is just a frame. That should be filled with something. And all the schools fill it with theirs. Yes it’s a weakening. And the Swedish National Agency for Education is a toothless tiger; roars sometimes, but not so much really happens. They don’t see much. They were here and talked to us, but they didn’t notice anything of all what we think they should have noticed.

**Gun-Britt:** Can you point out what they should have noticed?

**Tina:** They should have noticed the educational level. The children here don’t reach the goals. They should have emphasized this much harder. We should have more resources to divide the children in groups. To do other things. Of course you can use resources in different ways but these reductions, going on since the nineties are troublesome. More and more happens in the society, also because we don’t take care of children in a right way. The school is a good institution for taking care of children. We have them here for a long time. We have them from that they are little. And we reach the parents, in most cases. And the independent schools caused problems, a little. Yes, we can have independent schools but now you cannot say so much to children and parents any more. Because then they move to an independent school or another municipal school.

Tina refers to the competition between schools and to the voucher system, that pupils and parents
can move to another school if they want to. Teachers can do nothing she says.

/…/ But everybody wants the money. And everybody accepts children anytime, I think. It has been much more difficult to handle, that the children move. You get questioned in a wrong way. It’s no problem to be questioned but it should be right I think. We lose 72 000 every time a pupil moves.

Gun-Britt: And you have seen the result of this?
Tina: Yes we have seen the result. /…/ at Christmas, in the middle of a school year. They have divided a class and taken away the teacher. That’s what they are after; then they can save money. Some children to that class, some to that class and some to that class. No matter. And teaching is rather personal, really. You are not the same teacher as I am. You cannot be and should not be. But the children must adapt here and there. And small children need security.

Gun-Britt: It’s something different?
Tina: It is totally different. But it’s really different in the whole Sweden. They save money.

The teachers have no tools to coop with the situation of reductions when pupils leave the school. The managers do not listen to their views, they have no counterpart. Teachers are subordinated the headmaster. However, the headmaster is not a teacher any more, but a manager in a line of authority.

**Demands from pupils**

Tina’s story about her meeting with pupils are here used to illustrate a teacher’s way of acting when she do not accept circumstances that effect pupils in a negative sense. Her strategy here is to cross ordering institutional borders by giving extra support to pupils.

*(from field notes, Tina)*

**Tina has around 15 minutes break which she uses to help a boy in grade 4 with maths. He was in her class the year before but “the school” recommended him take grade 3 once more. But he didn’t want to stay in grade 3 and his parents had found a school who was willing to accept him in grade 4. Tina now helps him with exercises in his maths book once a week during her break. This is my own initiative she says, nobody has asked me or told me to do this. She says that she helps the boy so he could be in grade 4 and also stay in the school. She knew that the boy had to travel a long way to the other school and that he was travelsick.**

Tina tells me several stories about her meetings pupils and their parents: She says that she has followed “the calling I had from the very beginning, to care about children who are in difficulties. I have helped many children with clothes and so on”. The stories are shortened and are about children and their families when they for some reasons have faced difficulties. They illustrate border crossing situations and meetings with children. The common instrumentation of the school such as division in classes, schooldays, timetables, exercise books, hand in the air etc is of no use here. But still the stories describe aspects of a teachers work and life:

**Story 1:**

*I had a boy with eight siblings and a mother who was mentally retarded, and a father who didn’t get on well with life either. This boy had a very difficult situation at home. And in his second school year he broke his leg, he was in my class. And this is kind of a chock I have got, He’s mother couldn’t take him to hospital so I took him to the hospital. He was X-rayed, and got a plaster. After that I took him home, followed him home. /…/ And when I came home to them with the boy, I suddenly understood what it was all about. Really, I don’t know how, how it can be. It was hard when I grew up but this was worse. I knew that I went back to school and said that it’s a miracle that these children come to school at all, a miracle. Because everybody (the other teachers) scandalised the circumstances, how bad it was.*
Story 2:

/.../ I read in the newspaper about the older brother, it was a social report about the family. I read about the family in the newspaper and knew it was hard for them. It said that they had a therapist at home and what that meant. I thought, help. What’s going to happen, how shall we handle this in the school? I had lots of thoughts about mobbing. But nothing happened, it was nothing. We talked a little about that conditions are different.

Story 3.

Yes, and the boy who got his family hanged out in the newspaper, because they didn’t understand that they must be careful. And the newspaper thinks it is fun to make a report about a societal phenomenon. But I had this boy, and the parents didn’t take care of him. And they left the children at home and stayed away for a long time. The neighbours reported them to the social authority who took care of the children. So I took him to my home. I didn’t know what to do with the kid. /.../ the social authority had heard that I helped him a little and asked if I could have him. Okay, I could. So he moved to our home and stayed for ten years.

Story 4.

And there was another boy, he got his hair cut by his father, they should save money. He was peeled. And he didn’t’ come to the school. I called his home and asked, why is he not in school? He’s been cut his mother answered, by his father. And this was such a proper father. But it takes time for the hair to grew and he didn’t want to go to school. Okay, I said, I can come to your home and take a look. And I went to his home and talked to him. He had his arms like this because it was worse in the back of his head. After a while he allowed me to look. It’s not that bad I said to him. I will talk to the other children and you can come to the school tomorrow. And I told the other children about how little children decide and how much parents decide, and all the children accepted that when mother or father had said something it was only to obey. And if they had said that you should get your hair cut, you got your hair cut, regardless of what you said. Yes, and they knew that this was not fun. They accepted that he couldn’t help the way he looked like.

Demands from parents

The following notes are taken from a discussion in a teachers’ team and a pedagogical development meeting that takes place every other week. Around ten teachers participate. The topic is how to get a better spirit in the school, and how to change the pupils’ attitudes. The children fight and the teachers say that some parents cannot stop them either and the parents need support. The discussion takes different directions but the main one is about getting support from parents:

The following are contributions to the discussion in a chronological order and deals with the parents’ situation as immigrants and being unfamiliar with the Swedish society:

Teacher: /.../ The parents are scared too. The children threaten them to call BRIS the parents know that they are not allowed to beat their children but the children scream, even if they are not beaten. The parents get scared of what the neighbours would think. They need to know how to stop the children. That they are allowed to stop the children.

Teacher: There are children who say that we live in a democratic country when someone tells them stop fighting. There are children who believe that they are allowed to do just anything they like.
The teachers come to an agreement that they have to find out a way to include the parents, the discussion continues:

Teacher: I think we must work with the mothers.

Teacher: But it must be fun to do it.
Teacher: We must make this fun and easy so that we could coop with this after a full school day.
Teacher: In the evenings.
Teacher: No.
Teacher: But they can’t come otherwise, they are at work.
Teacher: But maybe it’s most important to reach the mothers who are at home?

Teacher: Maybe the children and the parents come together.
Teacher: Many of them have seven children at home.

It seems to be quite difficult to arrange. One problem is the teachers’ working hours and that parents have the same working hours. Parents’ expectations can also turn into a problem. One teacher tells about parents who wanted to arrange activities for children but with hopes to get an employment at the school. An employment was not possible and the whole thing came to nothing. The meeting continues, maybe the teachers could meet parents when they participate in other activities, for example parents’ education or in the preschool.

Teacher: In the Maple School, we had meetings and gathered all parents to the beginners. We presented the staff and expectations from the school, when your child comes to the school. It was good, one becomes visible. We just let everything flow.
Teacher: Good.
Teacher: This is something we can do, we who get the grades one and four.
Teacher: Maybe we can start here, if it becomes to big, it all ends in nothing.

The meeting is interrupted by children who fight in the corridor ”I get crazy if its my children” says one teacher and three teachers run to the corridor and stop the fight, the other teachers try to see who the children are, if they “belong” to them. The meeting continues:

Teacher: We could present grade one in the spring semester.
Teacher: Don’t forget that we have the preschool class that should be introduced.
Teacher: We could gather people in different groups with interpreters.

The teachers’ solution is to have contact with parents before the children start school. This is maybe not so difficult for them to arrange and maybe they do not regard this discussion as a big issue either, but rather an aspect of normal life at work. But the topic they discussed is quite complex: it is about contact with parents who are not familiar with the Swedish school and with an ambition to make school life easier for the children. Not so many years ago this discussion would have seemed exotic, almost all parents had own experiences of the Swedish school. What the teachers try to do here is to develop their own tools to handle the demands from parents. They do this because they have experienced the problems in their contacts with pupils and parents, not because of demands from management.

The professional ’no’?

The teachers say that the situation in the school is difficult. Tilde often talks about how important it is that teachers say “no”, when the situation does not hold any more. But she also says that teachers
seem to manage even if they say that the situation is impossible.

*Tilde:* Yes, but at the same time we must be self-critical in relation to how we organise our complaints. I’m afraid that many teachers are so tired that they often say that it’s so heavy, it’s so heavy, but this will take us nowhere. We must be better in how we say no, we will not do this. /…/ I didn’t participate in the meeting where we should discuss our professional no. But I think this is important. And the trade union says that you must learn how to say no, that this is more than we can do.

*Gun-Britt:* I noticed in the report on your homepage that many pupils don’t reach the educational goals in grade 5.

*Tilde:* Yes, we say so, we don’t reach the goals. But there are lots of things we can change, to be better organised as a group when we complain, I think. More unified, be more clear and distinct. And some of us are like that. And then we got a fuzzy mass in between. So I think we can change. Us. And have to do so. But then it is also, as we talked about when he (the city district manager) was here, the management must change and be clear. To think about what damage they cause when they make certain statements, such when it wasn’t eleven positions that should be taken away but seven. And as our, what's her name? at the city district management, in the press says that the teachers must sharpen their pedagogy. This causes a great deal of damage, to do such statements, I think. So it’s a crisis of confidence between management and teachers I think.

Tilde concludes that there is a crisis of confidence between teachers and management. One reason for this is that management sometimes have used the press to complain about the teachers, that teachers must change and do a better job. Another reason is the reductions of the number of teachers, and earlier rumours from municipal officials about reductions that were partly wrong.

**Life at home and life as a teacher**

*Tea* got her first job as a teacher when her eldest son was too old for the leisure time centre after school. She also says that her husband works a lot and is often away from home. When I ask if it is difficult to get a life balance between home and work, her answer is yes. The job as a teacher is hard and difficult but at the same time it is rewarding. But she is often very tired when she comes home after work.

*Tea:* /…/ I was at home during the years abroad and then I studied for three years, I was the one who did the work at home. I mean, I’m completely exhausted when I come home after 40 hours here. Then I go home, and I have spoiled my husband. But after six months he is starting to understand that this will not work any more. But I still do all the laundry, I drive the children. Now he has started to take them home after their activities, but I have to drive them to all their activities. All the buying, the phone calls, a lot of things must be done. I take care of the whole thing at home. He travels a lot and then it becomes more. It’s heavy.

*Gun-Britt:* Yes I can understand that. You have a hard job and bring the job with you home.

*Tea:* Yes. But at the same time I bring the joy with me home. The nice hug, you can live on that, that’s one of the best parts, the immediate positive response. Or when you discover that a child has understood something. Very good! Go on now! And that I mean you cannot get from a work with numbers.

Tea says that she wanted to have a profession that made it possible to combine work and children.
She regards teacher as such a profession. It was more difficult the semester before when she worked in the leisure time centre and many of her workdays did not end until six o’clock in the evening. The job as a teacher is easier in that respect, the teachers’ agreement says that she have to spend only 35 hours of the week in the school, the rest of the hours she can work at home. This was impossible, and not allowed, in the leisure time centre.

When I asked the five teachers from the Forest school about the work affecting life at home, they all told me that this issue was not a problem for them. They were all experienced teachers they said.

My comment is also that the teachers at the Forrest school did not describe a work situation with parents that are not familiar with the Swedish society and the Swedish school. The pupils at the Forrest school have satisfactory reached the educational goals decided for grade five, set by the Swedish National Agency for Education (www.skolverket.se). It is only a few pupils at the Forrest school that have another first language than Swedish.

Concluding comments

The main point here is that restructuring can weaken the relation between teachers and the pupils/parents when the school quite rapidly reduces the number of staff, and in accordance with the economic restrictions inbuilt in the voucher system. The teachers’ strategy is a striving for preserving a long term relation with pupils. Tools such as IDP are introduced by the state, but work as a disturbing element within a community of practise build upon a teacher meeting a group of pupils over a longer period of time. These arguments will be outlined under the following headings:

What does restructuring mean?

In their stories about occupational life, the teachers often talk about the children they meet. And they talk about children as pupils. The teachers do not have access to children in the full sense. In the school, children are constructed as pupils. Teachers’ community of practise is build upon creation of long-term relationship with pupils. A salient feature of teachers work is to be familiar with the single pupil’s behaviour and educational achievements in the classroom, but at the same time meet pupils as a group.

What the teachers have access to can be called ‘traces’ of children, such as written tests, oral statements, behaviour, talks with parents etc, and these ‘traces’ are involved in the construction of children as pupils. These ‘traces’ are not just there. The construction of pupils is an outcome of the teachers’ actions, including the use of tools. There is also a normative aspect involved: The pupils should behave well and be nice to their school mates for example. They should do their best in relation to the tasks the teachers assign to them.

Children constructed as pupils are most commonly part of a school class with their own teacher and classroom. They are not randomly assigned to a teacher or a classroom every day. It is even unlikely that pupils and primary school teachers change school classes now and then during a school year. In particular, the organising of the school around school years and division in classes of which teachers can be responsible, or not, are important to understand teachers’ work. But also tools developed to create long-term relationship with pupils. In the following, the stories of the three teachers are depicted with this point of departure:

Teas story is about a struggle to get balance between life at work and life at home. She is not only a
new teacher; she is also a substitute teacher. The later situation conditions her interaction with the pupils. She knows that she soon could be replaced by the permanent teacher and then, if lucky, get a new temporary job in another school class.

Tea talks about the situation as demanding for both her life as teacher and life at home. She does not seem satisfied to enter the classroom and meet a group of pupils one month and another group the next month. Work in the classroom is organised around a long-term planning were the teachers are quite free find out the best methods to meet the need of the single pupils. But it takes time to get to know the pupils. It is no use to plan for the next month if the teacher has to leave the group of pupils next week.

Tea could finally stay as teacher of the class, the other teacher did not come back. This can here be regarded as a turning point in Tea’s short career. Now she could plan her work and develop a long-term relationship with pupils. However, she could not use the tools necessary to create a long-term relationship with pupils without being certain of a long term relationship, a quite paradoxical situation for her within this community of practise. To achieve what is demanded (long-term relation), the demanded (long-term relation) is needed. A solution, according to Tea, is a permanent position.

Tilde’s story here starts when she was a young teacher. Like Tea she was a substitute teacher for many years and she also talks about broken relationships with classes. She describes feelings of uncertainty. One example is when she talks about a school class described as difficult and none of the more experienced teachers wanted to take on the responsibility as class teacher. Tilde as the youngest and least experienced teacher got the class. Here Tilde’s and Tina’s stories interfere. The meeting with Tina was an important turning point for Tilde that made her feel more comfortable with the work as teacher. Tilde could have left the teacher occupation but was encouraged to continue. A lack of infrastructural tools for supporting the new teacher is here obvious. A teacher can be quite alone in this matter.

The point here is that Tina crossed institutionalised borders to do what she did to help Tilde. The teachers organise their work in classroom, quite much on their own, often with a colleague but not on a collective basis. They have not access to tools that help them to share their class room work with many teachers and other occupational groups in school. Employment terms, the school building with long corridors, the classrooms with closed doors, the lack of common work spaces and that the teachers have to do their planning work in their own classrooms, are tools at work in this community of practise.

**How is restructuring working**

The pupils and their parents have access to a school voucher and can change school whenever they want. They could choose another municipal school or a private school, financed by tax money. A school that looses a pupil, also looses the money connected to the pupil. A problem for the Rowan school is that around 60 pupils have left the school last year. Therefore the city district wants to reduce the number of teachers. There had already been some reductions at Christmas, between the autumn and the spring terms. Now it seems as there will be even more reductions say the teachers.

The teachers worry about the economic restrictions, and that they should break up the school classes in the middle of the school semester. This is of course also the same as a new teacher/group of pupil constellation. The teachers’ space of action in relation to pupils become limited, they must please parents and pupils so they do not leave.
Teachers at the Rowan school also face parents with lack of experience of the Swedish school system. It is reasonable to believe that this is a quite new experience for many teachers. That cannot take for granted that parents know what schooling of pupils is about.

The relation between teachers and pupils can be weakening in relation to the voucher system. Parents not being familiar with the school can also be described in terms of a weakening relation. It makes it more difficult for teachers to communicate with parents, parents then think that the school is bad, and that children do not learn enough, and move their children to another school. The teachers cannot expect that all parents know what (the Swedish) school is about. Like Tina said, teachers are sometimes the only Swedish people pupils and parents meet. Tina’s stories about her meeting with parents and pupils in difficult situations also reveal the lack of institutionalised tools to handle the meeting with pupils and parents facing difficulties in life. She has to cross the border of the institution to do what she regarded as necessary.

**Professional configurations**

The argument here is that the instrumentation of the teachers’ community of practise is challenged; teachers have no tools to handle exchangeability. However, the IDP and the demands of documentation can be seen as introduction of tools to standardise and externalise teachers work.

It is reasonable to believe that most of all things that constantly are going on in the classroom only appear in the teachers’ memory. Teachers do not document all aspects of a working day regarding their doings and undertakings with pupils, and they do not have to. Most likely they also can rely on their memory because they are familiar with the pupils. Teachers and pupils meet them almost every day during several years. However, some aspects of teachers work with pupils are documented, like on the test papers described above, and also in a long-term sense in a pupil’s development plan, or maybe as discussed in a pupils’ wellbeing conference. Thereby the documented ‘traces’ also are part of the teachers’ professional accountability, but also a tool for self-regulation. The teachers react on the ‘traces’ and adapt their acting against them.

The instrumentation of a teachers’ community of practise supports the long-term relationship with pupils but not exchangeability and standardised procedures. On the contrary, demands of exchangeability and standardised procedures work as disturbing anomalies.

The meeting with different cultures is another aspect that challenges the mundane instrumentation. Common Swedish words often used in schools (but maybe not used in the daily vocabulary) like “fyr” (light house) and “myr” (mire) become almost meaningless syllables for children who only use Swedish at school. Also the idea what school is about can be difficult to handle in the meeting with parents with no other contact with the Swedish society than the school.

**Professional strategies**

Demands from management and demands from pupils/parents are contradictory within a community of practise and an instrumentation built around creation of long term relationship with pupils.

Decentralisation is often described in terms of increasing the professionals’ influence over the work situation. However, decentralisation can also be the same as centralisation. The teachers’ space of action is here limited; they have no direct channel to the city district manager. Their strategy is to call for more resources by writing letters and consequence descriptions. This strategy can also be regarded as a call for “more of the same”, that is to meet the demanding situation when with the
familiar instrumentation.

But teachers are not controlling the resources, and they are excluded from the line of authority. The demands from State and citizens turn back to teachers to solve.
Chapter 3

English primary teachers’ work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing contexts

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1. Introduction

1.1. Conceptual position

The aim of the Profknow project is outlined in the proposal:

*Our over-arching ambition is to understand knowledge “at work” among professional actors situated between the state on one side and the citizens on the other side. This is a way to consider opportunities and constraints for change as well as a means to capture issues of social cohesion and integration in Europe of today.*

The area between the state and the citizens is the provision of services that has been under a process of restructuring in England and in Europe. It is the process of restructuring of this provision and role of professionals in it that is of interest to the Profknow project. Restructuring is seen as a co-production of societal changes, institutional changes and professional habitus. So the term restructuring includes the dynamic interaction between 1) societal issues such as increased technology, greater consumerism and increases in women working 2) national government inspired policy changes influencing Education especially since the 1980s 3) changes occurring from within the teaching profession.

This report is made up of subjective and objective data taken from interviews transcripts, observational field notes, school and national websites and previous ProfKnow work packages. A Bourdieuan inspired approach was used for this report. Teachers’ biographies are seen as illustrative of the different experiences of habitus-specific individuals but also vividly highlight their shared experiences in the field. Bourdieu's concept of habitus involves the aspects of culture anchored in practices of individuals and groups including learned habits, bodily skills, tastes, dispositions and beliefs. It is 'an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular condition in which it is constituted'. (Bourdieu 1977a:95, quoted in Grenfell and James, 1998). Here the field is defined as the 3 primary schools visited for this research. However this is intersected by the structured structures of professional, national and local educational fields. Teachers are seen as possessing different combinations of capital (economic, social and cultural). However, capital is only valued to the extent it is recognised in a certain field. Knowledge is viewed as constituted in a teacher's cultural capital and includes the accumulation of personal characteristics, dispositions, institutions they have attended and artifacts used. Fields are "lubricated by forms of knowledge which are only partially consciously known; have their own self-referential legitimacy and to a large extent operate in a tacit manner" (Grenfell and James, 1998:24). The changing social practices or praxis in primary schools described by the teachers of different generations combined with my own observations of procedures will be focused on as an attempt to illuminate changes in teacher habitus. As Teacher 4 (experienced teacher) ruminates herself in the quote below, the dichotomies of structure and agency combine and influence each other in a dynamic process of internalisation of the external and externalisation of the internal that makes up the construction of a professional habitus and this means different generations of teachers have different professional identities (Bourdieu, 1977, Grenfell and James, 1998).

*T4: And in fact the older you were and the longer you'd been teaching the harder it [change] was because you had all your kind of erm, what can I say, your habits that had grown over the years that you didn't even recognise were part of you, were actually, you know, they were part of you, just because you'd been teaching for so long.*

The same theoretical approach will be used for both WP4 and WP5.
1.2. Research Process and Methodology

This report aims to look at the dynamics of educational restructuring in England and teachers’ working experiences, their expertise and professional knowledge. This report focuses on information from six life history interviews and observations carried out with 3 teachers belonging to different generations, within one school. It also includes focus group data, interviews and observations collected in 2 other schools. In all, opinions and experiences from 15 teachers are included here. The ethnographic observations of between 2-3 days with each teacher were carried out over 6 months during the spring and summer terms of 2006. The Department of Education website reports two of the schools were fairly ‘typical’ schools while the other school was in a designated area of social deprivation and catered for children speaking over 20 languages. Interview transcripts were coded using NVivo. Transcripts were returned to interviewees so they could make comments or amendments.

Life–history interviews were chosen as the methodology for illuminating the professional habitus of different generations of teachers. The first interviews were conducted in a very unstructured way and participants were simply asked about their life history. The second thematic interviews were carried out after analysing the first interviews and discrepancies and omissions were also explored. The focus group was held at the end of the data collection with the aim of further clarifying issues and investigating themes. A life-history approach contextualises the professional experiences of a narrator within their whole life and so within a time period. Goodson (1992:6) has noted the importance in differentiating between individualistic life stories and life histories - where narratives are linked to structural changes in society and the “historical context”. Following this insight, the participants’ biographies are explored keeping in mind to what extent they are representative of their generation and of how they have experienced changes over time.

It is also noted that the transcripts produced from these interviews are viewed as socially constructed texts produced from the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Consequently my own role interviewing as a female, professional-outsider should also not be ignored and brings advantages and disadvantages and the data reflects these nuances. Finally some teachers felt more exposed by being interviewed and observed than others (also revealing of the atmosphere of the school) as well as their own disposition as the following quote indicates.

*T7: ... lack of privacy actually is a big issue, I mean, and having you in the classroom [...] I mean, there's nothing personal at all, but it's another body, you know, watching and thinking and looking and it's just, you just [...] it's just another aspect, another example of being under the microscope, which is what I just feel you are. (T7 mid-career teacher)*

2. Contexts

2.1. National – Primary Schooling in England

The national context of primary school teachers can be described as having come ‘full circle’ over the working lives of the three generations. The progressive teaching of the 1960 and 70s emphasised in the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) was abruptly ended under attacks from the Conservative government during the 1980s, with the introduction in the Education Reform Act (1988) of the National Curriculum, rigid inspection by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) and national testing at ages 7, 11 and 14 with results published publicly.
in league tables. From 1992 whole-class teaching was advocated by the Conservatives.

Since 1997 when New Labour came to power, they have continued with a raft of new initiatives affecting primary education and teacher practice, expertise and knowledge. Their original back to basics agenda was followed by the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998 and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) in 1999. These greatly changed the practice of teachers in the classroom, as they involved highly prescriptive lesson outlines emphasising whole-class teaching, planning based on objectives and a carousel approach to delivery. Now not only was the curriculum dictated but so was pedagogy. This prescriptive approach has recently been replaced with a new Primary National Strategy, Excellence and Enjoyment, with a more creative curriculum (DfES, 2003). Personalised learning and topic-based work is once again seen as central, although this is now combined with standards set by national curriculum tests (commonly known as SATs) and the National Strategy Frameworks. From the summer of 2004 less emphasis has been placed on tests for seven-year-olds in favour of teacher assessments and targets have been dropped.

Other policies that have greatly affected the working lives of primary teachers have been the introduction of large numbers of Teaching Assistants in the last 10 years, who have been taking on an increasingly important role in the classroom with implications for pedagogy (Lee, 2002). Another recent initiative is Workforce Remodelling (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001) introduced in 2003 with the aim of improving the worklife balance of teachers. This included the transfer of administrative and clerical tasks from teachers to support staff. From September 2005 teachers have also been entitled to spend 10% of their working week as PPA (preparation, planning and assessment) time.

New Labour’s teacher restructuring has also included a new reward and grading system and improved pay for teachers. They have introduced Threshold Competence Assessment and Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) where expert teachers can earn more without management responsibilities. Some headteachers also now have the freedom to determine their teachers’ pay and conditions.

The introduction of IT is also an important issue for the professional knowledge and expertise of teachers which has challenged many of the older generation, with the enforced introduction of laptop computers and interactive whiteboards replacing the old classroom blackboards.

However, in some ways these national policy changes are not the most important factor for teachers. This research found, when teachers talked about restructuring, the theme they continually came back to was the change in children and parents over the years. The breakdown of class barriers in society, the rise of individualism (Beck, 1999, Giddens, 1991) and the decrease of respect in society is felt by the teachers in the changed relationships they have with children and parents.

2.2. Local – A case-Study School

The following is a description of the school in which the greatest amount of ethnographic work was carried out. Information is mostly taken from observation and secondary sources such as the school Annual Report to Parents and Prospectus. These documents lay out school policy on many issues as well as events going on at the school. The importance of self-promotion of schools in an educational ‘market’ is also evident from the school web-site. Additional detailed statistics and reports on the school were used from the national Ofsted and DFES (Department for Education and Skills) websites, demonstrating the standards agenda.
The school is a larger than most primary schools with a two form intake. It has nearly 500 pupils aged between 4 and 11. It is a well established Community school situated in a residential area. The school was built in the 1970s progressive education era and designed to be open plan encouraging creative teaching and learning. However, since then, dividing walls and doors have been introduced to separate off most of the classrooms. There are areas for science, Food Technology, Drama and Music, an IT room and a library. Nearly 15% of children come from ethnic minorities, mostly of Indian origin. The school is divided between infants and junior departments. Classes are mixed ability although children are setted for maths. The proportion of pupils in this school that qualify for free school meals is below the national average. The school has a uniform policy.

The school has grown considerably over the years and now comprises of a large staff including more recently created roles and teams. The head teacher is supported by two deputy heads. Other Management roles include an Inclusion Manager (SENCO and Able Pupils), subject areas and Key Stage Co-ordinators, a Learning Manager and Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator. Teachers liaise together for example in a Curriculum Development Team. Some teachers work part-time or as Release teachers – especially needed since PPA time was introduced. There is also a Learning Support teacher, an IT technician, LSAs (Learning support assistants) and TAs (Teaching assistants) as well as administrative assistants, a school secretary, a bursar to deal with finances and mid-day meals supervisors.

Staff development is extensive in the school, according to the school report staff attended over 80 INSET courses in the last year, for example specialised courses for the SEN (Special educational needs) support team, Early Years training and development in the teaching of Maths and English.

The proportion of children on the special educational needs (SEN) register is average when compared nationally. The number of Statemented SEN children was also average. Pupils in the school include those with moderate and specific learning difficulties, hearing impairment and autism. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is managed by the co-coordinator and another specialist teacher. Children are put on the Special Needs Register if their teacher fills out a ‘Cause for Concern’ form and this is signed by the parent. These children then have I.E.P.s (Individual Education Plans) written for them by their class teacher and may receive individual extra help from personal LSAs. The school liaises with outside agencies, some of which are provided by the Local Education Authority such as services for psychology, speech and language or English as a Foreign language.

The school has a Board of Governors made up of parents, teachers, community representatives, a LEA (Local Education Authority) representative and other associate members. The role of the Governing Body is to represent the public interest in the running of the school, ensuring financial management and that the best is being done for the children. Governors sit for 4 year terms and there are 3 meetings a year as well as committees (finance, staffing, curriculum and premises) with twice-termly meetings. There is an active school fundraising organisation which has organised events such as a Summer Fair, a lottery, sponsored walk and a disco to raise money for the school.

The school is involved with various national initiatives such as Healthy Schools – an attempt to encourage better diets and lifestyles for children and Eco schools – a raising environmental awareness scheme that encourages, for example, re-cycling, composting and the development of the school pond. A special interest pursued in the school is ICT. The school participates in the gifted and talented programme, where able children are identified and put on a register and encouraged to attend schemes tailored to their needs, run by staff and outside agencies. Recent government initiatives have highlighted the importance of successful transition of children from primary to
secondary schools and efforts are made to facilitate this. Another recent initiative has focused on cutting down unexplained school absences. The school provides a wide number of after school clubs such as netball, gym and cricket, chess, country dancing or gardening which are run by teachers as well as outside coaches. Trips outside are encouraged, for example one teacher was observed discussing with a class a group theatre trip.

There is a School Council made up the Head, teachers, support staff and one representative from each class voted for by their class mates. The aim of this is to encourage student voice and democracy. The school runs a house points system and the House with the most points at the end of the year gets a cup. This house points system was in evidence across the school with all the classrooms displaying points charts on their walls. Certificates of Effort and Attendance are awarded to children at the end of each term. Children also have achievement books to fill in.

Packed lunches are available for children either provided from at home or provided by the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) who also supply them for those who qualify for free school meals. This policy differs across LEAs and provision and contracting out of school meals services has been controversial in England.

The school serves a population that is of an average social economic group so is not involved in some New Labour initiatives targeting areas of disadvantage, such as Excellence in Cities. This initiative has provided funding for a large number of schemes especially aimed at improving ICT skills, such as City Learning Centres, Leadership Development for school managers or Playing for Success (PfS) with study support groups based at sports grounds. However, one of the other schools was involved in these schemes. This school also provided the controversial Extended school Programme - another recent government initiative being unrolled to provide children with care from 8am-6pm, all year round, not necessarily on the school site. Extended schools are to provide study support, IT access and clubs as well as having links with other community and social services as part of the Every Child Matters agenda introduced in 2003. These social democratic schemes demonstrate the contradictory nature of the New Labour restructuring project as they try and reconcile Neo-Liberalism and Old Labour social equality in a Third Way approach (Giddens, 1988).

3. Generational Biographies

The following teacher biographies were gathered during this research and will be examined to see in what ways they are representative of their generation and how they have experienced structural changes over time. Notter (2000) has identified 4 generations – Matures (aged 62-82) Boomers (aged 42-62), Generation-X (aged 22-42) and Millennials (under 22). He finds certain common identifiers in generations, although the boundaries between them can be fuzzy. Maturers (interested in family and religion, dedicated to hardwork, duty, education and a dream); Boomers (optimistic, interested in personal gratification); Generation X (experienced downsizing and redundancies of their parents generation and consequently 'work to live' not 'live to work' and value worklife balance); Millennials (characterised by IT knowledge and confidence). It can be seen that some of these characteristics do ring true in the following biographies of teachers. But to what extent can the teachers' identities be seen to be representative of their generation and is this reflected or not in their professional practices, knowledge and expertise?
Maria – Experienced teacher - team player, learns from others

Maria is in her late 50s and is approaching retirement. Maria was brought up in the South of England, her father was a member of the clergy and her mother worked at home. Maria attended a private school where her father worked and then as a young teenager, her family re-located and she changed to a Grammar school. Maria recalled being excluded from friendship groups when she started her new school and reflected that these experiences possibly made her a team-player. Maria had always wanted to be a teacher and she started a 3 year course in infant teaching with a nursery extension and drama as the main subject. It was at this teacher training college based in a large city that Maria met her husband as he was on the same course. Maria's first teaching job was in an inner city school. She felt she learned quickly due to the good support provided by the Head and other new and experienced colleagues. After 3 years Maria was promoted to specialist language development working with small groups throughout the school. She then left to have her first child. After a couple of years Maria returned to teaching part-time at a challenging school where the catchment area was a working class white council estate. She remembers this time as demanding but fun. After having her second child, Maria and her family re-located as they wanted a bigger house but could not afford this in the city. Maria was then inspired by the lack of good nursery provision to start up a playgroup which she ran for 5 years. However she returned to teaching in a small village school for the next 5 years. Maria moved to her current school where she has been working for the past 16 years in a senior management role. Maria is typical of her generation in that she remembers and describes vividly the attacks on teachers by the conservative government in the 1980s at the start of educational restructuring.

Jane – Mid-career teacher – a 'new professional'?

Jane is in her mid thirties and was brought up in a commuter outside a large city. She has been teaching for nearly 10 years. Jane recounted a very happy childhood, going to her local primary and comprehensive schools with her two older brothers. Jane's parents came to live in the UK from overseas with the aim of giving their children a better life. They both work in manufacturing. Jane had wanted to be a teacher since she was a child, having enjoyed helping out a neighbour who was a teacher with preparation for classes in the summer holidays. Although Jane was discouraged from teaching by her mother who thought it would be hard, poorly paid work, she applied for a 4 year degree course in Education (at a Polytechnic that was re-named a university during her course). She specialised in PE. Jane felt ready to go into the classroom by the end of the course and had experience of whole-class teaching for two years. Jane found her first job rewarding as she reported the school had a supportive Head and she enjoyed the multicultural, small, family-atmosphere. She experienced some issues dealing with parents but these were resolved with the backing of the Head. Jane was a subject co-ordinator for the school and trained her teaching assistant as well as receiving lots of professional development herself. However, after 7 years, Jane felt it was time for a change and went travelling for 2 years. When Jane came back she found a new job easily as her previous head recommended her. Jane worked in this new role for two years. Jane could be seen as an example of a new apolitical generation of teacher who is broadly supportive of government policy, sees change as an inevitable part of the job and does not have time for colleagues who moan. She has been approached about becoming a school advisor. However, Jane has decided to work overseas indefinitely and so is representative of a globally mobile profession.

Susan 3 – Early career teacher – works to live, not lives to work

Susan is in her mid twenties. She has been teaching for under three years. Her schooling took place in local primary and comprehensive schools, followed by a 6th from college. Susan’s
description of her family is representative of how work has changed compared to her parents’
generation. T3’s father did not go to university but became a self-trained professional. He has
worked in the same career for his whole life and has only left jobs when he has been made
redundant - not through quitting. Consequently he has encouraged his daughter to pursue a reliable
career herself and is very proud of her being a teacher. One reason Susan chose teaching as a career
was she felt if her family were to pay for her to go to university she wanted to be qualified for a job
at the end of the course. Susan is representative of her generation for whom tertiary education is
expensive as grants are no longer available and students pay fees themselves rather than the state as
was previously the case. Susan did a four-year Early Years degree course. Susan typically found
her NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) probationary year hard and having completed it, she found an
administrative job outside teaching. However, Susan found this job unfulfilling as well as
demanding. This is typical of her generation - an ever increasing percentage of young people are
graduates – so establishing a career is progressively more competitive. So Susan returned to
teaching, initially as a supply teacher which she described as confidence-building, before joining
her current school. Her professional identity involves giving children an encouraging and
supportive environment in which to learn as she felt this was sometimes lacking during her own
school days.

4. Thematic Analysis

This section aims to look at the major themes that arose from the interviews, the focus group and
observations. The problems associated with using case-studies to make generalisations is a well-
covered issue (Bassey, 1999). However, using the qualitative data collected here, it is possible to
pull out themes and make some wider generalisations due to the centralised education system in
England. It is also interesting to note that the teachers' accounts of their experiences and practices
under restructuring were remarkably homogeneous. Following the agreed Profknow structure the
following areas will be addressed: - working conditions, professional knowledge, social position,
worklife balance and emerging themes (gender). The themes of restructuring and generations are
addressed throughout the thematic analysis as well as in the final conclusion.

4.1. Working Conditions

4.1.1 Organisation of Work - Arrangement of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Central to the working conditions of teachers is the National Curriculum. The introduction of the
National Curriculum (1988) and then the National Strategies (1998 and 1999) altered working
conditions of teachers. Over the generations, teachers have become less free to use their own
discretion to organise the content of their work. T8 explains how the introduction of the National
Curriculum has changed working conditions with the emphasis now on literacy, numeracy and
science.

T8:  ... I think what did change was with the introduction of the National Curriculum was actually
the expectation of what you would be including in the curriculum. Now, when I started there wasn't
a kind of expectation of doing science with very young children. What one did do, is I think one
always did a certain amount of what we would call in the old days, nature study [...], but when the
science curriculum came in and there was that kind of expectation of the more physics side of
science. [...] You've now got the whole of the computer bit, the whole of the science area, design
technology, you know, there, it's just a totally over-crowded curriculum. [...]  ... (T8, experienced
teacher)
New Labour’s National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies (1998 and 1999) led to restructuring pedagogy as the frameworks prescribed down to the minute, exactly what and how teachers should be teaching. This was initially responded to with resentment, and seen as de-professionalizing, however, in retrospect, the Strategies were seen to be well designed and teachers reported seeing them as improving their skills and knowledge, accountability, timing and planning.

T1: With the Numeracy and Literacy strategy, once we’d shaken off the kind of straight-jacket syndrome and got down to actually teaching it, it was very helpful, provided that you still remembered that you were a professional and you needed to remember the children's needs... (T1, experienced teacher)

Most recently New labour’s National Primary Strategy (2003) has emphasised the Creative Curriculum. This is seen as a return to earlier teaching methods. The phrase coming 'full circle' was mentioned by many of the teachers or as T12 put it 'if you stand still long enough you're actually an innovator!'. During observations in all three schools similar elements in the teachers' practice and pedagogy could be seen. The teachers used similar pedagogic strategies such as the use of small individual white boards in the middle of the desks that children had to hold up during whole-time teaching to show they had the answer. The vocabulary the teachers used was similar. If children were feeling wobbly (loosing concentration), similar techniques were used to give them a break such as whole-class clapping or finger clicking and then getting back to the work. All the teachers used positive praise techniques to maintain classroom discipline. Teachers also used egg-timers to give children or the class time limits for carrying out tasks. The use of a decibel thermometer - so children know the level of noise expected from them – eg silence or a working whisper was also used for class control. The teachers' desks were not located at the front of the class but at the back or side of the classes. Simply giving children a text book to work through or a workbook was unusual. Use of text books was only observed with one older teacher and only for a short part of the lesson. The rest of the time, the teachers had prepared classes in advance, involving various different activities and group work and these were delivered from their laptops using the interactive whiteboards. Timing of classes was seen be especially important, so for example when children were lining up to go to lunch or outside for breaks, the teachers used this as an opportunity to ask them mental arithmetic questions. At the start of every lesson, the teachers explain to the children what they are going to be teaching and why. The L.I. (learning intention) is written at the top of the whiteboard before each topic and pupils write this in their books. Teachers also used various similar techniques at the end of the lessons to obtain children's self-assessment of how much they had understood, for example, drawing different types of 'faces' on their work – from smiley to sad depending on their grasp of the topic. Since the introduction of the National Primary Strategy, the prescriptive approach has loosened and teachers are now encouraged to make work topic-based and creative. Observations showed this approach at work for example, one class was working on water and the whole class including the windows were decorated in paper and Perspex sea creatures including a huge shark. My fieldnotes mention other creative displays such as - ancient Greeks (religion, myths and legends and groovy Greeks) or Coming to England (imagining coming to live in a new place now and in the 1930s and how you might encounter racism). Teachers were observed being urged to be creative by the Head during a staff meeting and he encouraged the use of decoration in the classrooms.

One result of the restructuring is the increase in the preparation time teachers need when they are no longer relying on text books. As a result of this working conditions have also been changed to allow teachers more time to teach under Workforce Remodelling (2003). This initiative means teachers should not be required to have to routinely undertake administrative jobs such as collecting money, photocopying, copy typing, classroom display, ITC repair or commissioning, stocktaking, written permission to go on trips or data entry. However, in practice, many of the teachers told me
they were actually still undertaking many of these tasks as it was easier to do it themselves than pass the work onto other administrative staff and TAs. As well as this, since September 2005, all the teachers get one morning or one afternoon off a week for planning, preparation and assessment time (PPA). Some teachers noted this was helpful and allowed time for team planning while others mentioned the lack of space and said they would prefer to work at home during this time but were not allowed to.

4.1.2 Management of Work

Local Management of Schools and commercialisation

Working conditions of teachers are affected by the interlocking fields of - national policies, the Local Education Authorities and school policies interacting with individual teachers' habitus. Since the 1980s and especially under New Labour, there has been increased devolution of power to local schools and teachers have more say in decisions over resources. Schools have also become more commercial. Under New Labour, schools' education expenditure has increased hugely. To cope with the consequent increase in work, new roles have had to be created in schools. For example, during observations, one school bursar (a newly created role) was seen to be very powerful as line-manager to all the TAs as well dealing with school finances and administration. This can be positive as it gives teachers greater freedom but it can also create more work.

T1: … I think right through education soon if we're not careful it's commercial, it's going to be business, it's going to be the schools that survive are going to be the ones that can get sponsorship, who have the business skills, who, who are prepared to be run by a private company or as a private company. [...] it's the rich school that get richer and the poor schools that don't get any richer. (T1, experienced teacher)

There has been increased marketisation of schools over the generations with private companies and sponsors keen to target young audiences. Whitty (1998) sees the growing influence of commercial organisations and consultants as changing the ethos of a schools. He suggests that some aspects of marketisation contribute to privatisation in an ideological if not a strictly economic sense. T8 noted that the children have collected so many tokens from Tesco supermarket (qualifying them for free sports equipment) that they have got too many toys in the playground and they are of poor quality anyway so need constant replacement. One telling quote from T10 supports the notion that teachers’ work is seen as any other service economy job – with parents and children as consumers. She stated that it was not a bad policy to ‘keep the punters happy’. The quote below from T4 demonstrates how attitudes to commercialisation have changed over the years with implications for working conditions. Whereas in the 1970s, the attitude was to protect children from the pressures of commercialisation and marketisation during their school days, across the generations the narratives appeared to be acceptance that this is a part of life now and - there is no alternative.

T1: I've worked with head teachers before now who wouldn't have any form or sponsorship in the school (I: Really). And, and perhaps at that time it was right, but I think now I think it is not the view to have, I think you have to be very careful about what you choose and how you use it and how much influence sponsors have got on you. Erm, but I think there's a place for it now. (I: You do.) Mmm. And I think that quite good education can come out of it with children, if it's discussed with children, or whatever. (T1, experienced teacher)

Control - SATS, School Inspection and performativity

Working conditions of teachers can be seen as controlled by the performativity agenda with Ofsted
inspections and National Curriculum Key stage Tests (Standard Attainment Tests - SATs) introduced during the Conservative years having been continued under New Labour. Teachers previously would have devised their own methods of assessment. However restructuring has meant compulsory national tests at ages 7 (english and maths) and 11 (english, maths and science) and optional SATs tests for the other year groups. Results are published in league tables that are printed in national newspapers and on the internet. The aim of this is to motivate schools to improve. However, teachers noted ideological misgivings about the logical progression of the policy that in this quasi-market, some schools will inevitably get worse as parents pressurise to get their children into the most ‘successful’ schools. This has always been the case, but in some areas the situation has intensified. T1 (older teacher) noted how demoralising testing is on non-academic children. I visited one school the week before the SATs tests and the pervasiveness of the exams in the school was observed. Colleagues were observed sharing spellings gained from reviewing past papers and drilling pupils on what they needed to know using past papers scanned into the computer as well as coaching children on the best way to tackle questions. One older teacher said to her class, "In SATs you're on your own. You cannot have time and you cannot talk about it. I know it's not how we work in class, these days, but we have to play the system. We have to do our best". In my fieldnotes I wrote 'The children are made to understand that teacher doesn't rate the SATs exams, nevertheless they are being preparing extensively to do well.' Whatever the generation the teachers reported feeling under enormous pressure to make children perform for their SATs exams as the following quotes demonstrate, one from an experienced teacher and the following one from an early-career teacher.

T4:  it does get to you at times. You know, the, you know, the SATs pressure gets to you, [...] It's internal. It's internal, it's self-made pressure. It's not pressure put on by school or management or anything like that, it's, you know, it's me. You want the kids to do brilliantly and when they don't do as brilliantly as you'd hoped you get disappointed and so on and so forth and that sort of pressure I'd like to be out of. [...] I don't mind being accountable, erm, I think assessment and knowing where children are is important, erm but I don't think putting them through things like the SATs are necessary. I think it was, it was all borne out of, 'We're going to get the teachers', [...] I think that's where it came from. And I'm only sorry that, you know, it hasn't stopped in England. (T4, experienced teacher)

T6:  It is a worry. It's just for lots of different reasons, you know, it eats into so much time, even though people say it doesn't really, it does [...] I think they're far too young to be sitting single file in silence without any help, [...] in the classroom, but, you know, separated desks and one at one end, one at the other, and silence, nothing to help them, all the walls covered over, erm, yeah, so it's an awful lot of, of work that goes into it [laughs] and it's quite harsh, I think, you know, and obviously we can't help them [...] anyway, that's just me, I'll get off my soap-box. But I feel for them because they're only six and seven and you just think, for goodness' sake, they've got enough exams when they're older, why do they need to do it now, and it doesn't actually get used for anything [...] Some of the children get so upset, which is understandable. I had a child last year who just cried and cried and you couldn't console him, you know, [...] Parents go either way, they're either blasé and don't care or don't know, or they are kind of buying books and saying, 'What else can I give them', and I've noticed he can't tell the time so well, have you got any other sheets that I can do with him', which is brilliant, but it should be year-long and throughout the school life, not just when they've got their tests coming up. (T6, early-career teacher)

Ofsted inspections are another pressure on the working conditions of teachers. Ofsted inspections are carried out around every 3 years. A detailed report is produced by the inspectors which is publicly available on the internet. A poor report can reflect on the reputation of the school and how popular it is with parents. Teachers also feel compelled to change their practice due to what is
written about them in the report. For example, one teacher told me that the Ofsted report had noted that children were only achieving satisfactorily and higher-attaining pupils need more opportunities to extend their thinking in lessons, especially in writing and science. Consequently she was forced to change her practice and focus on these areas.

T1: I think, you know, it's, it's like there's been a huge hammer to crack a nut, and that hammer has mostly been through the channels of, you could put it under the umbrella of Ofsted, basically, and it's been vastly expensive. Vastly expensive. And has it achieved what it wanted to? Well, in a way, but at what cost? [...] I think a lot of it has been, basically, a political football that's been kicked around and we're the ones that have felt the kicks [chuckles] if you know what I mean. We've got the bruises to show for it. And some people more bruised than others. (T1, experienced teacher)

Autonomy

It has been argued that teachers’ working conditions have changed and teachers have less autonomy over the content and delivery of their work. As had been discussed, teachers have lost control of defining the curriculum. They are subjected to a much stricter regime of testing and inspection. They are also now expected to work with other teachers more. Technology means they can be monitored digitally. T7 explained how her work was monitored day to day as they have to submit all their weekly lesson plans electronically to the Head teacher and he checks and initials them. In this way, subject co-ordinators can also monitor their subject areas.

Increases in Paperwork

Teachers’ working conditions have also been affected by the increases in paperwork. This can be seen as improving their accountability and professionalism or increasing workload needlessly and being a form of surveillance and control – over individuals and schools. Experienced T1 commented, 'You have to justify your existence about everything. I used to say - if it moved in school you had to write a policy for it. Well, now we've done that, we've been there [...] Now, people are writing action plans for everything'. Teachers complain about constant new initiatives requiring responses. An example noted during fieldwork collection was while going to a school in the morning, I heard on the radio there was going to be an initiative to find out how many children are walking to school as a first step to tackling the ‘obesity epidemic’ in England. During the day, the Head came into the class I was observing and asked the teacher to gather this information and hand it back to him by the end of the day. The teacher being observed then had to interrupt her class and find out this information from all the children including from friends of those who were absent, write it down and remember to pass it back later to the Head. Teachers complained about continuous new initiatives or 'fast policy' making working conditions more pressured and creating endless paperwork.

4.1.3 Social Relations

Pupils and Parents

The role of pupils and parents in shaping a teacher’s habitus is important. A common theme of the interviews was the change in working conditions due to the children. Today's children were often described as being materially well-off, but lacking in time from parents. Children were described as being constantly stimulated and entertained so they were poor at listening and concentrating. Children are also criticized as lacking respect for their teachers. The change in children was noted by teachers across the generations. Consequently the working conditions of teachers are seen as
more difficult.

T8: Children are not as nice. [...] And talk to anybody, and they'll agree with you, anybody who's been in school. Children are more difficult, and they're actually not as nice because they don't have any kind of self-discipline, on the whole. There's a lack of boundaries, a lack of parenting, and it's actually meaning that the children are just not so nice to deal with. [...] Nowadays children are kept in, they're not given freedom, they are like pressure-cooked, you know, so that they come to school like they're little things wanting to burst out, you know, and, and yet, they don't know rules and boundaries, so they don't learn self-discipline, [...] it was just accepted in the past. (T8, experienced teacher)

Teachers also recounted working conditions had changed due to relations with parents, who were seen as more assertive and demanding. Professionalism has changed and now has to be defined by a more equal, collaborative partnership between teachers and parents.

T8: Most parents are really wanting help, [chuckles] which is different. They're also stroppy with you, which they never used to be, but parents question things, which is no bad thing. I mean, there are, there are, I mustn't portray it as all being bad, because I mean, in the past parents weren't involved with school, they just handed their children over and that was it. And they didn't really know very much about what went on, so all that kind of aspect of parents being involved and the fact that reading books go home for the children to read at home every day, and all of that kind of thing is great. But, again it's, somehow we've, almost moved a bit too far in terms of, well it's the classic thing, people know all their rights without their responsibilities, it's that kind of phrase, isn't it? [...] now parents question everything. And they molly-coddle their children, they don't kind of accept that children actually have to learn to find out things for themselves and stand on their own feet a bit, and…[...] it's society generally, it's not just with teachers. People question more. People are less submissive, they will, you know, the class structure is not as strong as it was. (T8, experienced teacher)

Another change noted in parents was the divorce rate. T7 highlighted how this means there are increasing numbers of emotionally damaged children in schools with implications for teachers. T15 related difficulties of marital disputes being brought into schools for example if divorced parents want separate access to teachers at parents' night. Socially constructed patterns of paid and unpaid work mean women are ‘blamed’ for negative changes perceived in children as the role of women as the main care givers is often taken for granted. For example, T10 noted how less and less mothers have time to help in schools and increasing numbers of children spend long periods in after-school clubs – 'I think they don't have enough time sort of just being at home with Mum.'

Team Working

A strict National Curriculum and the Strategies means that lesson content is determined making staff collaboration and team-teaching easier and an important part of teachers’ lives. Teachers can share planning with their parallel class teacher and deliver identical lessons. Mentoring and team co-ordination is encouraged, for example, one of the teachers I observed was also a mentor to a NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) so one lesson she spent time observing and assessing and filling in paperwork on the NQT. Although some may see this as decline in personal autonomy (in that they are under more surveillance), T4 explained how he sees increased team working as supportive and professionalizing.

T4: Oh, yeah, I mean, when I first started teaching I, it was very much, 'you're on your own, mate'. Because I remember being, you know, in my very first year as a sort of a raw, out-of-college
teacher, erm, I felt tremendously at sea at times. [...] but er, erm, certainly we've moved on a long way from there. I mean, when I first came here, we were a bit sort of, you know, you've got your class, you're on your own and that's it. But we've gradually moved into different sorts of teams, erm, because the school itself has evolved and changed while I've been here, so erm, but we've become much more collaborative with planning and so forth and it just lightens the load. (I: Yeah). It also makes you feel that you're not on your own. That you can share, erm, you share responsibilities, you also share expertise, (I: Mm) which I think is a good thing to do, too. (T4, experienced teacher)

T8 explained how communication and co-operation with the Heads in schools has changed and the younger generation of teachers work in a more egalitarian structure.

T1: Of course when, when I started teaching one was very in awe of the head teacher. It was, he or she was, could tell you what to wear, could tell you you could wear trousers or not. Erm, could very much influence the way you worked and the way you lived and, and was seen as very much a sort of King [off] the establishment. I say King because I worked for headmasters a lot. Erm, and I say for, you notice I say for when I'm talking about them, it wasn't working with, it was working for. And I think this has changed and I that's what's made, that's what's made the divide [between generations] so much (I: Really). Mm. [...] heads have to be good to survive so therefore they are, erm, work within a team, and they don't just give lip-service to saying they're working with a team, they do. [...] It has changed. (T1, experienced teacher)

Co-operation with Teaching Assistants

Working conditions and practices have changed due to the increase in Teaching Assistants (TAs) Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and SEN specialists in schools since New Labour came to power. TA roles were often carried out by unpaid volunteers in the past, usually relying on the unpaid labour of mothers. While additional support is welcomed, teachers noted that working with other adults in the class could pose difficulties. As part of the Workforce Reform, Labour are aiming to train 14,000 TAs to become Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) through undertaking government accredited HTLA training programmes in 2005/6. During observations, I could see relations between teachers and TAs could be sources of tension and were very dependent on the personalities involved. Evidence of the embodiment of different power relations between TAs and teachers was physically demonstrated by their occupation of different spaces in the staffrooms. Younger teachers noted the difficulty in becoming the manager of a TA who may be much older than yourself, with both parties being untrained for this situation.

Increases in Special Education Needs

Working conditions of teachers now include inclusion of children with Special Education Needs (SEN). The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 asserts the right of children with physical or behavioural problems to be taught with mainstream classes. This has been an important structural change affecting the work of teachers hugely and is a controversial area with some teachers saying it doubles their work as they have to plan separately for those children. SEN children were observed in various classes working separately with LSAs or being included in general activities. However some of these children were also observed being disruptive despite the presence of their designated adult workers. T4 (experienced teacher) for example explained the difficulty and work involved in trying to get funding for SEN children and how he feels 'bitter and twisted' about the failure by the LEA to provide support for children that need it. T1 talked about the increased labelling of children on the SEN spectrum and the increase of outside agencies to work with these children. Another issue is the concerns of parents about the interruption caused to
the education of their children who may be in the same class with a disruptive SEN pupil for up to 4
years. T8 also discussed the huge gap between the political rhetoric about inclusion versus the
reality of having to deal with some extremely difficult children.

4.1.4 Choice

The choice agenda affects working conditions for primary teachers. Although in the primary sector
‘choice’ does not exist, it is at present, the right to express a preference between 3 schools – it can
create work for teachers. It is also a change from in the past when LEAs simply placed children in
primary schools. Raising the expectations of choice for parents can create ‘hotspots’ of frustration
when parents cannot get their child into the school of their choice (Taylor et al., 2002). During
observations I witnessed the choice agenda changing working conditions for teachers, for example
T1 told me she saw it as her duty to the children to see that they got into schools that would suit
them and so she came into conflict with the LEA who did not want her to get involved. It also
meant more contact time with parents to discuss the various choices, which was witnessed during
observations.

5. Professional Knowledge

A major problematic in this investigation is the conceptualisation and articulation of professional
knowledge and expertise. Literature has approached teacher knowledge from different angles and
common approaches are subject knowledge versus transmission knowledge or personal knowledge.
Others debate the variety of origins of knowledge - including practical day to day experiences,
higher education and professional training and formal schooling in the past. Commonly used labels
are ‘the wisdom of practice’, ‘professional craft knowledge (Brown and McIntyre, 1993) ‘action-
orientated knowledge’ (Carter, 1990) or teacher thinking (Calderhead 1987).

However in this report the work of Eraut et al. (2004a) and Belenky (1997) will be used. Eraut has
highlighted the importance of tacit knowledge Eraut (2000). In some recent work Eraut al. (2004a)
researched nurses, engineers and accountants and found professionals progressing along different
learning trajectories in gaining knowledge in different areas - task performance, awareness and
understanding, team work, personal development, role performance, academic knowledge and
skills, decision-making and problem solving and judgement (see appendix 1). This typology is
useful when trying to interrogate the professional knowledge of teachers in detail.

This data will also be approached from a gender perspective, as the majority of teachers are female
and the profession is increasingly feminizing. In Women’s Ways of Knowing Belenky et al.
(1997) interview 135 women and examine how women conceive of themselves and the world.
They outline five stages of knowing. They find there is 1) Silence: one blindly follows authority,
sticks with stereotypes, women are treated like children 2) Received Knowledge: one listens to the
voices of others, receives and reproduces knowledge from ‘experts’, 3) Subjective Knowledge: one
listens to oneself and severs the sense of obligation to follow others views, truth and knowledge are
conceived of as personal, private, and intuited, 4) Procedural Knowledge: one heeds the voice of
reason, reliance on objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge and 5) Constructed Knowledge: one integrates their own opinions and sense of self with reason and the
outside world around them, views all knowledge as contextual; value subjective and objective
strategies. Develops a narrative sense of self, high tolerance for internal contradiction and
ambiguity. These approaches will be returned to while looking at restructuring and its impact on
professional knowledge and expertise in this report.
5.1. Tasks, requirements, demands

As has already been noted, a major change in the knowledge of teachers was whereas in the past they decided what to teach based on their professional knowledge, now it is prescribed. Teacher knowledge has been restructured so it is now defined as how to comply to regulations rather than the construction of your own knowledge based on experience. The first change came with the imposition of the National Curriculum and then the detailed Strategies as is described by T5.

T5...when the Numeracy strategy came in and everything was driven by that, you had to have ten minutes on the carpet doing this part of the lesson, then half an hour to do your work and then a follow up. We all felt very, very, restricted and we all felt that we weren’t teaching properly as well, because we had people come in, advisors come in and watch us teach and the criticism would be...well you spent 12 minutes on that section of the lesson and you spent 2 minutes here. And it all seemed to be dictated by this silly clock on the wall, rather than actually what the children needed to learn and if they asked a question and responded and were looking for misconceptions rather than spending your time actually teaching. The Literacy hour and Numeracy hour was for a couple of years and although they had their place, actually it frustrated us all, [...] half my day was gone because of the new Numeracy and Literacy hour. Looking back now though I can see that actually from a skills point of view for the teachers, we taught the Numeracy and Literacy hours so specifically that we now have a huge amount of knowledge and from the children’s benefit it is actually a good idea because I don’t know as to how much we would have been teaching about adverbs in the same way, and I think for continuity and progression throughout the school, [...] rather than just relying on different methods, different methods, different people, different learning styles and it became much more looking specifically at skills, vocabulary and I think that has really helped. I feel that’s why now I think that the government decided maybe that they are going to go back to this creative way of teaching because they feel teachers may be skilled enough, because we have got enough knowledge now, so they can relax a bit and let us get on with proper teaching. [...] I think we could all quite happily sit in the staffroom and have a conversation around conjunctions and I think that when I first started teaching most people would have not really known what a conjunction is... I’m going to have to go and look that one up’...and although people would have taught them, I’m not saying that they would not have taught them, that actually we are now more aware of the vocabulary. And children are now aware of what it is they are using and everybody is on the same wavelength. (T5, mid-career teacher)

During the focus group interview, mid-career T14 remembered how she had seen some of the older teachers lose their confidence in their professional knowledge and practices in the face of the Strategies. Suddenly being asked to teach in a different way, made teachers re-evaluate what they had been doing in the past and doubt their whole careers. T14 explained how she had had to reassure the older teachers their past practice had been good and not to feel that the changes were a deep personal criticism of their professional identities, knowledge and expertise.

5.2. Learning

5.2.1. Initial Teacher Training

The knowledge and expertise gained in teacher training is highlighted in the narratives. Teacher training has moved from classroom-based knowledge of the Teacher Training Colleges, to the psychology and sociology influenced courses of the later 1960s and 1970s when Colleges were moving into polytechnics and universities. Since the late 1980s, courses have been reformed to provide the knowledge needed to fulfil criteria to deliver the National Curriculum and later the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies (Maguire, 2002). Emphasis is now placed on planning,
preparation and assessment. Elliot’s (2002) contention that theoretical knowledge about the aims of education or child psychology is no longer seen as important but rather knowledge of how to comply with the structures defined by the state is what defines a competent teacher, was upheld in this research. T8 for example explains how things have changed since her progressive teacher training course and so how the cultural capital of older teachers is different to younger ones.

T8: ... our course was rooted in child development. It wasn't, there wasn't much pedagogy. We weren't really taught how to teach very much. It was really all about child development. And then there was a lot about how to engage children more creatively, in terms of what we were taught, I suppose, actually using equipment, handling things, a lot of encouragement for creative making and maths and language, all coming out of what the children do. But the education part of it was very much about.... we studied Piaget we learnt about child development, we did a lot on  

psychological and social influences on children[...] and so that's what was the basis, and actually the practice you did in a classroom was, grew from that. [...] And nowadays I think the students don't get that side, they get a lot of how to plan, a lot of curriculum-based planning sheets, they're very good at the paperwork, and yet actually they don't know a lot about child development, which I think is really sad. (T8, experienced teacher)

T1 (experienced teacher) noted how she felt the old 3 year courses were more valuable than the 1 year PGCE courses which she feels encourage people to go into teaching who are not really committed. She also highlighted how those of the generation who missed out on a university education still feel this as an issue today. A major change in society is the decrease in jobs for life and the increase in flexible workers, so many more people now come into teaching as a second career or as mature students, with experiential knowledge and a different approach to studying. This was clearly seen from my sample of teachers and noted during observations.

5.2.2 Continuing Professional Development

The teachers interviewed discussed how their knowledge is augmented by undertaking a large amount of INSET. During fieldwork I observed a numeracy session with an LEA trainer, held after school hours. The prescriptive approach was in evidence as the trainer firstly stated that the school should have already received the poster containing all the information and should have this displayed on a wall. She then proceeded to discuss the poster which contained suggestions of teachers’ aides such as using clothes pegs on a coat hanger for early-years numeracy teaching. In the following quote, T6 describes the learning opportunities she has had for improving her professional knowledge.

T3: Loads of training - almost too much training! Just that sort of, I’m just straight out of university and I was on so many training...you do so much training at uni. In my first year I did so much training, which was really useful and really good but actually all I wanted to do was be with my class everyday because I’d finally got in the classroom and got my own class - ‘Don’t take me away from it! [laughs] [...] I don’t want to sit with other teachers’. [...] Everything from Literacy to Numeracy to different learning styles, um, behaviour management, just lots of things, you know, lots and lots of things that are all really useful. [...] So that has been wonderful! (T3, early-career teacher)

However some teachers criticise some of this professional development such as different learning styles, as being provided by outside private consultancies who are simply peddling unproven theories to teachers to make a profit and the money could be better spent elsewhere.
5.2.3 Theory versus Practice

Most of the teachers stated that gaining knowledge by practice or experiential learning is the best method of learning. However despite saying this, in retrospect, the style of initial teacher training seems to gain in importance over the life-course in the habitus of the professionals and was often referred back to by the older generation of teachers interviewed. Early-career teacher, T6 noted the commonly expressed opinion especially of younger teachers that knowledge gained on the job, 'hands on' or 'speaking to others' - is the most important for your practice.

5.2.4 Skills

The teachers described how it was often the combination of their skills that they felt made them successful in their teaching. So it is the coming together of different areas of knowledge that is important. T3 described how she combines her knowledge of a subject and how to teach it, with insights about how to deliver information to children while maintaining discipline; 'It's an entire package'. Understanding of how children behave is also crucial to the job as T7 relates when she talks about knowledge needed to do her job.

T7: Child development. I think that's really important, so that you know you're pitching your lessons at the right kind of level. Erm, er, language. Good use of language, I think. Ability to explain. Ability to use vocabulary well. I think that's hugely important. Erm, and assessment's important, too, so that you're aware of, you know, what knowledge children have acquired and can use, and that you can build on or where you need to go back and revisit. So that ties into planning, progression. (T7, mid-career teacher)

5.2.5 Lifelong learning

The dynamic relationship between teachers and their pupils makes lifelong learning essential for professionals. With the advent of ICT where children often know more than their teachers or can check up disputed ‘facts’ on the internet knowledge has become more accessible.

T1: ... the biggest lesson for me when dealing with children is knowing that I'm only human and that sometimes I get it wrong. (I: Oh, OK). Erm, you know, I think there was a point when a lot of teachers sort of almost put themselves on a pedestal of being God in the classroom, and I suppose I started off like that, but then I suddenly realised, 'No, you can't do it all the time. It's not fair. I do get it wrong and if I get it wrong I say so'. (I: Oh, OK). You find that you get a lot less resentment from children, you know, [...]. So, it, it's sort of, knowing that I'm a human being like them, I sometimes get it wrong. [...] I mean, if you think in the very old days, I mean, desks used to be raised up on a little platform, didn't they. (T1, experienced teacher)

5.2.6 ICT

ICT is now crucial to the professional knowledge of teachers. New Labour have targeted funding on ICT and this was obvious from observations where there were computers in all the classrooms as well as computer suites and one Head proudly showed me 15 palm pilots available for classes. All the teachers also had their own laptops connected to interactive whiteboards. This process has been harder for the older generation of teachers. It could be seen how the new interactive white boards had been located covering most of the blackboards so that there was only a small space left to write on with chalk. Consequently there was no possibility for teachers to carry on with their old practices of using chalk and the blackboard. One teacher noted that teachers had not had any input in this and it had happened while they were on holiday. Although one older teacher also
acknowledged that ICT can make the job easier as old lesson plans can be stored on the computer and re-used the next year (after updating). During the focus group, a young NQT-status teacher spoke about how she valued her ICT skills that were part of her habitus as she felt she had some knowledge to share with older members of staff rather than it being a one way process of support and expertise transferred from the older teachers to herself. However, maintenance of computers can be an issue. For example the Head of one school was observed in a staff meeting discussing how the school could no longer insure all the computers unless they had special security arrangements. He said in the past if the burglar alarms went off, he came in at night, but now a private company had to be employed who wanted to fit security scanners in the classrooms. Consequently teachers were advised to be careful of setting off the alarms with dangling mobiles or displays. This is an example of how local management of schools and ICT create new areas of work and professional knowledge for Heads.

5.2.7 Personal Knowledge

The personal construction of self, involving one’s own disposition and accumulated capital can be seen to be an important part of teacher knowledge and of what it is to be a professional. Experiential knowledge can be seen to influence the professional values, ideals and motivations of the teachers and their professional practice. For T1, who is coming up for retirement, finding psychological equilibrium, reflecting and negotiating a self-narration about his career is important.

T4: No point in torturing yourself. I'm not saying because I've got everything right [...] it's not always easy to tell whether I've had a lot of impact on the children who've gone through my hands [...] I've played a part in that. I don't, you know, I never think, I'm never going to be one of these sort of, you know, 'my best teacher' or something like that, I'd never expect that, erm, but that I've had some force for good in erm, helping them along their way. I think I have. I know I have with some. They've told me so. (T4, experienced teacher)

Teachers talked about the role of self-knowledge and self-reflection (Schon, 1983) and how this is actually most valuable in self-development. Teachers also mentioned critical incidents in their lives such as divorce or bereavement that led to periods of growth in their personal development. So personal life histories affected professional practice. T11 felt the unhappy relationship between her parents had made a large impact on her personal values and motivations. She introduced this knowledge into her professional habitus and was highly conscious of the importance of being a good role model. She felt this was especially important today when increasing number of children come from broken homes. T3 noted the importance of your own personal philosophy of being a teacher, and she emphasises treating children holistically and focusing on inclusive practices. She focuses on this knowledge as part of her professional persona, having experienced feeling insecure as a child due to family circumstances. So she values giving children confidence not insecurity from an early age. So professional knowledge comes from many sources, as T6 comments: “you're there to nurture them and be all sorts, be a nurse, be, be an accountant, be, you know, everything and anything, and a social worker and a psychologist and, you know, all the hats, kind of thing, goes on!” (T3 early-career teacher)

5.2.8 Learning in a community of practice?

Feedback and support from colleagues functioning in a community of practice is an important area for improving confidence, professional knowledge and allowing professionals to develop as is demonstrated by this diagram by Eraut (2004).
Unfortunately one area that teachers highlighted as being particularly lacking was support. One teacher for example described how in a previous school she was put under so much stress she developed severe headaches and a tumour was queried. She was booked in for a CAT scan appointment for which she had to wait a long time on the NHS. However on the day of the appointment, at the last minute the Head of the school asked this teacher to try and change the date as there was no supply cover for the class. This was the last straw for this teacher, who felt totally unappreciated and she handed in her notice at that school. T12 also describes how lack of collegiality affects confidence and therefore learning. She noted that good self-esteem is crucial in teaching for professional development, but that it can be easily threatened by other members of staff who are too busy to recognise signals of distress.

T12: And I think that's a real problem, because what happens very often too, is that there's a lack of team spirit because people, you tend to operate on your own little tram line, you interconnect when you need to, to get jobs done, but you fail to relate as individuals and as human beings, and erm, I think it's then that you get tensions and unhappinesses creeping in. Erm, I think, I, we work very hard on children's behalf to help them with co-operation, to help them with behaviour, to help them with feeling and caring for other people, but I don't think we do it for ourselves. (T12, mid-career teacher)

Lack of co-operation between teachers can lead to bullying among staff with the accompanying detrimental affects on self-esteem and professional learning. One teacher remembered how in a previous school she was bullied by the head and what an awful, destructive experience it was. However, she noted that it had taught her the importance of being assertive.

6. The Teaching Profession and its Social Position

6.1. Symbolic Capital: Respect and Prestige

The narratives seemed to agree that restructuring has changed teaching and made teachers more accountable and professional.

T2: Oh, I think it's become more professional. (I: Do you?) Yes, I do. I do. Definitely. Definitely. In terms, in planning, in terms of planning and assessment requirements alone, we have to, we have to be much more er, clear in our structuring and our writing. We feel very accountable, I think, both to parents and to inspectors and to governors and head, you know, there is that, that sense of erm, being accountable, I think, but also really, erm trying to understand what good learning is, and how to deliver knowledge and skills to children, so I think in that respect we're very much more professional. Professional in terms of record-keeping as well, reporting back to parents. Yes. I think we have, I think the expectations on teachers are, are of greater expertise, greater professionalism. (T2, mid-career teacher)

However, whatever teachers feel themselves about their professionalism, the view propagated by the media is not always as positive. As T4 said, his friends 'knew enough about the profession to know they would NOT want to do it'. The older generation recounted media attacks on teachers in the 1980s, how they had been the ‘whipping boys’ for the government and how the profession had never recovered from this. New Labour have tried to raise the status of teachers in some ways for example, the creation of a General Teaching Council in 1998, which registers all teachers and was intended to be a body comparable with other professions. However, it does not seem to have improved their status and was mentioned by only one participant. Since the 1980s, there have been
shortages of teachers especially in key subjects indicating the falling attractiveness and status of the profession. However in the last couple of years recruitment has improved but there has now been reported a shortages in Heads as devolved powers mean their jobs involved many new tasks and greater responsibility. One teacher for example sadly stated that her husband had taken early retirement as a head teacher due to the pressure of the target-setting agenda. She described how he had finally resigned after a child made a false allegation against him and is now working outdoors manually and says he derives more satisfaction from this than he ever did as a Head teacher. The older teachers noted the fall in status in the eyes of the public of the job of a teacher.

T4: I don't think teachers are held socially, if you like, erm, and I use the term fairly loosely, I don't think they're held in the esteem that they once were, you know, because, you know, ‘he/she is the teacher’. That was felt to be a really good job. (T4, experienced teacher)

There has been a change in society, from one that admired people who stayed in their jobs or professions for their whole lives, devoting their lives to their career to a feeling that these people are naive.

T4: *** years to retirement, me. [...] You know, in times past, people would have said, you know, that's something good. (I: that's fantastic). Erm, nowadays that's sort of frowned upon, I think, rather more. Erm, you know, I've not been the sort of person with a lot of get-up-and-go who's wanted lots of promotion, I've never really wanted that... (T4, experienced teacher)

The extent to which older generations of teachers see the profession as a job for life compared to younger teachers who may try out different careers is difficult to assess from the data gathered here. T8 ruminates over her long career in the following quote.

T8... not many people stay in the profession as long as I did. (I: No). Why did I? Because I promised myself I would. Because I said that I'd see it right through to retirement age and not take early retirement. Having said that, that's going to become harder and harder for people to take early retirement and get a full pension and whatever and, you know, so yeah, maybe they will. (T1 experienced teacher).

The public perception of teachers is not aided by the fear of paedophilia of those working with children. Registration of teachers and police checks on people working with children have been recently introduced. The government see this as making the profession more accountable and restoring public trust after high profile abuse cases involving school support staff. However this also impacts on teachers.

T5: ... I honestly think it is very sad when you have a parent that wants to come and help and you know, they are within the classroom and they have to go through X, Y and Z checks and then the police check and it’s really putting people off coming to work in schools, not that they have necessarily got anything to hide, but it’s the fact that they may not have enough skills that they can fill in a form, or [...] It’s really sad. (T5, mid-career teacher)

Part of a teacher’s habitus involves their religious beliefs. Interestingly, this was mentioned by 3 of the older teachers. So the role of religion and teaching as a vocation may have been an important taken for granted, tacit moral value guiding many of the older generation of teachers.

T1: I just, I just think that if everybody's got this one common thing which they're learning about, which is outside of themselves, which is selfless and, and erm, for others and teaching tolerance and everything, I think, I just think that that's, I'm strong on morals, yeah? And
standards, and I think if we all had the same kind of philosophy around that it would help tremendously. (T1, experienced teacher)

6.2. Economic Capital: Pay

During the focus group, pay was an area over which teachers did not agree, although this divide was not seen to be a generational divide. Some teachers expressed the view that is common currency in teaching - it is a poorly paid profession and always had been and that teachers do not go into teaching for the money. However one teacher noted that actually teaching was well paid compared to other jobs available in the area. Under New Labour, teaching salaries have risen, especially for those in senior positions. (However this is seen as necessary as they now carry greater responsibilities.) There is now more scope for some schools to vary teachers’ pay and this was noted by one teacher to be divisive to teacher solidarity. One teacher noted that the fact teaching is perceived by society to be a not particularly well paid job reflects the fact the public think teachers are not intelligent.

The career structure of teachers has changed under New Labour especially with the introduction of Advanced Skills Teachers (AST)s who can earn higher salaries without holding senior management roles and higher Threshold Pay for skilled teachers. One of the teachers interviewed was an Advanced Skills Teacher and this meant in exchange for a higher salary, he was released from classroom duties one day a week to co-ordinate and disseminate subject specific information to other schools across the County. One of the older teachers described how these changes have meant that the old career pattern where teachers often were expected to work in around 5 schools before they became a Head or Deputy had changed and it was now less necessary to move school to go for promotion.

7. Worklife Balance

The division of labour is often constructed as natural and so much domestic labour carried out by women is rendered invisible or taken for-granted. Flexible working patterns may have increased in teaching for example, during observations it was noted that there were part-time teachers working including one class who had 3 teachers. However, mid-career T5 articulated the endlessly debated dilemma working mothers face in England when she discussed the guilt and self-blame she feels at leaving her young child in nursery. 'You are teaching other people’s children and you should be at home with your own child, which is very, very hard.' The teacher biographies noted various degrees of stress and worklife balance satisfaction. T7 for example, noted that she did not have time to pursue her interest in reading novels and T6 said she could only go to the gym in the holidays. T7 described how hard it is to obtain a good work life balance and how she is too tired after working to keep in contact with friends. The following quote emphasises the stress and pressure involved in teaching.

T7: I think the pressures are huge. I think it's, one of the problems with teaching is knowing when to shut it out, knowing when to draw a line under it, we're talking about the work-life balance, you can start a term with clear ideas in your mind about how many hours you're prepared to do and what tasks you are prepared not to do but as, you know, people come to you with, with more demands, increasing demands as the term goes on, and as you become tired-er which you do, so that by this stage in the term we are incredibly tired, it becomes, you become less effective in managing tasks and you become less effective in saying no or shutting out the thoughts or the worries or the anxieties, because you've lost the energy to do that. […] I think a lot of people
outside teaching, work very, very hard, I know they work long hours, but I wonder how many of
them actually work probably fifty percent or more of their weekend as well, and, put in, you know,
two hours minimum an evening, beyond the working day. That is, that's a heavy load so what
happens is you end up like I am having had a little more sleep but not necessarily rested mentally
or emotionally because you've still been living and breathing and thinking about work that you've
needed to do. Erm, and then if you have a house to run as well, [...] I do find that hard. (T2, mid-
career teacher)

Of great interest in this research are the changes in attitudes and identities between generations of
teachers. It has been argued that younger generation of teachers are more likely to see teaching as
simply a job. Occupational affiliation has changed and ‘loyalty’ to one’s workplace or identification
to one’s working organisation is seen in a post-modern ironic way of being old-fashioned or naïve
as no reciprocal loyalty can be relied upon in return. Pensions can also not be trusted as the recent
collapse of various occupational work pensions have shown and the discussion about raising
retirement age to 70. Jobs are short-term and flexible and collaboration is at surface level. T4 is an
experienced teacher and this quote demonstrates how her life has revolved around school. Whereas
the beginning career, T6 is determined not to let this happen.

T4:  And so, you know, life itself has sort of taken sort of a very third seat, I mean, school's
always come first, (I:  Right) Has to. (I:  OK) It's me job, don't want to lose it, don't want to do
anything wrong [laughs] so, you know, erm, and it's important because you want to do your best
for the children. Soerm, that's always taken priority.

I:   Do you think that's the same with younger teachers?

T:  Erm, it's very difficult to say. I think with some, and I think we're very fortunate here, we've
got some very committed young teachers. I'm not so sure that all young teachers are as committed.
They see it more as a job (I:  Right) you know. And they will do their job. I'm not saying they'll do
their job badly, but it is a job and there are other things in life as well. And I think actually, they're
right, because I think..... in my time as a teacher, because I've got, I've been around, I've been on
the teaching scene for quite some time. I find that erm, there are some people who are so immersed
in school that it really does take over their life, and I think that's not healthy. [...] Because I think
if you're doing it all the time you tend to become very narrow [...] I'm saying it's getting the right
balance. And I mean, I know that there are some times of the year, like when we're doing reports
and so forth, that I can have evening after evening after evening where it's school, school, school,
school. (I:  Right) Erm, but that to me is part of the job. [...] Erm, it's not quite true now, I think
I've got a better balance of things, but erm, but I still don't have a lot of time, free time (T4,
experienced teacher)

Early career, T6 is clearer about her boundaries.

I:   Does that affect, friends and everything?

T3:  No. I don't let it creep into that, no. No. No, no, weekends are my own, and I made a strict
new year's resolution that if I work late here, my lap-top and my work stays here, and I don't take it
home. Whether I have, if I really, really have to, if it's following day I have to have something in,
fine, I'll have to take it home, but I refuse now because prior to that I was, I was working all hours
and taking stuff home and it was starting to affect my relationship with [partner] [...] He was
very understanding, yeah, I was very lucky, but I knew it wasn't fair and it does cause tension and
stuff, and the whole day just merged into one big long teaching day in the end, you know, you don't
feel like you get a break. But I think now I've got more of a handle of it and I'm sure as time goes
on it will improve: (T6, early-career teacher)

T4 also sees a division between teachers between the older generation and the younger ones who value their work life balance.

T1: I think, I think the new generation of teachers, or the ones, the other side of the divide from me, are much, I say harder, and I don't mean that, but much more professional about what they do and don't do. (I: Really). Mm. I, I feel so. Erm, so that they erm, most of them are not so ready to say ‘yes’, as we, or we used to be frightened to say ‘no’. (T1, experienced teacher)

These quotes support the idea that the work ethic of the younger generation has been modified as suggested above. However T8 suggested, in reality although the younger generation of teachers may talk about work life balance, in reality restructuring has increased workloads for everyone and most teachers across the generations are having to do more work in than they had to in the past.

7.1. Friends and Social Networks

Belenky notes the gender difference that women see themselves as part of networks, whereas men see themselves as separate. Consequently relationships are not researched sufficiently. It has been suggested by many that in a less regulated job market where there is a culture of performativity, social interaction and collegiality is degraded (Sennett, 1998). This is hard to assess from the narratives as it is affected by life course transitions although the quotes below support this. During the observations, I could see that some teachers were eating their lunches at their desks rather than in the staffrooms as they continued working.

T6: ...some people have gone to the pub, in fact less of the teaching staff now go. But that's partly because that the erm, lunch hour as you know is not as long as it used to be[...] And I got out of the habit years ago, because I had a particularly difficult child in the class and we were trying to turn his behaviour around, and erm, he was pretty awful with some of the dinner ladies at the time and I sort of promised that I'd always be on hand, in case there was a problem, so I just got used not to going out at lunch time. Erm[...], but there's just not the time now. (T6, experienced teacher)

This can be compared to the attitude of an early career teacher.

T6: ...I always make sure we, every Friday lunch time we go over to the, just the local pub, there's only a very small group, though, it's not everyone, but again that's one of my other things, because initially I was letting that slip and I wasn't always going, I was saying, ‘Oh, but I've got to stay and do marking and things’, but again I've said, ‘Right, hard and fast rule that I will always go over there’. (T6, early-career teacher)

8. Restructuring and Gender

8.1. Symbolic Violence’ in a historically gender habitus?

The teaching profession is traditionally strongly gendered with imbalances across subjects, management roles and between primary and secondary. The dynamics of restructuring and gender can be seen as working on various levels. At an international level, Walby (2001) argues that private domestic patriarchy has been replaced by public patriarchy regimes where women’s labour is exploited by the state for poor pay and low prestige. At a national level restructuring has meant
the increase of local management and the growth in decision-making of (often male) head teachers. However, these theories deny the agency, contribution and influence of individual female teachers as well as their views about the emancipatory effect of succeeding in a career in education, earning a wage outside the home and the opportunities provided for flexible working. The three schools visited were typical in that two of the Heads were male. Out of all the 15 teachers involved in interviews or the focus group as part of this research, only two were male. However, younger male teachers were viewed at work, especially in the school in an area of social deprivation. It is hypothesized that male applications are encouraged in this context as it is common currency that 'male teachers are good for male pupils in a society where there are increasing numbers of households headed by single women'. This view is criticised as intrinsically sexist as it implies that females do not make good role models for boys (Hutchings, 2002).

The actual basis of teachers’ professional knowledge is also not gender neutral. Belenky et al. note that feminist writers have convincingly argued that there is a masculine bias at the heart of most academic disciplines, methodologies and theories (Belenky et al., 1997:6). They find a historic absence of women as major theorists in social sciences and psychology. Consequently research has traditionally focused on autonomy, independency and abstract critical thought. But research has neglected knowledge of inter-dependence, intimacy, nurturance and contextual thought. Belenky notes, in contrast to Piaget’s theories of development based on males, feminist writers’ theories such as Gilligan (1983) focus on moral development based on notions of responsibilities and care. The individual life stories themselves are infused with references to gender – highlighting how teaching is a historically gendered habitus and how life chances/choices are rooted in gender as well as the socio-cultural situation of the family. The historic struggle for women to establish legitimacy in the workplace reverberates in the narratives – of the young and the mature. Narratives highlight how women’s choices in the past were rooted in family and gender expectations and this has changed over 3 generations. The older generation of teachers note how there were only two career paths open to them in the past – teaching and nursing. One teacher also noted the injustice of her brother being sent to private boarding school and then university while this was denied to her on account of his gender. This had created long lasting family friction. For the older generation of teachers there were also less places for girls available at Grammar schools than there were for boys. The older female teachers recounted how they were unable to continue in jobs when they married or became pregnant. So the older generation of teachers had reduced opportunities for accessing both education and work. The older generation of women teachers can feel a certain jealousy about the greater freedom women have today.

T7: I think I probably envied them to some extent, the, the newer generation who have been able to pursue greater opportunities in school and college, having had a greater freedom of choice, I think, and been about to go straight, straight into er, a career, in fact probably a greater range of career choices than I had. I think I envy them that. Also the, the self-confidence, the level of self-confidence that they clearly have, professionally, anyway, er, which, I envy that too. [...] And on the other hand if, if I hadn't had those opportunities to be at home, which I did with my children earlier on, I would have regretted that as well, so... but it's quite, I think it's quite an interesting situation to look at and recognise, the change that's happened in the female working role is huge. (T7, mid-career teacher)

The biographies also note how traditional notions of women’s caring work are reproduced within families. For example, T5’s mother, and two aunts are all teachers. So the narratives outlined how women's work is reproduced through the generations and women are constantly funnelled into ‘female work’ as any experience of child care is seen as opening doors into these professions. For example, 2 of the older teachers talked about time spent working in playgroups. Others felt that it
was a profession that fitted in with their home lives. However it is noted that this was not always a good training for teaching as T7 relates when discussing her first year of teaching. The reality of teaching and the emotional labour it entails can actually be far more draining than society gives it credit for.

T7:... there is a problem if you're a mother and you become a teacher, in that you're used to mothering, you're used to, used to one-to-one or small groups of children which you want to care for, nurture, whatever, and you cannot do that in the same way with thirty-three children and I know that my behaviour management took a while to grow. I let them get too close, and I didn't want to upset them or alienate them. I didn't want them to dislike me or hate me, erm, so that was, that was quite tough really. Erm, at the end of the year when, when I'd left, you know, I thought, ‘Oh, they did like me after all’. (T7, mid-career teacher)

Bourdieu (2001) argues that women are complicit in maintaining the male hegemony as they do not question the taken for granted practices and thought categories that subjugate them. This cannot be supported from the data collected here as the teachers did question the status quo.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Restructuring, working conditions, worklife balance and professional strategies – (non) resistence?

Restructuring has changed teachers' working conditions with the National Curriculum, the Strategies and now the return to a more creative curriculum. Teachers reported an increase in workload and paperwork due to greater planning and preparation demands. Workforce remodelling, PPA time and the offloading of administrative tasks to TAs were welcomed by the teachers in addressing this situation. Teachers reported changes in their working conditions due to more demanding children and parents and increased staff team-working. Teachers' working conditions are also now affected by increased privatisation, commercialisation and the choice agenda. One older generation teacher expressed admiration for they way she felt younger teachers were better at managing their work life balance and saying ‘no’ to demands. However, at the same time as this, the performativity agenda, increased planning and a more diverse SEN population means that, although the younger generation may say they value their work life balance, in reality they may be working harder than ever.

The narratives show the profession reflects shifts in society in general which has moved away from a more collective outlook towards a more materialistic and individualistic society (Giddens, 1991, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) The narratives support the theory that while in the past the older generation of teachers’ were likely to have been influenced by the church, this is no longer the case. There is general disillusionment and lack of interest in collective national politics, especially among young people. For example, early-career T3 noted, 'I am not a political…and I get quite, I tend to sort of get confused about who is who really'. The older generation of teachers remember the governmental attacks of the 1980s clearly and feel they were offensive and to the detriment of the profession, but these memories do not separate them from the younger generation as they have moved on. The narratives typify the decline of support and interest in trade unions in England and how they failed in their objectives in the 1980s and hint at how this has affected the teaching profession and its status. The older generation of teachers discussed the strikes under Thatcher, whereas the younger generations tellingly fail to mention union membership. Meanwhile difficulty in recruitment of teachers for the last 10 years until recently demonstrates that the public accept
teaching is a stressful profession. Teachers noted they felt it had lost prestige over the years and the profession was not valued despite the increases in material rewards under Labour.

9.2. Restructuring and professional knowledge

Using Eraut’s (2004) typology, it can be seen that various areas of professional knowledge have been affected by restructuring of education and teacher training. The academic work primary teachers need to know to teach has been re-designed, with the re-focusing on science and ICT. With the Strategies, pedagogy has been changed so that task and role performance is different, for example the emphasis is now on timing, preparation and imparting the details of the curriculum or delivering it. The more recent move towards creativity means teachers have to flexibly change their approach again back to topic work and innovation. Changing demands of teachers means personal development is needed. Teachers have been called upon to increase their collaborative team work among themselves and with TAs and other actors; this calls for greater awareness and understanding. The delegation of work involved in involves decision making and judgement.

However using Belenky's (1997) Women’s Ways of Knowing is also illuminating when viewing the data. It places the teachers as relying more on the received knowledge and procedural knowledge of Belenky’s categories, rather than the more complex constructed knowledge in the past. Some of the teachers agreed with this and saw it as positive - possibly because it offers reassurance and takes away the unease and self doubt over whether you are teaching ‘properly’. This attitude was expressed to me by some of the teachers. However, with the return to the ‘creative’ approach and agenda, teachers are being encouraged to use their own Constructed knowledge more again. Alternatively the Strategies could be seen as simply giving teachers more tools to conceptualise their work which can be used to construct their teaching knowledge and most of the teachers interviewed took this view. They felt their professional knowledge had improved rather than declined through the restructuring.

One area where professional knowledge has changed hugely is ICT. ICT is increasingly an important part of teachers’ knowledge and its integration into the Curriculum is an issue for many of the older teachers. The imposition of ICT into schools has meant that older teachers have been forced to take up this challenge and update their knowledge.

Knowledge of the changes in children and parents is an area of professional expertise that is seen as crucial when examining restructuring and teachers. Acquiring the knowledge and understanding to negotiate with children and parents who are seen as increasingly more assertive is seen as a major change for teachers.

9.3. Restructuring and generations

The idea of different generations who have been imprinted by history according to their location in time is not new (Abrams, 1982, Edmunds and Turner, 2005, Mannheim, 1952). Edmunds and Turner (2005) combine Mannheim (1952) and Bourdieu’s (1990, 1993) work to argue that generations are engaged in a fight over resources. They describe how trauma combined with opportunity and leadership can create 'activist' generations that manage to monopolise resources for themselves. Later ‘passive’ generations may be less successful in maintaining a favourable situation for themselves. They also discuss the growth of new global generations – marked by shared global real time experiences - notably September 11th. Using this theory, the older generation of teachers – trained during the 1960s and 1970s would be seen as having managed to
appropriate economic and cultural capital for themselves setting the scene for decades with their popular culture and generous social provision and working conditions. It can be seen there is some truth in this proposition. Many of this generation of teachers in England have secured themselves generous pensions, early retirements and enjoyed a generous NHS. Meanwhile, the younger generation finds these social goods are being attacked, they have less stable work conditions combined with intensified labour regimes. However, part of their generational attitude involves not being prepared to fight to preserve these social goods.

A major difference between the generations is the knowledge they bring from their teacher training but in practice teachers share a common working context and do not speak of a wide generational divide.

T8: ... a lot of the younger ones who've trained with, well, you know, come in with Curriculum and then with Strategy, we've had more problems now with younger ones, moving them away from strategy and getting them to loosen up. We're in, now, a funny situation of the other way round. Yes, initially, it was the older teachers who were finding it really difficult, and really resistant to a lot of it, and, you know, people can be resistant to change, and they should take on board the good things, and in a way you have to do it a bit to find out what's the good part and what isn't, erm, yes, and now it's swung back a bit and it's some of the ones who are coming out of colleges which are still teaching rigid planning and rigid strategy-based and saying, 'Free up', you know. (T8, experienced teacher)

Troman (1996), writing just before New Labour came to power finds primary teachers divided between resistant old professionals and new professionals who accepted political guidelines. Writing in 2003, Horne (2001), also found a generational divide in the professional identity of teachers, based on how they respond to change. He writes that younger teachers are more interested in learning outcomes, pay and autonomy than they are with ideological or historical arguments about the processes by which these outcomes are achieved. He also finds an increasing division among more experienced teachers between “energy creators” who try to subvert prescribed orthodoxy to meet more demanding and valuable goals and a "disillusioned" group.

The evidence collected here disagrees with these findings and does not find a large generational divide among teachers. There did not seem to be a generational divide over pay or autonomy or attitudes to restructuring. None of the teachers were hugely interested in historically arguments about these issues. To this extent the profession may be said to have been successfully reconstructed as was the government’s aim. This could be because self-selection of teacher participants meant that those from an older disillusioned group were unlikely to get involved. This may be because many of the older teachers have taken early retirement with the associated ‘mentoring loss’ (Goodson, 2003) to their school. However, also important is that New Labour restructuring in primary schools has been resisted less than Conservative reforms across the generations due to the Strategies themselves being seen as helpful for primary teachers. I found among the teachers a large amount of common agreement over general disillusionment with aspects of the government’s educational policies and the rhetoric that accompanies them, combined with professional commitment to the children in their care.

9.4. Restructuring and Periodisation

Teachers’ biographies can be seen as reflecting the general periodisation in England. Teachers describe how primary education in England has come ‘full circle’ over the working lives of the three generations. The progressive teaching of the 1960 and 70s where children were encouraged to learn through play and group work, ended under attacks from the Conservative government
during the 1980s and with the introduction of the National Curriculum, rigid inspection by Ofsted, testing and publishing of results. The Thatcher era is remembered by the teachers as an era of public ‘naming and shaming’ which was described by one teacher as ‘using a hammer to crack a nut’, to tackle the minority of incompetent teachers. The teaching profession was blamed for being left-wing and failing children in their education and thereby the whole country. Under the Conservatives and John Major, the choice agenda came more to the fore with the rise of parent power and a back to basics teaching agenda. The latest epoch under New Labour can be viewed as a period of continuing globalisation where education policy change has been fast and furious. ICT has been a central tenet of the agenda and teachers with laptops delivering the curriculum via their interactive whiteboards has become the norm. The prescriptive National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies although originally regarded as restrictive were also praised by teachers for having raised standards in what was being taught. Since 2003, a creative topic based approach has been encouraged. This is seen by many as the latest economically inspired educational policy motivated by the desire to create the sort of flexible, innovative workforce required in the 21st century to compete in a global market against the rising giants of India and China.
Chapter 4

Greek Primary Teachers’
work and life under restructuring:
Professional experiences, knowledge and
expertise in changing contexts

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1. Introduction: conceptual position and research focus

The aim of this ethnographic study is to analyse the work life experiences and professional cultures of Greek teachers through their own voices. It attempts to understand the implications of political and educational change in professional positions of teachers. More specifically, this paper examines the processes and dynamics of educational restructuring through its narration by social subjects that operate within educational institutions, namely teachers.

1.1 Professional knowledge

This paper is based on the assumption that professional culture embodies professional knowledge and habitual institutional practices produced, enacted and shared in the process of the everyday work life. Professional culture is an osmotic process that is performed throughout work practice. It is argued that teachers ‘know something not understood by others’, and this lies at the ability to transform knowledge and values into pedagogical representations and actions. The knowledge base that forms the distinctive identity of teaching is hard to be defined in concrete axiomatic terms. While, for example, a history or maths teacher is expected to understand and possess a substantial amount of knowledge on history or maths, this knowledge is neither scarce nor sufficient to distinguish him/her from non-teachers. What is distinct about teachers is their capacity to transmit this knowledge to others or in other words: a. to act with knowledge in the sense of reframing and re-contextualisation of the officially codified school knowledge and b. to act on people in the sense of pedagogical action. Teaching is inconceivable outside a context of praxis. The reasoning of teaching is largely related to a form of practical knowledge at work, which is not always explicit.

‘Teachers themselves have difficulty in articulating what they know and how they know it’ (p. 6).

Tacit knowledge in the sense of non-codified experiential knowledge forms a large part of teachers’ professional knowledge base.

‘We know more than we can say. Some knowledge is not easily expressed in words, and so it is difficult to talk about (as in lecture) or write about (as in a text-book) or to communicate from “master” to “apprentice”’.

Thiessen understands teaching as ‘knowledge work’. The affirmation of teachers’ experiential knowledge represents a new strand in the discourse of professional teaching. While there is no consensus with regard to the definition of what constitutes teachers’ professional knowledge, it is widely accepted that this is not shaped exclusively in teacher education programmes. Propositional knowledge, as theoretically grounded set of concepts and principles, emerges in laboratories and university campuses, but it co-exists and interplays with practical knowledge.

‘Though the development of practical knowledge dominates learning to teach in schools, propositional knowledge can come into play both within and outside the school action. While learning from within the action, propositional knowledge is more on the background, often in the crevices of student teachers’ implicit theories. When involved in observing and trying out skills under more managed classroom conditions ... propositional knowledge can interact with practical knowledge in ways that are similar to its functions on campus’ (p. 531).

However, it is unclear to what extent teachers absorb theoretical knowledge in their practical knowledge. Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer on the other hand, avoid the sharp polarity between
Theoretical and practical knowledge, by referring to the totality of teachers’ knowledge that embraces both practical experiences and propositional knowledge. Both conscious and unconscious, intuitive or tacit knowledge are important determinants of teachers’ professional activities.

Following a bottom-up approach, this research attempts to explore the dynamics and processes of the construction of professional knowledge as this is perceived by the informant teachers. Furthermore, it aims to understand the reconfigurations that have taken place in the teaching profession over the last three decades and impact on representations of professional knowledge and systems of expertise. The global discourse on teachers’ ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalisation’ is echoed in Greek education politics, as it happens in other countries as well. However the specific connotations and meaning of these terms are determined by local social constraints that shape the configurations of welfare state restructuring in Greece. Consequently, ‘policy borrowing’ is eclectic and contextually determined.

This research is based on data derived from:

a. Observation protocols regarding the everyday work life of three teachers belonging to three different generations. Each one of the informants was shadowed for three subsequent working days.

b. In depth interviews with the above teachers, conducted in two phases;

The first phase interviews and the observations took place in November 2005, while two of the second phase interviews took place in March 2006 and one in May 2006.

In the following sections pseudonyms are used to protect anonymity of the informants;

Teacher 1: female teacher who is 3 years in service (pseudonym Helen)
Teacher 2: female teacher who is 17 years in service (pseudonym Mary)
Teacher 3: male teacher who is 30 years in service (pseudonym John)

c. a focus group interview comprising of 7 teachers belonging to three different generations took place on October 2006.

While this report draws mainly upon the life stories of the three major informants, in several cases it juxtaposes findings from the focus group interview. This is not an attempt at generalisation but rather an additional input from teachers that do not share the working environment of the same school. The aim of the juxtaposition is to explore the institutional logic that might be emerging within professional teaching.

## 2. National and local Context of the life stories

### 2.1 Description of the work site

The ethnographic part of the research has been conducted at a Primary School located in the western part of the wider metropolitan area of Athens (at the municipality of Peristeri, one of the largest municipalities in the prefecture of Attica). The school lies within the industrial inner city
zone at a predominantly working class area. It is surrounded by a residential area that also hosts small factories.

This school operates as a ‘Day-School’, which means it has an extended time-table (8.00 a.m. to 16.00 p.m.), an institution manifested as meeting the needs of working parents.

The student population numbers 165 students, 36 of which are from an economic immigrant family background. Most of the foreign students come from Albania, while plenty of them maintain the Albanian citizenship in spite of the fact that have been born in Greece and have a right to Greek citizenship, an entitlement usually denied to their parents. There are no official school records regarding the socio-economic background of students.

The school staff consists of 15 teachers (7 men, 8 women). Half the number of school’s teachers is graduates of the two years Pedagogical Academies while the other half is university graduates teachers. All the relatively younger teachers are university graduates, two of them having also further qualifications (MA degrees). The senior teacher of the school is a graduate of a Pedagogical Academy but has additional qualifications, such as a university degree and a qualification from in-service teacher training. He has received special training on Special Needs education and he is the vice-Head of the school. The Head Teacher has no further qualifications.

2.2 Socio-political context

This research has been conducted in a period of a right wing government that adopts an authoritarian populist discourse regarding welfare state institutions.

Public institutions are associated with ineffectiveness and corruption related to the interests of their employees and administration officials. The main agenda of the New Democracy government that came in office in 2004 is ‘katharsis’, which means corruption cleansing. Public institutions such as universities, hospitals, even justice itself, are treated as potential loci of crime and have been condemned to public disgrace. Mass media, often accused themselves for being key stake-holders in the interweaving interests between the state and big private companies that undertake public works, are performing simulation trials at the 9 o’clock news that govern and fuel public opinion’s distrust in the social services and the political system as a whole. Neoliberalism is then presented by the government as the political remedy to public services’ malfunction.

In the official governmental discourse education is criticised as underachieving and ill-performing due to lack of accountability and evaluation. This attitude towards educational institutions, however, has been followed since the 1990s and it is expressed in the respected legislation and financial position of teachers. The teaching profession is represented as the main reason of education underperformance and new modes of education governance have been promoted since the 1990s aiming at monitoring teaching practices. An intense multilevel network of scrutiny institutions regarding teaching assessment has been legislated in 1997 but has never been materialised due to lack of consensus and severe resistance on the part of the teachers’ unions.

Although actual measures implementing public choice policies have not been put forward in the Greek public school system, the political discourse of neoliberal restructuring has been echoed in the political agenda since the 1990s. In a context of extremely low public educational expenditure, the lowest in the EU, principles of new public management, although not officially passed through the parliament, are actually encouraged and presented as modes of rationalisation and modernisation of public education institutions. At the level of school practices, head-teachers are seeking to attract sponsors to fund a multiplicity of school activities (such as computer rooms,
multimedia education material, sport events, arts education, or additional foreign languages teaching). On the other hand the parents tend to play an important part in financing schools’ infrastructure under various forms of extra-curricular activities. In several cases in inner city areas certain schools tend to become ethnically mixed due to the large number of students who come from economic immigrant families, while some other schools in the same areas discourage immigrant students’ enrolment and remain ‘immigrant free’. In such ways diversification, public choice, entrepreneurial culture, elitism, and even racism, are allowed space within a school system that remains apparently public, universally provided and centrally controlled.

3. Brief presentation of the three life-stories

3.1 Helen: 3 years in service

She comes from a middle class family. She finished school at the American College in Ankara, due to her father’s transfer who works in the army. She speaks Greek, Turkish and English. She is single with no children. Her aim was to succeed in a Biological or Medical faculty but she did not get the required grades and she finally entered the Pedagogic Faculty. She graduated in 1996. Afterwards she went abroad. She did postgraduate studies in Belgium on educational research in the public University of Brussels. She graduated in 1997. She has been working as a teacher since 2002.

She reports that this year’s class has quite a few children. She stresses the fact that there is enough preparation and correction of papers out of school. In general, she describes her job as demanding and tough. She says that the working atmosphere bothers her because she feels a lack of collegiality in the school. She thinks that she does not have enough opportunity to participate in the decision making processes at her workplace. She reports that she does not feel autonomous to do things beyond the prescribed curriculum. As for the School Advisors she reports that nobody has visited her class. Helen thinks that School Advisors, in most of the cases, are simply an ‘ear’ which will listen to the problem, or give you a phone number for the parents to seek advice for their child. She stresses that most School Advisors may have excellent academic knowledge, but they do not have practical experience.

Also she notices that she has the feeling that the parents monitor her work.

As for the pupils she reports that she has a feeling that those children who come from a deprived family cultural capital, do not get the appropriate care from the family as well. In general Helen identifies lack of respect regarding the teaching profession.

She stresses the fact that she is relatively new in the school so she has not got used to working with the other colleagues. She seems to appreciate her profession though the salary could be higher. She is satisfied and would not change profession though she thinks that the prestige of schoolteachers has been lost. Parents’ involvement, she notices, contributes to schoolteachers’ degradation. She describes herself as relatively new in the profession consequently she thinks that she is not experienced enough. The main source of professional knowledge, she reports, is the internet.

She notices that the postgraduate studies had a contribution to her professional life.

She emphasises the human dimension of the profession and stresses the fact that it is a big responsibility to deal with children. She reports that there are several difficulties, which have to do
with the fact that teachers work with a human material and specifically children. This in itself is, as
she says, a big responsibility for a teacher to carry, starting with their physical integrity, which,
according to her, is of primary importance.

She claims that she cannot work as she would like to, she reports that she would like to feel more
autonomous to do things, to have the freedom of time, in order to do things without feeling any
pressure and having the stress of whether the time will be enough or not. She notices that she has a
feeling that parents monitor her work.

She seems to have a very general and opaque view of the structural changes which took place over
the last two decades in the profession. She believes that the profession has changed and she thinks
that the change has come as a result of social change. She feels that children do not get the
appropriate care from the family and she stresses the fact that pupils do not respect teachers’ work.

An emergent issue which requires further elaboration and probably empirical research is parents’
involvement in teachers’ daily professional life.

3.2 Mary: 17 years in service

Helen experienced a rather stable childhood with her father being a public servant and her mother a
housewife. Her aim was to succeed in a Medical Faculty but she did not get the grades required.
Concerning her present-day home situation, she is divorced with two children. Her personal
interests and activities are strictly organized around her two kids and she is currently thinking of
buying a new house. As far as the relation between her personal and professional life is concerned
she reports that she tries to compartmentalise the job from her personal life.

Concerning her professional education, she reports that the Pedagogical Academy provided for the
basic “general knowledge”. The private school where she started her carrier as a teacher was the
real on-the- job-training for her. During her studies in the academic equation programme, she
simply obtained a certificate, because she was obliged to do so, while her experience from the
programme was stressful and to her account practically useless.

Her professional career started after her graduation, when she worked in a private school for five
years. By that time she was appointed in the public sector. She reports that she doesn’t have any
great ambitions regarding her professional future.

As far as her working conditions are concerned, she describes her daily work as intense enough and
especially her present year as extremely hard. She reports as factors that affect her everyday
professional practice, the bad quality of text books, the lack of modern educational material, as well
as problems of the technical infrastructure, while the presence of immigrant pupils and the lack of
pupils’ discipline in general creates serious problems in her daily function. Concerning her relation
with the parental community, she tries to keep them at a certain distance.

At the level of the decision-making, she has enough opportunity to organize personally her own
work, as no one can intervene in her job. As she should follow the analytic program, she does not
function completely autonomously. Nevertheless, nobody can prohibit her of making her own
choices. In this context, she tries to do her every day job in a different way.

As far as the school management is concerned, the head-teacher plays an important role in a school,
at the administrative and the financial management level.

Regarding the issue of teachers’ professional status, there is a lack of respect regarding the teaching
professions and it is being controlled and validated by parents. Parents underestimate teachers’ professional abilities and they are obliged to prove on a daily basis their scientific knowledge. Even the state itself, does not anticipate teachers with dignity, by not providing them the appropriate material and technical infrastructure, not even a decent wage. Therefore, she needs to fight for her professional status completely by herself.

Regarding her professional ideals, values and motivation, the issue of the offer to her pupils seems to mainly motivate her. The ideal teacher needs to have patience and love for the profession. The financial motivation is not so significant, while a secondary motivation lies also to the long periods of vacations.

She also has an opaque view regarding structural changes in the profession and she seems unable to identify them. She believes that there is no significant change in the content of teachers’ education despite the establishment of university teachers’ education. Regarding the abolition of the waiting list, she thinks that “the state” just puts teachers in a competitive situation, according to its usual practice.

As emerging themes, she stresses that during last years, family has converted in a more lax institution and this has an impact on teachers’ job. Gender issues emerge through her life history analysis, as she describes that during the program of academic equation the situation was desperate, especially for women teachers, while she describes teaching profession as a perfect choice mainly for women.

3.3 John: 30 years in service

John is 58 years old, he is married and he has a son who studies economics. He comes from a poor rural family background, which makes him a typical case regarding socio-economic background of male teachers of his generation. His career choice to become a teacher was understood as imposed by economic need. Teaching has offered him urbanization and economic stability.

He graduated from the Pedagogical Academy in 1973. The next year he registered at Panteion School of Social and Political Sciences and he got his degree, which gave him an important additional qualification. He started his career as a supplementary teacher in 1975 and later (1978) as a permanent teacher working at small schools in the Cycladic islands, but a few years later he moved to the western part of Athens. In 1979 he got married, while in 1983 he registered in Maraslio School, the in-service teacher training school, where he opted for the Special Education Needs specialization. This option gave him a specialized career within education at a point when special education institutions were established in the country. He reports that the main motivation for this choice was the additional reimbursement that special needs teachers receive.

He has a sense of disappointment by the fact that he has not got a management post within the educational hierarchy and he interprets that as the outcome of clientelism and his reluctance to adapt to its rules. He presents himself as devoted to his work and to the children. He says he is satisfied from his work and that he would not change it for another job although he had this opportunity in the past. He says that the teacher should be accountable firstly to his own consciousness and secondly to the children. Unlike his younger colleagues, he does not perceive the parents as the receiving end of his services and he is not in an endeavour to convince the parents about the importance of his work. He is frustrated though by the low social recognition of teaching, but coming from a low socio-economic background he still sees his social position as improved compared to his origins.
John reports that his teaching methods and professional practices mainly draw upon his own experience and secondly upon the exchange of ideas with his colleagues. He does not see formal teacher training or seminars as offering any substantial source of knowledge to the teachers. Technological change and especially computers have been integrated in the way he works with children. Nevertheless, ICTs as such is not a knowledge source for him but only an educational material added in the traditional paperwork the teachers use. Wider socio-economic change, especially immigration flows, has affected his work, since almost all his students come from economic immigrant families. John is the only one of our informants who has a clear view of the educational reforms and institutional changes that affected the social position of teaching in the last decades. He perceives the structural changes that took place during the 1980s as beneficial to the professional status of teachers, while he sees the period of the 1990s as a period of restriction.

John maintains his relationship to his motherland where he still owns a house and some land with olive trees. He likes travelling but he cannot afford it. His main escape and sense of holiday is to return to his village.

4. Themes of Life History analysis

4.1 Structural changes and professional life

The structural changes that are expressed in teachers’ narrations of their professional lives are explored in this section.

4.1.1 Urbanisation and expansion of middle classes

In the post-war period up to the 1970s there has been further restriction of the agricultural sector and the last phase of urbanisation in Greece. The life history of John represents the fact that teaching has been part of the urbanisation process and the attempt towards relative social mobility on the part of the agricultural social strata.

John: (My parents were ...) Farmers, my father was a secretary in the Community (a.n. it indicates the municipality of a small village), he had some basic literacy; he had finished “sholarhio” (a.n 31: a kind of basic schooling). My mum was a farmer. ... My second thought was to go to the police ... Finally I decided... to sit the exams ... in the Faculty of Law, then my father influenced me somehow and he told me that the studies would last for a lot of years, we were born in a poor family, that we could not afford it, but also later, professionally... these professions belong to the “fireplaces” (a.n. aristocracy, bourgeois families)... he was right in this... that is to say somebody who has his father eh... to have a good work, an office, ...we don’t even have some acquaintances... would it be better to enter the Teachers’ Academy... it was near our village, in Ioannina, it lasts also two years, you will finish... I liked the idea and I followed it. I sat the examinations, and I succeeded in entering the Academy of Ioannina.

John ‘liked the idea’ of becoming a teacher in the sense of Bourdieu’s formulation that ‘working class children perceive reality as being their dreams’. As soon as he graduated from the Pedagogical

31 a.n.: abbreviation for ‘author’s note’. Author’s notes are added to clarify the informant’s meaning with regard to the Greek context.
Academy he moved to Athens. Urbanization for him represented a life of more opportunities and relative prosperity compared to his rural origins.

**John:** Finishing the Academy, I had already joined the army before, ... and I came to settle here in Athens. I did various jobs. ... I came to Athens, I made various jobs up to... the teaching appointment was too difficult then... not so difficult as it is today... you should have to wait for 3-4 years.

When he entered the teaching profession he was initially appointed to a remote village on an island in Cyclades called Serifos. His view of rural Greece at the time is revealed in his account of the social conditions prevailing in this village.

**John:** I was appointed in Serifos, in a village called Virgin Mary of Serifos... and there again I found myself in the islands without... I would have never thought of it, ... my fiancée was, she was working in a microbiological laboratory, her work has opportunities only in a city and a big one indeed... therefore there was a problem, where we would settle... Therefore we went there (in Serifos), he (a.n. the regional school Inspector) prepared us; these villages were excluded, and they did not have any transport. When he went there, he went on foot, from the harbour to the village. When I went there, it was the first time that a rural car circulated for the transport, but it was a big hassle...

**John:** Yes, Serifos... e... The first impressions that I had when I went, there was the wind! ... I was also so distressed, I had changed my environment, it was like hell...

E...where I will stay, I say, there was a small room in the school, too much humidity, from the floor it was coming out water, you can imagine, there was no heating, I had a stove, like the electric ones, it was round, I was trying to break a little bit the cold and the humidity... e... difficult conditions, the children, there were 11 children there. A lot of them were occupied by their parents in rural works; they did not deal with the reading, what they learned in the school... e... about the food, it was also difficult, it was a cafe over there, they told me: “whatever we are preparing you will also eat, but it is not to order different food, whatever we have”.... e... I liked, I was eating, I was eating less... thus one year passed... one year I stayed in Serifos and I made application for a change of the post ...

**John:** one year I stayed in Serifos and I made application for a change of the post, we didn’t believe it then, somebody to move to Athens!, he needed at least 25 years in service in order to enter the region, therefore for us it was just a dream! That year however, it was the year the doors opened, so a lot of young teachers entered Athens and I made the application by chance, I did not believe it then...

While Athens was a ‘dream’, his village is a ‘Paradise lost’!

**Interviewer:** Do you still keep land there (a.n. in his motherland)?

**John:** Yes and I still have contacts and my son, as we went there, he kept the contacts, he has been known, he likes so much to go there... at the first chance he gets he goes to the village... we have made also a lodge there, now that it has the comforts that we have also here, it pulls us to go there at the first occasion. ...

**Interviewer:** Therefore do you travel mostly inside Greece or do you travel also abroad?

**John:** Mainly I go to my village... I try to find free time to go... to go to my village... in order to make also our house there... it attracts us to go there!
4.1.2 Democratisation and welfare state expansion

The life stories of the three different generations of teachers represent the historical trajectory of the country. Obviously, John’s life story is more representative of the recent political history. His career choices were made during the dictatorship. His account of the police as an oppressive apparatus of an authoritarian state is depicted in his view that the police during the dictatorship was mainly recruiting illiterate personnel. This, however, is an ex-post reflection on the issue since the fact that the police was an oppressive apparatus has not disinclined him to join it at the time, an option, of course led by economic need (see section 3.1.1).

John: My second thought was to go to the police, I was influenced again by another friend, then I sat the examinations, but I failed. It was taking more … eh … not the lyceum graduates, then the police was taking the illiterate, it rather needed those more than others. … I jointed the army during the dictatorship in 1972, I finished the Academy in 1973 …

His younger colleagues, Mary and Helen, do not even mention the dictatorship in the narration of their life story. During the days we shadowed their work there was a memorial day of the students’ uprising against the dictatorship in the Athens School of Engineering in 1973. The 17th of November is a day devoted to a school festivity aiming at the historical memory of that event. One day before the celebration, Helen, who is the teacher of the 6th grade and has relatively more mature children than the other teachers of the school, chose a relevant to the event passage from the language textbook and asked her students to respond on what the ‘Polytechnic School’ uprising was. She did not make any comments herself, not even in order to comment on false or error, and she only asked some students to read the textbook loudly in the class.

The transition to democracy had a social impact that is clearly narrated in John’s life story, but much less so to the one of his younger colleagues. The impact of democratisation, the legalisation and freedom of trade unionism and especially the widening of the welfare state institutions are perceived as beneficial to the social position of teaching.

John: (Teachers’ unionism) has contributed in the upgrading of the profession in the past...

Many things have been achieved through the commitment and struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. This was a good period. In 1981 the salary was doubled. The political opposition the [the political Right] was against all these changes.

Helen sees as an important transition affecting the profession the fact that teaching has become more student-centric and she perceives that as a democratisation of the classroom. She understands the school as being ‘more free’ after the changes that took place in the last decades.

Question: over the last two decades changes have taken place in the teaching profession, can you mention the most important changes in your opinion?

Helen: …it’s a bit difficult for me…so…eh…when no classes were held on Saturdays, the passage from multi-accent to demotic Greek, the change of textbooks, the change of textbooks was a turning point …also we passed from student uniforms to wearing whatever one wanted, so the school as an institution in general started being more free …

Interviewer: yes, but I mainly ask about the changes which pertain to the profession.

Helen: good, so in this context new learning theories started to appear, although they existed before that……in Greece we started with a pupil-centered approach vis-à-vis learning not a teacher-
centered one...eh...more democratic procedures in the classroom...and everyone behaved accordingly, ...thus the changes in the profession started by the end of ‘80s beginning of ‘90s those generations until now...eh...

4.1.3 Corporate Clientelism and Political Culture

Corporate clientelism is an enduring feature of Greek political culture which is literally narrated in teachers’ voices and it is a cross-generational experience. John, as the most experienced teacher, expresses bitterness and disappointment regarding his career opportunities which in his view have been limited due to the unfair treatment on the part of the state officials. In his view, promotion to management posts has been depended on political affiliation.

**Interviewer**: Yes, namely, do you think that the procedures of selecting officers are not fair?

**John**: Yes, they are not.

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**John**: There is a case, colleagues who did excellent in the interview, because this was playing the most important role, rather than the formal qualifications: what are the degrees you have etc. However, you were getting a 20 (excellent) in the interview and this was helpful for you. I was saying to the colleagues who managed to take 20, where... one did not even have further education training certificate, he had SELDE, a one year training, how did you manage to get a 20, what kind of interview did they make to you? (He replied...) ‘Nothing, they were asking me about the swimming, where I went on holidays...', namely soon after he came in, a signal was given, whose is this, ok. He is ours, our friend, so they asked him insignificant things, ....get a 20, while another [teacher] like me, was asked specialized things, who will decide...which is the school committee, something, what... are its members...some procedural issues that someone has to have served as school principal in order to know these, who in the local authorities is responsible for school issues, who is representative, there is a representative for education matters what is his name and something like this, namely typical things. It seemed that there was an intention to undermine me, eh...these things are always functioning like this, it is not an issue of this government and the previous one, it is not an issue, who are ours and how they will undermine someone without being visible...to trip somebody up but without being visible.

Clientelism is not only a social practice restricted to the role of state institutions. It is a wider social strategy towards satisfying fragmented interests. Trade unionism plays a vital role in the process of negotiation of these interests between the social space of the profession, the political parties and the government. However, the leading figures of the trade unions are anticipated with public distrust, while the level of political commitment decreases substantially in the course of time compared with previous decades. The difference in political commitment is visible in the comparison between the three generations of teachers.

**Interviewer**: How about the Teachers’ unionism?

**John**: It has contributed to the upgrading of the profession in the past. Lately there is lack of interest and commitment. Every year there is the usual established strike to imply that there is some interest. In fact there is indifference.

Today ... Our representatives on the other hand are seeking for their own personal interests. They are using trade unionism as a ladder for getting into politics to become Members of the Parliament!
Helen, although recognises that she is not very much involved with trade unionism she also feels that the union leaders act on the basis of partial interests rather than for the common good.

Interviewer: … what is the role of Teachers’ unionism?

Helen: yes, e ... you are catching me a bit unread here... because generally speaking I am not involved in syndicalism that much, perhaps not at all. But I think, ... at least this is my impression that ... unfortunately each one cares to fulfil his own expediencies and interests e... my impression is that we are not doing anything for the benefit of the profession as a whole but only in order a certain party to show off ...

Mary’s silence on the procedures or the achievements of student and teacher unionism in the 1980s that has led to the upgrading of teachers’ education and the establishment of university departments (in spite of the persistent questions on the part of the interviewer) is a striking example of a generation that entered the profession after the basic achievements of teacher’s unionism and, perhaps, took everything for granted. The growing a-politic social attitude in Greece is also verified in the European Social Survey (http://www.ekke.gr/ess/ess_results.doc). However, political leadership itself is partly responsible for the dissociation of people from politics.

Interviewer: What is your relationship to trade unionism?

Mary: Nothing. I am a little bit far away from this. I think that we have not achieved a lot of things in this sector. I haven’t had any relations with trade unions. I follow the facts, I participate in the meetings, I know what happens, but I am rather disappointed. We haven’t tried as a professional body to be joined. We don’t support each other. Unity is something missing. We would have achieved more. Both at financial level and we would be valued more among the people, among parents, in front of the state. Unfortunately, they have undervalued us. We have a responsibility for this. We haven’t achieved a lot of things. Trade unionists in a certain way lead us, so it has to do also this (a.n.: to establish unity).

4.1.4 Globalisation and immigration flows

Greece used to be an emigrant country for the most part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Since the 1980s, however, Greece receives large numbers of economic immigrants mainly coming from the Far East, North Africa and East Europe. The largest immigrant ethnic group is the Albanians. According to the 2000 census of population registered immigrants correspond to over 10% of the country’s overall population. Immigration flows have dramatically changed the social conditions prevailing in the country since the immigrants have provided for a cheap and flexible labour force that has contributed to the increase of the country’s GDP in the past ten years. Nevertheless, public distrust and often hostility against the immigrants is gradually developed. The presence of economic immigrants is reflected in the student population and has created a totally new condition within schools.

John is a Special Needs teacher and runs the integration class of the school. The students who anticipate learning difficulties in the ordinary classes attend the integration class as well for some hours during the day to receive extra help. This year the integration class is attended by 12 students, 11 of which are economic immigrants. Ferian is a student of the 6th grade who attends Helen’s class. This is the first year he is not in attendance of the integration class as well.

Interviewer: Has Ferian learned Greek?
John: He has.

Interviewer: I believe that he speaks without problem.

John: He really does...

Interviewer: Does he understand everything he listens?

John: He understands the language...simply he has difficulties...it took him 2 years to learn how to spell but he should have also other problems at home... now... he can easily read and do the easy exercises in Maths. However, he has other dexterities. Ferian can dismantle a bicycle into screws and within a record time he can assemble it back...it is not easy for other children, that is to say first of all he could make a career and become a very good craftsman.

Interviewer: Yes, he says to his teacher..., the poor boy, I am fed up Madam...he is crying

John: And it is natural to be bored with all the things that take place in the classroom they have no meaning for him...they do not touch him...he cannot approach them...and the very fact that he is staying...in the first years it was difficult for him to get used to the class...there were these things that he could not follow in the classroom...he is a bit older than other children, he was quarrelsome, he was teasing other children...one or two times the parents’ association had decided etc. what we will do with him...

Interviewer: ...So tell me what happened with Ferian? Has the association of parents proposed him to be dismissed from the school?

John: Yes, because he teases the children, he makes gestures to them etc he is naughty in the classroom, he pesters other children during the breaks, so we decided to expel him from the school. I said o.k we can expel him, where can we send him...he will go to another school, there the problems will be passed on to the other teachers...and what can we do...I had noticed that he had an aptitude in doing things, but many times we the teachers make mistakes, we express our sympathy to certain children that are talented, that do not need our favour in order to attract notice, they can manage it by themselves, that is to say to send for chalks the such and such pupil that are the best pupils...give this chance to another pupil, to be raised...when we say Ferian come here we want you to fix the door, to fix the screws, to do that...he saw that he gained prestige...he saw the situation differently...then in the games he had a leading role, he was acceptable from the environment because he was leader, he had the acceptance of the group what he did not have was our acceptance, when we say Ferian we want you to do this, go and bring that maps, do this, that he became more mature and then we ask him ‘come on Ferian why did you make trouble?’...He replied, look...the children are making fun at me, they are teasing me...this is the reason why...and from that time he relaxed, he does not cause problems to the teacher and in general.

Helen, however, who is Ferian’s teacher this year, anticipates the presence of immigrant children in her class as a source of ‘difficulties’ in her everyday job, because she cannot devote the needed time and individualised teaching to these particular students. She finds it hard to maintain the balance between meeting the needs of the immigrant students and getting on with the rest of the class.

Helen: ...In the classroom there are some difficulties...namely there are children with learning difficulties who need special treatment, eh...there are some foreigners that perhaps needed more attention...something which is not always so easy, to give them the required attention in the
classroom, because there are also other, quite a few, children who...they have to go further and must not be held back, therefore we are trying to find an average speed...this cannot be done easily...Speaking about personalized-individualised teaching sounds nice, but this is not easy to achieve in the classroom, eh...

Mary also finds educating large numbers of immigrant pupils within a class as being ‘difficult’. But at the same time she finds that immigrant students are more disciplined and respectful to the teacher than the average Greek ones. For her, immigrant children represent the ideal student, because they are committed and respectful.

**Interviewer:** Here, which is the percentage of immigrants that you have?

**Mary:** About 30% roughly. Of course this year I don’t have a great percentage of them in my classroom. I have only 4 pupils in a total of 22 children. But usually we have about 30% immigrants. It has happened to me, 4 years ago, to have a class were half of the pupils were immigrants. All right, it was very difficult. Most of the foreigners are mainly Albanian children. The Albanian children that we have are very intelligent, because they were born here in Greece, they live a lot of years in Greece and I can say that they are much more intelligent than Greek children. I mean, we do not anticipate so many difficulties with the Albanian children; not as many as we do with the Greek children. Why? Because the Albanian children remind me of the Greek children of the 1960’s. They respect you, when you say a word, they get red, they look at you like looking at the God, and it’s exciting! I mean, it’s something that all the children should have towards the teacher.

However, the children that Mary finds ‘intelligent’ are those who in her words ‘were born in Greece and live a lot of years in Greece’, so in other words, not the newcomers. In fact she appreciates the assimilation of the immigrant children into the Greek society. The presence of economic immigrants is a given fact and a reality for the teachers nowadays. For John the immigrants are his main work subject, although originally the integration classes were focussing at learning difficulties with regard to special needs children. This does not seem to be bothering John, or making him feel uncomfortable with regard to ‘what he is doing’ everyday at school. He sees his work as beneficial to these children, since he believes he facilitates their integration to the Greek school system. Today the children who are considered as having special needs tend to be dealt with in specialised schools while the integration classes have been largely confined to immigrant children. On the other hand, the institution which has been initially designed to facilitate the integration of immigrant children in Greek schools, the reception classes, has faded away and is not functioning any longer due to lack of resources. Reception classes have never been effective because their teaching personnel was not specialised and the programme they followed was unsuitable for their purposes.

This has led to a distortion of the institution of the integration classes as such and of the type of difficulties the immigrant children anticipate. Although officially this is not acknowledged, in the everyday educational practice the immigrant children are anticipated as part of the so called children with ‘learning difficulties’, and not as children coming from a different culture, having a mother tongue other than Greek and living in a socio-economically deprived context.

In sharp contrast to previous research (such as the EGSIE project), Europe is a silenced category in teachers’ voices. Although policies and programmes that are funded by the EU are mentioned in the teachers’ narration, such as the specialised centres for the diagnosis of learning difficulties (KDAY), the European Union as such is not acknowledged or mentioned, either positively or negatively.
4.2 Working conditions

4.2.1 Work organisation

Primary teachers’ work tasks in the school are really diverse. The research data show a multiplicity of tasks and roles attributed to teachers. Namely teachers’ work involve: classroom teaching, preparation of their everyday teaching and correcting students’ homework, some administrative work, attending the pupils and guarantee their safety, participation in the school’s teaching council, communication with parents and organisation of various seasonal school festivities.

a) Teaching as primary duty

Teachers usually report that they think of teaching, as their primary duty, at a daily basis, and that their everyday job absorbs them almost fully.

Mary: When I work in the school I forget all the personal matters, the class absorbs me, the children absorb me, and this is good, too, as I forget all my troubles, all the problems.

Mary: I think the every day…that I will go to the school tomorrow (she laughs, as if she was ashamed), and I will have the children, I say...what I will do, how I will cope with them, this stresses me a little bit... I do feel a little bit of pressure.

Generally speaking, they describe their daily work in the school as intense, emphasising on the multiplicity of their work.

Helen: the fact that you are there and have to be there for them for everyone separately and for all of them together, that is to say you have multiple roles at work

(Focus group) Vasilis: One aspect of our job is what exactly pupils learn; another aspect is to make pupils thinking, criticizing and being social. These are different things. Teachers have to play many roles at the same time.

According to our observation, Mary is a teacher who never stops working while she is at school without getting any break. During the school breaks she corrects students’ homework or she is preoccupied with some of her students. She describes her work-day as a ‘run’.

Mary: When I am at school, I feel very anxious; there is a lot of intensity around. I mean, that from the time- you saw it- that we begin, in the morning, I am standing up, I must run around, I have to be patient for everything that I hear. I do not even stop during the break. I mean, during the break I will also correct, and even if I would like to drink a coffee, I would drink it hurriedly. This is, that you are in a run continuously. But...there are days when the pressure is really immense. You run all the time in order to have the time to do everything. There are days when things are easier. A little bit more comfortably. It depends on the program of each day.

Mary: …to make a nice, happy teaching, each day should be different than the others. Each day has to be different than the previous one.

b) Preparation of the everyday teaching and correcting students’ homework

Primary teachers seem to dedicate considerable time at home for the preparation of the everyday
teaching.

Helen: ...there is a lot of homework correction work, besides the daily preparation for the next day's material...usually there is a lot of correction work to do.

Mary: I am not indifferent, I get prepared at home, I try to make an extra work, you know particular, extra for these children that have difficulties, as long as I can. ...the work enters a little bit into the house.

Especially teachers that describe themselves as relatively new in the profession, have far more additional work beyond the school hours.

Helen: first of all I spend a lot of time working beyond the fixed working hours ...I don’t know whether I will stop doing this at some point in the future or if it is simply that I am relatively new in the profession and it will be like this until I will have worked with all grades for at least once...I want to create my own material...to be familiarized with the material of each class, because a number of years has passed since I studied all these at the University.

Mary, although she has 17 years of teaching experience, prepares her teaching even during the intervals, when she stays isolated correcting the exercises in the pupils' copybooks. In addition, she frequently spends the break into to the staffroom to make some photocopies.

Mary: ...when you have a certain exercise the next hour and you do not run to prepare the instruments in advance, during the break, you will not be able to make the experiment at the end. Therefore, you should loose your break in order to have a good result.

c) Children’s guardians

Teachers emphasise the human dimension of the profession stressing the fact that it is a big responsibility to deal with children. Safeguarding their safety, not only while in class but also in the school break and out of school visits and excursions is considered of primary importance and a source of anxiety for the teachers.

Helen: there are several difficulties, the difficulties basically are that you have to do with a human material and specifically children, this in itself ...is a big responsibility for a teacher to carry ...starting with their physical integrity, which is of primary importance, to finish the school year without anything bad happening to the children

(Focus group) Dionyssis The first thing that I care about is to have them (the pupils) safe and sound. I don’t want them to pluck out their eyes...

d) Administrative work in the school

According to the interview data as well as the observation protocols, primary teachers who teach in class do not have any substantial administrative work. Their administrative duties in terms of bureaucratic work are rather marginal. The head-teacher performs most of the administrative work at school and his duties are predominantly administrative.

e) Participation in the teachers’ council

The teachers’ council in the Greek school context has rather low influence in the school management. In the week we shadowed the three informant teachers we observed that during the intervals, the Head calls the teachers to make a number of announcements. There is always the
possibility for the teachers to make similar announcements, but most commonly this is the Head’s initiative. For example, two days before a school festivity, the Head speaks about the celebration that would take place, as well as about the gym instructor who is absent, and adds that he has done an application about the cutting off of a tree. The significant is that there is no single reaction by the teachers about any of these matters. All the matters which are not of prime importance are been dealt with in the staffroom, during the breaks, or before the start of each teaching day. As for example, one of the observation days in the staffroom there is a short of a conversation about the painting of the classrooms, an issue that has been met with some discontent on the part of the teachers with regard to the inconvenience caused in the school schedule.

In general, the more usual situation in the staffroom seems to be unplanned conversations at break time, in which the Head makes some announcements or some teachers share views or information.

f) Communication with parents

One of teachers’ official duties is the communication with parents. Besides the official part of this responsibility, communication with parents constitutes an important and influential factor in teachers’ work, as it makes part of their main job. They namely perceive it as a feature of their job which is substantially interconnected with their teaching and pupils’ learning.

Helen: we have regular meetings with the parents ...by regular I mean once a month which is the case for the entire school...parents’ meeting but beyond that, in the classroom, in my class there are children whose parents participate in the parents’ association, these are four. The majority of parents’ association are parents who have children in my class...as a result they are very often at school, we are in contact with these people...in the meetings they are usually approximately more than 50% of the class...not everyone participates and some parents who I would definitely like to meet they usually don’t come, that is to say the parents with whom I would particularly like to discuss a few things usually are those who fail to come.

Nevertheless, especially for John, who is responsible for the integration class, things seem to be different as far his communication with parents is concerned. When we asked him whether he received parents the previous day that there was a parents’ meeting day, he replied:

John: No, no parent came to see me! Don’t you know? The parents whom children have problems do not come to see the teacher. The ones who come to the school are those whose children are doing well, and they come in order to be rewarded!... this is the negative attitude...very rarely do parents come to see us either because they see that their child has a problem, so they think that he will not manage to do many things, they have a negative approach, a few parents are conscientious and are cooperative with us.

g) Organisation of various school visits and festivities

The organisation of educational visits constitutes an extra activity and concern for teachers, mainly because of the responsibility regarding the safety of the pupils.

Helen: namely in this school the educational visits are held in groups of two or three classes, that is to say that the sixth grade goes with the fifth ... That happens for an additional reason; there is only one class in the sixth grade and I could not possibly escort the children at an excursion on my own. The security deriving from the presence of an additional colleague is necessary.

When they are obliged to organize several school festivities, they dedicate time even at home.
Mary: When I have to prepare a celebration... I should think of it, I should dedicate time... I have to deal with the school for one hour, or so.

Additionally, the preparation of festivities requires a certain amount of time even during the breaks. It is evident when Helen is spending her break-time in the theatre helping her colleagues to organise the anniversary of Polytechnic, by sticking posters on the walls. In general, the responsibility for the preparation of seasonal school festivities is undertaken by one or two teachers at a time. As a consequence, this part of the teachers’ work does not constitute a permanent work load.

4.2.2 Professional Autonomy and Control of School Time

Professional autonomy presupposes control over the knowledge base of the profession and capacity to decide on what to do and how to do it.

The school curriculum as the one applied in Greece, which is centrally controlled and provides for a detailed content accompanied by compulsory single textbooks and teachers’ manuals is the main mechanism for monitoring teaching practices. As a result, the school curriculum practically undermines and challenges professional autonomy. In the Greek schools several teaching subjects have been added in the last three decades, such as Environmental Education, Foreign Languages (English in Primary school and a second foreign language in the secondary school), Ancient Greek literature translated into Modern Greek, Informatics etc. On the other hand none of the traditional school subjects has been removed from the curriculum or even diminished in terms of teaching hours per week. This means that the school curriculum becomes heavier and more intense. The allocation of school time and the imposed task to finish the prescribed material for every school subject and “finish the textbook” is a constant source of stress for the teachers.

Mary sees her everyday work life as ‘a continuous run’ with no break.

Mary: But here the job... when I am at school, I feel very anxious; there is a lot of intensity, running about. I mean, that from the time- you saw it!- that we get started, in the morning, I am standing up, I must run around, I have to be patient for everything that I listen. I do not even stop during the break. I mean, during the break I will also be correcting their homework, and even if I would like to drink a coffee, I would drink it hurriedly. That is, that you are in a continuous run!

Helen perceives the school curriculum and the parents as the main agents that govern teachers’ work and set the limits to their professional autonomy. The curriculum controls the content of teachers’ work and monitors the allocation of school time. On the other hand the parents judge the teachers on the grounds of their apparent effectiveness in implementing the prescribed curriculum. This is a concern mainly expressed by the younger teachers.

Interviewer: I want to ask you something else, do you feel that you are quite autonomous to work as you would like or is there something that restricts you, a specific factor and what exactly?

Helen: Yes, the thing that I feel that restricts me is mainly eh...the pressure on behalf of the parents, the word pressure in quotes, because they judge, that is to say, usually they judge teachers whether they have already finished the textbooks, which unit has the teacher already taught in comparison with the teacher of the child’s at another school, without actually looking at the essence of the situation or how many photocopies or homework one teacher or the other teacher gives loosing the essence of the situation, the way [the subject] can be worked on, how can a class reach at this point or the material [the kind of pupils] you have in the classroom, that is to say that each parent sees the one out of twenty four of my class where their child is and they also suffer from the “owl syn-
Thus, on one hand we have parents who judge you whether you are a good teacher or not on the basis of criteria such as, whether you have finished the textbook, which unit you have already taught, how many photocopies you give etc.

On the other hand, you have a curriculum which is very tight, that is...there are directions from the Ministry, we have specific textbooks, specific material which must be taught and we are in a constant run, we are continually in pursuit of time in order to complete the specified material.

Even if we want to say or to do some things more we always have in mind whether time is enough for finishing the textbooks and to catch up with what the Ministry specifies, sort of saying, that I must already have done. Thus there are all these, the 'musts'.

Eh...there is an effort through the flexible zone, which if it finally functions properly and if we eventually are informed it might turn out to be time that can be utilized for something more, but again within specific limits that is to say, in the sixth grade it (the flexible zone) is two hours per week, you want to add something to History, you want to add something to Physics, you want to add something to Maths and something more to Language something...it is two didactic hours per week. Except another topic has started and you have to work on it.

Eh...(coughing) theoretically, according to the curriculum we have a specific amount of didactic time at our disposal which has...I think it is not enough for having a feeling of being autonomous and doing things beyond what is determined by the Ministry.

4.2.3 Teacher-student relations: disciplining the child

All the teachers say that their primary concern is the benefit of the children in terms of safety, well being and acquiring knowledge. Moreover, all the informants, but especially the younger ones are complaining regarding children's lack of respect towards the teacher and lack of discipline. Teachers attribute disobedience to the lack of culture on the part of the family.

Helen: ...lack of culture from the family, I feel that children do not get the appropriate care from the family. ...Eh...they do not learn to obey to the rules, to know and accept that, yes, they have rights but they also have duties when they operate in this context. (coughing) ...That is to say, many times you can criticize somebody's behaviour and the children reply with a retort...with a reaction which we did not have when we were pupils ourselves. We also were children and we were not quiet but in no case did we react with retort, this...“you can do what you want and also you can phone my mother, she will defend me”. Yes, at the slightest thing...“I will tell this to my mother ...eh, ok...I will tell it to my mother”, what? This means that the pupil threatens me? ...

some children seem to come from good families or from an environment which is characterized by communication and some other, you very easily understand that it is children that they will do something very quickly and then either they will be at the mercy of...or they will be continually outdoors playing, or they will be in front of a T.V and they will watch, without any control, everything and anyway they do not communicate with their family and they have not learned how to communicate in general.

4.2.4 Parentocracy without ‘parental choice’?

Although in Greece there has been no straight-forward neoliberal policy promoting parental choice at schools in the younger teachers’ voices there is a clear concern regarding the parents’ judgement
of the teacher’s work. While in the past teachers would be cautious about the scrutiny on behalf of
the inspectorate and the administrative hierarchy, today their main concern is the scrutiny of the
parents. Our informants perceive parental involvement in education as interfering into teaching
professional space.

**Helen:** parents have learnt to get involved in our work eh…I think that it is important to have a
good cooperation with the parents to the extent that the parents know how to dissociate their
roles...as I am their schoolteacher I am not their mother as their mother cannot be also their
schoolteacher...in the specific class there are some pupils whose parents participate in the parents’
association...it might be the case that the parents think that they have some power

**Interviewer:** yes, but there were parents’ associations before...

**Helen:** yes, there were parents’ associations before but now, because the schools’ budgets are poor
eh...parents’ associations can finance some...

**Interviewer:** activities...?

**Helen:** not only activities, for example the parents’ association paid for the acquisition of com-
puters and the creation of a computers’ room, it was not the state who paid but the association...

**Interviewer:** thus, the parents’ association plays the role of the sponsor.

**Helen:** in a way...consequently this gives to them some power...probably in their mind.

The change in power relations within schools has created cleavages between teachers and parents
which have not been the result of any clear privatisation policy. Consumerist ideologies, fuelled by
a public discourse on the malfunction of public services have impacted on the social status of the
教学 profession and have facilitated the increasing influence of parental power. Teachers
perceive this change as been the outcome of a shift in social values.

**Helen:** I believe that in general the social prestige of the teachers has been lost ...in the past, if my
parents were in disagreement to the teacher’s practices e...this would not allow us to annul the
teacher; to disagree and come to open conflict with him, against him... (our parents) would never
entitle the child to criticise the teacher.

Europeanisation and globalisation processes develop a new context for socialisation strategies
enacted by middle and upper classes. The change in modes of socialisation is attributed by the
teachers to the modernisation of society and the fading of traditional values which has led to the
deviation of teaching and the lack of respect towards the teachers. Teachers perceive the family
as not collaborating to the socialising role of school.

**Mary:**...The family as an institution is more lax, the way parents anticipate their children.

**Interviewer:** Where do you see all these problems?

**Mary:** Where I can see all these? E... I can see them in their behaviour. I mean, the child that will
not sit on the chair, the child that is undisciplined. He has not learned to listen to commands, when
you say “get your exercise-book on the desk”, that he has to get it off. You should tell it five times.

Or, the child that in his house, his mum says “drink your milk” and he does not do it immediately.
The mum who does not insist, she must insist in certain things, in the matters of behaviour. All these
come out in the classroom. E... Generally speaking, to follow the commands, to apply immediately
whatever you ask him. Yes. This is the biggest difficulty. The discipline, too. Discipline does not exist. E...To make him a remark and the pupil to be ashamed... I believe that the problem begins at home. I mean, that the child will know that he will do something, his mum won’t tell him off and he will continue doing it.

(Focus Group) Interviewer: do you mean that the family values have changed with regard to children upbringing?

Dionyssis: The child is of supreme value for the family. This has transformed the child itself ... Sometimes I say, jokingly, to young couples ‘what kind of students do you prepare?’. These people are prepared to move the sea instead of persuading their child not to get too near to the sea and fall into it!’

However this is a social change related to urbanisation, the expansion of middle classes and the emergence of the knowledge society. The teachers’ discourse with regard to their relationship with parents mainly addresses two conceptual positions: firstly, that teacher-parent transaction is inscribed into socio-economic relationships and, secondly, that it is mediated by knowledge. It seems that these two parameters do not contribute to the development of a collaborative educational community, but rather to a highly competitive educational space. According to younger teachers, middle classes tend to challenge the power of the teacher because: a. they are of a relatively higher socio-economic position than the teacher and b. they do not consider teachers as professionals.

(Focus group) Katerina: you asked us whether the parents respect us. I believe that it is a matter of social class. That is, middleclass parents with a higher education degree do not consider me as been adequate. I believe that. I, for instance, am lucky enough to work at an inner-city neighbourhood. I know that I am more respected there...

In agreement with other international research findings an emerging outcome of this study is that parental educational strategies are genuinely related to the family’s social resources. Middle class parents in particular treat education as a positional good and tend to use education as a closure strategy at an attempt to ensure successful careers for their children and to achieve social mobility. Heterogeneity and socio-cultural diversity within schools are perceived by middle classes as potentially endangering the quality of education. In the school this research was conducted the Parents’ Association is exercising influence in the functioning of the school not only by financing basic educational infrastructure and extra curricular activities, but also by expressing specific demands regarding the expulsion of certain immigrant students who are perceived as threatening the average academic level of the school. Moreover, in several cases individual parents devaluate the teacher’s work on the basis that in their view it is lacking any substantial and distinct knowledge capital and expertise.

Mary: Now about our place here at the school in ..., in relation with the children and with the parents, I believe that some particular parents, those who have a certain level, respect us and they distinguish us, they give, that is to say, the place that we should have. Parents that- anyway- have perhaps a lower intellectual or socio-cultural level – the lies are always bad – devaluate us. And this is also evident through the children. Sometimes, o.k., the level of parents could be high, I mean, a high intellectual level, but even then they could underestimate the work of the schoolteacher. Perhaps, because they consider that he does not do anything special. Perhaps because they know also the theme, the subject. So, they say “now what she will do, she will teach let’s say, the “a” or the “la”, or she will say “1+1 equals two”, easy thing! They believe that this is something very simple and many times they underestimate it, and unfortunately many times they pass it also to their child. And this comes out afterwards in the classroom. We face it and it wears us out. Because if a family
underestimates the school teacher in a child’s eyes, then the child does not follow him, he does not respect him, he does not obey him. This problem regarding the parents exists, I mean, that we face it too often nowadays. ... 

While younger teachers express frustration due to the social devaluation and disrespect regarding their work, John, a senior teacher, thinks that the teacher’s authority derives from knowledge and this is the reason the most knowledgeable parents respect the teacher’s work.

**John:** Parents of a certain ‘level’ respect the teacher. The teacher has the knowledge and the authority. The most educated parents, medical doctors, lawyers, such people, never intervene in teacher’s work. But the teacher needs to do his work properly. Some teachers don’t

Mary, by contrast, although she is an experienced teacher, thinks that the teacher needs to deploy specific communicative strategies in order to gain parental confidence. She perceives the parents as the final judges and the only evaluators of her work. Parental opinion seems to be a source of anxiety and stress that governs her professional practice, although there is no institutional provision prescribing any specific role to the parents regarding teachers’ assessment. Parents for her represent the ‘panopticum’, when she says ‘by everything we do we “write” in front of the parents’.

**Mary:** You should keep the parents at a certain distance, in order to respect you. Otherwise, they do not respect you. They consider that you are similarly, like them, or even inferior to them. I mean, that in order to achieve it, you should cultivate this relation. If you don’t try, you will lose the game. In what sense? That the parent does not pay any attention to what you say, he does not collaborate with you regarding the child, and he does not help many times the child, why? Because, “you have not filled the eye” (a.n. he does not think high of you, he does not appreciate or believe in your teaching methods and capacities) as we say, as a person. We should transmit (prove) our scientific character to the parent. That we are scientists, that we have knowledge. And this, we should gain it also through our work, that is to say through the way that we work, through the way that we speak, from our attitude more generally, from the behaviour that we adopt. Because, nowadays the picture counts more and more, I mean, the appearance that each person has. By everything we do, we “write” in front of the parents: through our appearance, in the way that we speak, by the work that we do, the photocopies that we distribute, from the appearance that the children’s exercise books have. I believe too much in that and I have realised it in practice. And you can see later that the parent afterwards comes and gets at the right place. Even a difficult parent does not have anything to accuse you. He says bravo, you have done a good job.

During the three days that we shadowed the teachers’ work we observed in several cases parents entering the classroom. For example one day two mothers entered Mary’s classroom, while one of them asked the teacher if she had something to tell her about her son. The teacher kept a certain distance from the mother, replying that the day of their collaboration would be the following day and ended the conversation by saying: “Now I have to do my lesson. We can’t speak now.” However, in the case of a parent who was a member of the Parents’ Association Council the entrance in the classrooms was easier, such as the case of a mother who wanted to collect money for the calendars and, who in addition, spoke to the teacher in a rather familiar way.

The younger teachers, Mary and Helen see their everyday work as a constant struggle to convince the parents for their scientific competence. Especially in the case of Mary, managing and handling the parents involves devices and communicative skills such as keeping the parents at a distance. She says that she learned how to handle this in the private school where the Director acted as her mentor.
regarding these issues. In this sense her perception of the social position of the parent is that of a client-consumer who has a right to intervene in education as long as he pays for it. The increasing influence of neoliberal ideology has contributed to the development of a wider climate that accepts consumerism as a mode of educational accountability and has developed the image of parents as the receiving end of educational services.

Mary: ... in this private school ... She (the director) gave us also a lot of solutions concerning the way of treating the parents, the way of speaking to them. And it helped me a lot afterwards in my job. It is enough to say that I did not need, I did not even face a single problem with any parent, with difficult parents. You know why? Because, I had a lot of difficult parents there. You can understand that, when a person pays, he has great requirements. E... there were a lot of problems even with small things. Given that I could face all these, when I came later in the public school, all these appeared to me as an easy game, I mean nothing. Well, when I came to the public school, I felt like I was coming into a playground.

While the younger teachers perceive the parents as the receiving end of their services and the final judge of their work, John, the senior teacher has no such conception.

Interviewer: To whom do you think that the teacher should be accountable?

John: The teacher should be in good terms with his own consciousness; then with his students, the parents and his colleagues.

Interviewer: How do you feel with regard to the parents?

John: The respect from the parents can be imposed by the teacher’s personality. It is imposed in the school.

In the beginning, when the Special Education classes were introduced, the Special Education teachers were perceived as the spare teacher of the school who could fill in the gaps when some other teacher was absent. There have been colleagues who have contributed in this perception. Those who worked in the right way managed to establish their role at school.

Knowledge and expertise is considered as an important prerequisite for the teachers to gain parents’ confidence.

Mary: ...you can gain parents, when you seem to be trained, that you know where to be based on. It isn’t good to see you hesitating, balancing, not to know what to do. They set you a problem and you have to give them a solution. If you cannot give a solution, you will lose the parent. I mean that it is the point where you have to show that you know about Psychology, that you know about Pedagogy. We anticipate lots of different situations. We have to give solutions, let’s say, we have to find something to say...we have to show what we really are, what is our real value”.

On the other hand, all three teachers report that their job is being significantly facilitated by those parents who are willing to be collaborative and support their children in doing their homework. This is an outcome of exceptional relevance to the social construction of the profession and its professional knowledge, since the teachers literally admit that parental involvement in teaching is essential for children’s progress. To the extent that this is the case, it implies that teachers themselves consider teaching as an activity that can be potentially performed by non-teachers as well.

Mary: It helps me a lot, when I have a good collaboration with the parents. I mean, I want to have
the possibility to tell them certain things for the child and then, them to apply these things at home. Because all the times that this has happened, the child did very well... parents, either do not have enough time because of their work, or in several cases, because it is such a difficult thing to help a child educationally, especially at this age, they are getting bored. So, they say ‘...the schoolteacher will do it, this is her work’...It doesn’t work like that!...I mean, the child – especially at the first grades- and more specifically in the first school year, needs his mum. The mother should sit at the house, too, or the dad anyway; to help him with homework. The things that I do in the classroom are not enough... the mum should also sit in the house. To touch him the hand, to tell him that he should write like this that letter...what I do here at the school, the mum has to continue it a little bit at home, in order the knowledge to be consolidated.

Helen: We try, many times, to teach also the parents...the collaboration between teachers and parents is very important and unfortunately it is not always successful...

(Focus group) Valia: In the first grade, you take the parent before the start of the school year, to tell him that the lines which you do not have the time to do with each child – when you have 25 pupils – he has to do them by himself at home.

Teachers take it for granted that a substantial part of the learning process will take place at home with the help of the parents.

(Focus group) Interviewer: what is the reason that the teacher asks for homework? That he/she does not have enough time to cover the material in the class?

Valia: How could we do it, with 25 children in class? If I had an extra teacher or a compensational teaching class, I would send the child there...

In certain cases teachers tend to blame the parents for not dealing effectively with what they perceive as children with ‘learning difficulties’. During the observation Mary says to a girl that doesn’t work: “I won’t get mad about you, rather your mum is going to get mad!” Similarly, in a case of a pupil who cannot read a passage from the textbook, Mary tells him: “Why doesn’t your mum help you? We can’t do it like that! Mums have to help them, too!” Then she turns to the researcher saying: “At the parents’ day, the parents that usually come are those of the best pupils. On the contrary, the parents of the bad pupils do not come”. The same view is expressed by John. In the same line of thought, observation data has revealed that Roma pupils anticipate certain problems as far as the parent-teacher cooperation is concerned, as for example, when a small Roma boy comes in accompanied by his elder brother, Mary says to the elder boy: “Tell your mum that she should definitely come tomorrow!”

4.2.5 Educational monitoring and collegiality

Educational administrative hierarchy and control

In a large number of different educational contexts worldwide education restructuring involves changing modes of education governance which are particularly expressed in new ways and agents of leading, monitoring and evaluating teachers’ professional activity. In the Greek context although the 1997 reform law has legislated an intense system of teachers’ assessment, this regulation has never been implemented due to a strong resistance on the part of the teachers unions. In this study none of the informants seem to perceive the educational administrative hierarchy, starting from the school Principal to the local and regional education officers and the School Advisors, as putting any particular pressure on their work. Regarding the role of the head teacher in particular, our
informants emphatically report that this is confined to administrative duties and that the school Principal does not really exercise any educational or counseling duties.

Mary: The Head plays a very important role in a school, because he is the Head, as far as the administrative duties are concerned, because this is his only duty. He has no other duties, educational, or pedagogic…if he knows how to manage, the school works perfectly. If he does not know anything of it, the school becomes a mess, a real mess!…the director should point out certain things about the time that we will come at the school that we should be always on time. Or, when the bell rings, the teacher in charge has to go down at the courtyard. Or when the bell rings and the children have to go inside the classrooms, that we must have the responsibility to enter immediately…."

Focus group (Dennis): The Head always plays an important role. He gives the tone in each school, (he shows) how to work all together.

According to the observation findings, in this particular school, the head teacher adopts a rather neutral political attitude, which, for example, becomes obvious when he announces to the pupils the celebration of the Polytechnic School, bringing the printed invitations. He said: “Tomorrow you have to come to the school, without your bags. You have to wear your bright new clothes. You will attend a nice celebration, organized by the pupils of the fifth grade.” He made no further reference to the content and meaning of this memorial day. This could be partly explained by the fact that the political meaning of this memorial has been mainly connected in public consciousness with left-wing political positions and the Head’s neutrality might wish to imply political impartiality. However, the school festivity itself cannot avoid getting into the content of the historical events, even if it attempts a rather superficial narration of them. In this respect the Head’s attitude may represent an understanding of his role as confined to a sort of supposed-to-be-neutral managerialism.

Teachers perceive the role of the Head as that of a conflict resolution manager.

Mary: when a conflict is being created, he should find a way to accomplish it, to simmer down the whole situation. He must intervene a little bit…not in the sense that he should take the part of the one or the other, but somehow to smooth over the situation, to ease it off.

Focus group (Denis): If the parent finds ‘fertile ground’, he can go far … If the Head teacher doesn’t make something to ‘put out the fire’, if the colleagues take the part of the parent, then the issue goes to the local Administrative Director.

The role of the Head as a manager of conflicts is strictly connected with his role of the one who offers or reduces the tone for collegiality among the members of the teaching staff. In this particular school Helen notices that there is not enough collaboration and collegiality established among the teachers and she implies that this is related to the mode of school management by the Head.

Helen: Eh…I have worked in a number of schools, I have found out that there are various types of Principals (Head teachers), as there are various kinds of people and this is where the issue arises…eh…I have been impressed by the looseness of some Principals, but I have met people who know how to maintain a nice atmosphere, to maintain and create a nice atmosphere among the colleagues, eh…What I have noticed here, not from the directorship, what I have mainly noticed among the colleagues is that while each one of them is very good in their class, they are doing things, they show interest and…there is no particular…what I have found out at the moment, I may be wrong …, it may be too early to make a judgment, there is not any particular cooperation among the classes, that is to say among the colleagues of the school, there is not a bonding as a group,
they are strong individuals, but they do not constitute a very strong team and...because I as a person I like cooperation this somehow bothers me...but ok we have already said that you choose some people with whom you can cooperate with and go on...eh...and ...as far as this directorship is concerned I have not seen anything...

Both interview and observation data stress that one of the duties of the head is the financial management of the school unit. In our discussion with the Head he made clear to us that one of his main concerns is to ensure additional resources for his school since he finds the public funding as insufficient to maintain his school at a good level. Sometimes he needs to deploy certain devices in order to attract donations from companies or parents, or in order to postpone payments, such as the electricity or the petrol bill for the central heating. During the observation days the Head was mainly preoccupied with the maintenance of the school building and the internal painting.

Mary: We had discussed many times with the Head, but as they are too expensive (the overhead projectors); he said that it is difficult to buy them.

The role of the Head teacher in the private sector, however, seems to be quite different and directly involved with the content and monitoring of teaching.

Mary: The Head teacher was very experienced, she was very guiding......we had a microphone in the classroom and the Head was hearing what was happening in each classroom. She had a system of open hearing...Additionally, as the building was old when I worked there, when this system was on and off you could listen to it. Therefore, when the system was on and the children were hearing it, they said, "Lady, she is listening to us". So, the children were standing quiet, because they understood that afterwards the Head would tell me off.

Sometimes teachers use the name of the Head in order to achieve a grade of discipline.

Mary: I will send you to the Head’s office! Close your mouth!

Namely the invocation of the Head’s name makes pupils stop speaking, a finding that shows that even in our days the Head still keeps playing the role of the discipline manager in the whole school unit, as in the traditional primary school of 60’s.

The School Principals constitute the lowest level of the educational administrative hierarchy. At the local level there are Educational Administrators assuming administrative responsibilities in a specific region. Additionally to that there are the School Advisors who are responsible for education guidance and their role focuses on pedagogical, educational and teaching issues. In the past the School Inspectors were assuming both administrative and guidance duties. The inspectorate was the highest rank of the educational hierarchy in Greece and it used to be an authoritative institution. In 1982, the Reform Act 1304 abolished the school inspectors and introduced a distinction between administrative management of educational institutions and professional counselling of teachers. Teachers, however, express scepticism regarding the pedagogical role of the School Advisors.

John:...Nothing, no material, some directions that are given just if any School Advisor happens to be sensible through the seminars that we make calling whoever is in the field, whoever has dealt with these subjects, whatever we take from there.

The interview data points out that usually teachers do not take any substantial help by their School Advisors, as they visit school units rarely.

(Focus group) Denis: School Advisors are like the police patrol cars. They usually come when the
incidence is over!(laughing).

It has been argued that the political diffidence to develop a really autonomous educational authority aiming at supporting rather than assessing teachers’ educational performance has led to the fading of the reform that introduced the School Advisors. Our informants relate the role of the School Advisor as deriving from his/her individual personality rather than from the institution itself.

**Helen:** the School Advisors, like the Principals and the local Directors of education vary, it depends on the person, on their approach.

**Mary:** It depends on the person every time, because during the years that I work as a schoolteacher, I have experienced two or three School Advisors. I will say that if he is an open person, talkative, communicative, a person that does not want to impose his opinion, you have a very good collaboration. He supports you, he helps you, and he gives you ideas...I like the Advisor - and the one that we have now here, I like him. Because he is exceptionally collaborative, he helps us, he gives us solutions of the problems, and you feel that you can even make him a phone in his house, when you see that you have a very serious problem and that he will help you. He is very helpful, very good. And even when he enters the classroom, to watch you, that is to say, I do not feel any stress. If you have a problem, you can call me. 'I will come to your classroom. I'll come to help you'. Certainly, I must say that this happens with younger persons.

Despite the institutionalisation of the School Advisor as a step towards the democratisation of the function of primary education, interviews data point out that sometimes the School Advisor becomes an inspector in disguise.

**Mary:** There are some of them that have remained back to the institution of the School Inspector. Some School Advisors behave like Inspectors, as I can remember them from my own school life. But, there are other persons that are very good...unfortunately there are also persons - fortunately they are older and they will get pension gradually (she laughs) – persons that have remained back at the institution of the school inspector. I will enter in the classroom, I will see what you will do, I will also mark you, as we say, and then God help you! I will write down all your bad things! I mean, they do not see anything good... While with other Advisors in the past, I felt stress. Why? Because of their attitude. You were seeing the way they entered in...He did not approach you, he was distant...you felt like a condemned!...They were sitting, they were observing a teaching unit and then they were saying all the wrong things. I can remember just negative things. I had always the impression that I did everything wrong. They made me feel awfully. With what courage you can go ahead after all these?...Older persons have still remained back to the old times. Maybe it has to do with this, too... It has to do with the person...Younger people are standing closer to us.

Lack of transparency and problematic procedures in selecting of the higher administrative personnel are in several cases related to clientelism and enduring features of the Greek political culture (see above section 4.1.3).

**Building collegiality**

Communication among colleagues is a vital aspect of teachers’ work. Interview and observation data point out that the issue is like a double-faced coin. Namely, it has to be stressed that teachers have different opinions as far as the relation with their colleagues is concerned. They mainly report that the relationship depends on the kind of personality of each colleague.
Focus group (Kostas): All of us have experienced the running of parallel classes of the same grade in the same school. We either have met the good colleague, with whom we go together forward; either the colleague who for certain reasons shuts his door.

The importance of collegiality spirit and teamwork is underlined by all the respondents although in several cases they report a lack of collaboration.

Helen: there is not any particular cooperation among the classes...among the colleagues of the school, there is not a bonding as a group, they are strong individuals, but they do not constitute a very strong team and...because I as a person I like cooperation this somehow bothers me.

Mary: Many times a number of intensities are being created between the colleagues. Unfortunately we have the opinion that the one tries to do something more than the other, as if we would take a medal, or we would gain some reward...A lot of times, certain colleagues do not collaborate with each other, when they have the same class...Each one tries to make whatever he can from his own side, to show himself as a good teacher, and he doesn’t collaborate with the other colleague, in order to make a name just for himself. To be distinguished by the parents. And in front of the director... E... As if he would take some reward...it’s also out of the norms of the solidarity between colleagues. This destroys the climate afterwards. You do not spend your day nicely. With your colleague, you see each other every day, you cannot discuss with him. In that way, you become rather more buttoned-up, you do not feel comfortably.

Building good collegial relationships is crucial for the informants.

Focus group (Dennis): If there is a nice climate of confidence and we open ourselves to each other. It is a very important feedback for both of us. We say something nice, we take something nice and we go forward together. We speak as real colleagues.

Focus group (Kate): I don’t believe that we enter everyone’s class. We neither take ideas, nor take advices by everyone. We have to feel the colleague close to us, not just in the school context. I mean his whole perception to be close to us. As a whole.

Similarly, teachers report that they have received significant help by their colleagues who were more experienced, or happened to be teachers of their classes the previous year.

Focus group (Angela): The first time that I took the first class, and I was extremely stressed, completely inexperienced, a teacher more experienced than me took me and told me: ‘Don’t worry. They will learn’...That time it was a magic glance. It gave me courage, indeed.

Helen: I think that the contribution of the colleague of the fifth grade was very important for me to start working with the class, namely, he showed to me some things from the work he had done the previous year, he told me some things about the way the class was working the previous year and I think this is very important for the children to have a continuity in the future; thus, the teacher is not arbitrary, of course everybody has its own way, so you try somehow to interweave and combine, eh...certainly, if there was a colleague with whom I would disagree on the approach towards work, I would not follow his way.

Mary: When I had to teach a first grade for the first time, a colleague told me an idea about teaching the new letters...The first year that I had to teach a first class, I tried to follow the guidelines of the teacher book, but I was feeling that it hadn’t a certain result...A colleague that had a lot of years of experience helped me a lot. As she was working about 6 or 7 years at the first grade, she had learned it from her experience, she had found some tricks.
Collegial relationships however are not always authentic. In several cases they are part of an everyday typical work routine. In the case of Mary’s classroom, when the teacher of aesthetics enters, she waits a little bit till Mary finishes her work. Mary tells her that some pupils would continue their work on mathematics, so she remains in the classroom helping the pupils that have not yet finished doing their class work. In this meantime, she stands still at her desk correcting the class work of the other children. Similarly, the teacher, who is responsible for the all-day school, enters Mary’s classroom, he discusses just a little bit with her, more or less typically and certainly not about the pupils. In this respect it is essential to separate between the genuine collegiality and the superficial one which is based simply on the typical relation of two or more co-workers in the same school unit.

4.2.6 Gendered professional relations

In the private sector women teacher are prioritised as a more disciplined and easy to handle personnel. ‘Nice appearance’ matters though.

Mary: When I came back to Athens, I had to look for a job. There was no chance to get a job in the public sector. It was very difficult at that time. I began therefore to look at all the private schools in line. E... She (the director of the school) interviewed me herself. She was very difficult as a person, I mean her choices, e..., and she selected me among a lot of other girls. She was difficult, you know, in what sense. That is to say, besides the fact that she was examining the degree of the certificate, she was looking at the person, she wanted to understand what kind of person you were, she preferred also a nice appearance. She wanted, yes, her girls – as she just wanted women – to be beautiful girls.

Mary narrates very vividly the depressing situation for women in the profession who have to fight to reconcile work with family responsibilities, which are mainly handed over to women in a traditional social context.

Mary: I did the academic equation after I got married. I had been appointed here in the school that I work now and I did it before... that is to say, I began the program in 1999 and I finished it in 2000. I began in October of 1999 and I finished in March of 2000. My experience was desperate. Entirely awful! The period that I decided to do the program of equation, .... first of all I decided it, because I had already two little boys, the one 1,5 years old and the other 3,5 years old. So, I thought: do it now that the children are young and they do not go to school, because later things will be more difficult. And my children stayed with others, I had my parents-in-law and they stayed with them. But it was too bad. It is enough to say that on that year I lost 5-6 kilos without noticing it. It was the tiredness, the stress! I was coming back, I was finishing the work at the school, I had to get back home, I had to feed the children, I was having lunch also, and at 4.30 I was leaving. At 5.00 the courses were starting and they were going on up to 10.00 in the evening. This happened every Tuesday and Thursday. I had opted for twice a week. Therefore, in these days there was madness! I had to leave at 4.30 by car and I would return approximately at 10.30- 11.00. I was going to Nikea and then I was living here, a little bit further than here. Generally afterwards, when the examination period was coming- there were three examination periods each year – things were very difficult then. I was placed in the 20 courses programme and the first year we had - I think- three or four examination periods and the next year we had two. In total we finished the programme in 1,5 year. They were 20 courses that we should take. Those who had less than 15 years of working experience were taking 20 courses. ... And things were very difficult. Particularly for us who were women, things were desperate. Anyway, attending the programme of academic equation, the follow-up of courses etc. relaxed us a little bit, a little bit we were hanging around, we were behaving a little bit like pupils, like students. But when the period of examinations was reaching, we were getting ter-
ribly stressed. ... very tedious! The reason is that you are not alone anymore, you have also a family from behind that keeps pestering and... This was tedious, was so tedious!

Situation is even worse for single mothers. This is what Mary experienced after she got divorced. Ambition for promotion to management posts and intra-professional mobility disappears for single mothers.

**Interviewer:** What about your professional future?

**Mary:** I think it will be just the same! It won’t be something different. I don’t have any great ambitions. I don’t want to study more. Maybe, because I cannot do it anymore. I don’t have plenty of time, because of my kids, of my family. But I think that it will be approximately the same.

**Interviewer:** So, you don’t think to become a head-teacher, or even to change jobs?

**Mary:** No, I don’t care about it. I think that it has a lot of responsibilities. I don’t mind about them. I don’t like that kind of responsibilities. Additionally, I don’t mind about the extra payment of a head-teacher. So, I prefer being at a classroom and being with children. I don’t know what will happen when I will be 55 years old. If I realize that I am so tired, maybe I will see it in a different way...

This is not the case for Helen who is still not married and with no family responsibilities. She is aspiring to a rich professional future.

**Interviewer:** What are your future professional plans?

**Helen:** Yes, at the moment my aim is to be able to teach, with the new textbooks from the next school year, ...to become familiar with the teaching material of all classes, eh...and...

**Interviewer:** in the long term?

**Helen:** in the long term I would like in the future to continue my career by going up the hierarchy that is to say that in the future I would like to become assistant headteacher, headteacher eh and...I would also like to attend the training in Marasleio...also my aim is in the future to work in Greek schools abroad...

The social position of Helen is quite different than that to Mary’s, however, both in terms of background and in terms of the present situation. Helen’s father was working in the army and he had served in several posts abroad which means he had a quite prosperous and cosmopolitan experience during her childhood. She studied at the university and she made post-graduates studies abroad taking advantage of her father’s post in Belgium. It is evident that her representation of a professional career is very similar to that of her father, a step by step promotion in the educational ladder that offers opportunities and potentially teaching posts abroad. Mary on the other hand comes from a lower middle class background, she studied in a Pedagogical Academy at a small city and she is now struggling on her own while having two children. As we have argued elsewhere, women’s self-discrimination in educational management is largely dependent upon socio-economic factors that are interplayed with the gentrification processes in the profession.

4.3 Professional Knowledge and Cultures

4.3.1 Experience

The most important source of knowledge all the teachers acknowledge is experience. The type of
knowledge they acquired during their initial training or at the university is perceived as ‘very
general’ and distanced from the everyday school practice. Teachers tend to value ‘practical
knowledge’ related to questions on ‘what to do in the class’, rather than theoretical knowledge that
in their view does not answer these questions sufficiently.

John says that the school practice is not compatible with the ‘theory’ he had been taught in his
initial training. In order to cope with this he followed the paradigm of the teacher he had when he
was a primary school pupil!

John: Yes and at the same time, in 1975 I was appointed as a supply teacher in a school in Kalo-
greza... then I faced the insecurities that each newcomer in a profession feels... I saw that theory
does not keep pace with action, that is to say...... all these that I had learned theoretically, I said
what I would do in the classroom, I felt a certain insecurity, what I would say and secondly, I had
as a model my own teacher... how he was teaching, what he was doing in the class, and especially,
as he was living here in Athens I went to see him and take his consult... what I would do, how I
would teach language... He gave me a ‘compass’ (some general directions)... That I would enter the
classroom, I would read the lesson, you would put the children read, e...and class-work, it was not
like these books that we have now that are like a compass (give certain directions to the teacher), it
is also positive from one side... they direct the teacher how to work even he does not possess prop-
erly the subject, they facilitate him, they guide him... then it was more that the teacher would act by
himself... how he would organize the teaching, e... these... insecurities... when I had already worked
about 1-2 months, I begun entering the climate and above all, it’s the love that somebody has for
the profession... he finds the way then...

John thinks that the new textbooks which provide for a teacher’s guide as well are quite helpful to
the teacher. Mary however feels that even that is not enough.

Interviewer: Where did you learn all these things that you are doing everyday as a teacher?

Mary: We took some general knowledge at the Pedagogical Academy. I took very few things from
my practicum in teaching. Experience has taught me more than this. The bigger part of my teaching
comes from my experience. The private school was the real school for me. I found there the guide, I
found what happened, what exactly means being a teacher, what I must do.

We had a head with a lot of experience. Each school year I was feeling that I had worked for five
years, because of the material, of the knowledge, of the amount of school works. Not only things re-
lated to children. But even things related to the parents, how to cope with them, how to manage
them, everything. When I left the private school after five years of work, I was feeling fully-armed,
as if I could cope with everything. I have met terrible things in the private school, all kinds of cases.
When I went to the public school, I felt like doing nothing at all. I was feeling so relaxed, so free
from cares, I was feeling that time was passing so simply, so calmly. In the private school we had a
lot of pressure from the head of the school and we were doing much more things. In the public
school, it was just a matter of personal responsibility. You can do whatever you want. If I worked
for the first time in a public school, I don’t think that I could cope with it. I don’t think that I had
taken the necessary equipments from the Pedagogical Academy, in order to cope with it. I would
make experiments, a lot of experiments. I would be obliged to search in books, to find how to face
things. On the contrary, I took everything ready. I took all the answers for everything. In the private
school I was feeling so stressed, so emotionally pressed, but it helped me a lot.

Interviewer: Did you not experiment in the private school?
Mary: No, I did not. No. I did not experiment at all. I admit that. I took everything ready ... yes, yes, it made us good. And she (a.n. the Director) was telling us that ... in the years to follow I thought of her plenty of times. I may had a difficult time there ... but she helped me a lot.

Interviewer: So, she was giving you ready solutions.

Mary: Yes. Of course!

Interviewer: Could you tell me one or two examples of things that you have learnt in the private school?

Mary: Yes. It's something that has to do with the dictation. She was telling us to collect the notebooks, to make an auto-correction, or to correct it on the blackboard. She was telling us to follow alternative methods. Otherwise, kids would feel bored. Another example is to make the writing expression just after the reading of the text. In this way, children are emotionally affected, so they can write better things. Otherwise, they would write something very poor.

Another example is the matter of time management. She was telling us not to exceed our time, to push kids to finish the written expression in ten minutes of an hour at the most.

Experience, however, is a sharing commodity. It is capitalised in the sense that it is accumulated by certain holders, in Mary’s case the initial holder was the private school’s director where she was firstly appointed as a teacher. It is modified in forms of practical learning packages, working tools, prescriptions on ‘what’ and ‘how to do it’. It is exchanged in the form of practical prescriptions or in the form of what the teachers call ‘ideas’. It is generalised in the sense that it tends to develop repetitious teaching practices, although similar knowledge sources do not necessarily develop similar practices. Nevertheless, the walls of Mary’s class were covered by the children’s drawings which were simply colouring within a predefined cartoon’s frame. A teaching practice of the 19th century is still reproduced as a device for disciplining children. Although drawing is a subject of a specialised teacher and not an activity performed by Mary, it is striking to see that traditional practice been still in place in some Greek schools. For the same reason Helen plays ‘kolokythia’ with the children, a very narrow traditional game, or she spends the first Monday morning school hour on dramatising the teaching unit on religion she decided to do on that particular day instead of language.

Experience as a sharing commodity is a vehicle for generalising tradition in education. The unquestioned implementation of given prescriptions offers predefined solutions to the everyday problems at work and a predictable work routine. In that case experimentation and research, that might facilitate innovation, are considered as potentially endangering the stability of school practice because it would lead to unpredictable outcomes. Experimentation in Mary’s narration is perceived as the opposite of knowledge because it presupposes a question on ‘what to do and how to do it’ which in her view implies ignorance.

Experience is perceived as an added value in teachers’ formation. Knowledge acquired at the university or at any other formal training system is understood as not enough in order to inform and guide work practice. In fact the existing training systems are devaluating teachers’ experience and are perceived as the exact opposite of practical knowledge.

Interviewer: What did you learn during the equation program?

Mary: I just took a “paper” (n.a. a formal qualification). The main thing was that I took that “paper”, because I had to, I had to secure myself for x reasons. I just refreshed a few things that we
had learnt in Pedagogical Academy, because a few years had passed. Nevertheless, I couldn’t say that I took something new. Unfortunately! There were few people that said some practical things, maybe in Psychology. All the rest was mere theory and mere learning by heart, right from the start. We were asking for answers, as we had some years of experience and we had some problems to put them. But we didn’t take any answer; we didn’t take any practical answer. That is all I have to remember from the equation program. A lot of reading, a lot of stress, and at the practical levels nothing special.

In agreement to Mary, John says that ‘experience’ and colleagues are the main source of knowledge, rather than the university.

**Interviewer:** Consequently, what would you say to a new comer to the profession, to a new teacher, what would you say to him? Now he has graduated from the University.

**John:** What I would advise him in relation to the job?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes how he will learn to do this job? Does he learn it in the University?

**John:** No, I do not think that he learns from the University…from his experience, from seminars, from the exchange of ideas with his colleagues etc.

Helen, the younger teacher, literally acknowledges that she lacks experience and this is a source of anxiety and stress. She mentions that ‘if you want to be good you have to work continually and do not stop to be up to date’. Helen is the only one of our informants who uses the ICTs and the internet as a source of information.

**Interviewer:** How are you getting informed on your profession, that is to say what are the sources of your information …on the professional developments, the instructive practice in general?

**Helen:** eh…yes…personally I am regularly informed enough through the internet, through the various educational sites that exist…eh… and, whenever I can, I attend training meetings, seminars…In February I attended a seminar on the prevention of children's accidents, another one on the traffic education and the safety in driving…eh…

4.3.2 Practical knowledge

‘Practical knowledge’ is what the teachers perceive as important and useful knowledge in order to do their work. Practical knowledge is knowledge transmitted through performance: through ‘showing’, not through writing or speaking or in other words, not through books and lectures, but through actual performance. Moreover, practical knowledge focuses on the everyday school practice and not on theoretical analysis, interpretations and explanations.

**Interviewer:** Do you use in your everyday practice something that you have learnt during the equation program?

**Mary:** No, I just heard about the team working, but I have never applied it. I could never apply it
practically. Maybe, because of the children, because of me, I don’t know. Now, I see that the new books ask for it, but...I understood what it was about. It wasn’t something difficult. I couldn’t simply apply it. The children that I had were such that could give me...Maybe it was their age. I don’t know...Maybe I wanted some help, I wanted someone to show me practically in the classroom. It is possible. It’s quite different when you hear theoretically about something, and quite different when you are going to apply it. It is a great distance! It would be very helpful, if someone was coming into my classroom to show me the method, to do it hear and now in practice, to show me how it works. I wanted to see it.

It’s the same with the new books. Do me a practical teaching, show me how to teach them. When you tell me theoretical things, it’s o.k. But, in practice, I have to teach them. What to say about it? I may make mistakes. Nobody knows.

According to Mary the teacher should know ‘a little about everything’! The multiplicity of subjects the teachers have to know implies that the wideness of knowledge undermines the depth of it. She uses the word ‘a little’, while, for instance, she could have used the word ‘general’ for describing the variety of subjects the teacher has to cover. Her perception of teacher’s professional knowledge reflects the internalisation of the relatively low social position of the teaching profession. The question on ‘what does a teacher have to know’ refers to an ideal situation and not to a critique of reality. Even in a question referring to the ideal Mary replies by placing low standards. Knowing a little about everything does not give professional self-confidence and self-esteem.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by the scientific knowledge of a teacher? What does a teacher have to know?

**Mary:** A little bit of everything. A teacher, for better or worse, has to know a little bit about everything. He has to be a pedagogue, a psychologist, to have a scientific knowledge about educational matters, to know how to teach, that is to know didactic methodology. The truth is that this is the reason we learn so many things during our studies. The Academy helped me a lot and the program of equation. I refreshed a lot of things: about matters concerning pupils’ behaviour, psychology issues. The private school helped me a lot, too. I took ready solutions for so many things. And then, experience helps you a lot. You try one way and if this hasn’t any result, then you can try another way. You try the knowledge that you have already acquired. You cannot do anything else.

When the issue of ‘scientific knowledge’ comes up, Mary admits that her professional profile has been formed in her initial education and in the academic equation programme she attended at the university. When the discussion reaches to that point she is ready to accept that some sort of experimentation, even in the ‘trial and error’ method, is unavoidably part of her teaching practice. However, in order to proceed in this trial and error method she needs ‘ideas’.

### 4.3.3 Ideas

Ideas, in teachers’ words, mean practical devices that are interpreted as work skills. Ideas are modes of action that translate educational aims into teaching practices. Ideas come out of experience in practice and are exchanged. The colleagues are a main source of ideas.

**Mary:** Yes. Given that every one of them has different pupils in the classroom, he has to cope with different cases, he has managed them in a different way. Consequently, you can learn something different from everyone of them. They tell you what they have done in different cases and you can combine all these. You can get ideas. Everyone by himself can’t find all these. You try all these and you see if it works, if it is effective.
Mary: (the colleagues can tell you) Something about pupils’ behaviour, how to anticipate it. When I had to teach the first grade for the first time, a colleague told me an idea about teaching the alphabet. An idea is to create small cards with letters. You can show them to the pupils, and they will be shouting the letter. Then you can hide the cards and then you can show them again. It’s an easy way for teaching the alphabet in the first grade. It’s easy for the kids to familiarize themselves with the letters.

The first year that I had to teach a first grade, I tried to follow the guidelines of the teacher book, but I was feeling that it hadn’t a certain result. I had to do more games, in order to make them understand, to familiarize themselves with the letters. A colleague that had a lot of years of experience helped me a lot. As she was working about 6 or 7 years with the first grade, she had learned it from her experience, she had found some tricks.

Interviewer: You frequently use the word “ideas”. What do you mean by this word?

Mary: To make a nice, pleasant teaching, each day should be different than the others. The following day has to be different than the previous one. To achieve this, you need ideas. For example, in the way you are doing the dictation. I shall do it every day, because I am obliged to do so, but I’ll do it in a different way. Then, a colleague can help you. He can tell you to do it in a different way, he will show you some ideas. Ideas are some different ways of doing the same thing. You need them, because kids are usually bored. And when they feel bored, they cannot follow you, or they start making noise. So, you cannot have a certain result, you cannot be effective.

4.3.4 Ideal teacher

While teachers admit that there is no ideal teacher, they describe the characteristics of a good teacher. Those have mainly to do with the attitude towards the job and the children. Professional knowledge comes second in the hierarchy of ideal teacher’s capacities. The word ‘love’ for the job is always mentioned.

Interviewer: Which are the characteristics of the ideal teacher?

Mary: First of all, he has to be patient. The main thing is patience. A great amount of patience!! O.k. scientific competence, scientific knowledge. Knowledge as we say .... To love his job, to want to do it, to have the intention every day to do his job. What else? Experience is something that can be acquired in the course of time. If you love the job that you do, you will do it well.

Interviewer: Who is the ideal teacher for you?

John: The one who is not authoritarian but manages to command respect, who is moderate and discusses things; the teacher who keeps formalities at work; the teacher who loves his work and is eager to do it; eagerness for the essential; who likes doing his job and does not do it out of need.

The teacher who keeps being informed; the continuous learner. Education is a science that changes and evolves continuously. New books are coming out, new practices and methods. The teacher must not remain stagnant.
4.4 Social Positions

4.4.1 Career choice

Although previous research concludes that teachers claim idealistic values for choosing their profession, in this research of life history analysis none of the informants has reported that teaching was a deliberate choice as a professional career. With regard to John, the elder teacher, teaching was imposed as a career out of economic need and it was a strategy for urbanisation and relative social mobility (see section 3.1.1). There was no claim of values or missions in his narration with regard to career choice. Helen and Mary have never chosen to become teachers, since they both had opted for other disciplines. They came to terms with the fact of becoming teachers after they found themselves in the respected University departments or in the Pedagogical Academy.

Interviewer: ...what does it mean for you to be working as a teacher?

Helen: Yes. I didn't start having chosen the profession of teacher. When I sat the exams my aim ...I had followed the second 'desmi'...my aim was to succeed in some faculty of Biology or Medicine. I did not get the required grades, I managed to enter the Department of Education considering that I would wish to try and sit the exams again before starting courses.

However, starting and attending...eh...I understood that it suited me well and that I would really want to continue in this direction. I did not even make any effort the second year (a.n. to re-sit the university entrance exams) nor did I try to do something else. ...

Interviewer: ... How did you become a schoolteacher?

Mary: Therefore, yes. The fact that I became a teacher, I would say, that it wasn't my preferable choice. It was a little bit a matter of chance. You know (she laughs) I had applied also to other faculties. I was trying to enter the Medical School. I did not manage to pass to the Medical School, or even Pharmaceutical in fact. And finally I entered the Pedagogical Academy. Anyway. However when I finished the School.... Rather, I should say that when I started, I entered the Academy of Larissa, it was an awful experience there.

On the other hand career options within the profession are not always the outcome of deliberate choice. In certain cases extra financial benefits related to specific posts motivate teachers’ career options. This was the reason John chose to become a special needs teacher. Specialised knowledge and interest come second as a motive.

Interviewer: How did you decide to deal with special education? Your placement in the department of special education in Marasleio (the in-service further training school for primary teachers) was accidental, or you chose it?

John: I chose it then because mainly, to tell you the truth, there was an extra economic benefit that was given and I would be interested, because as a new field, I wanted to learn certain things, what happens in the special education, how these children are helped, etc and then there was also an open choice, when you would finish the special education department, you could declare if you wanted to follow the sector, if you did not want it, you went in a regular school, if you declared it to work in departments of integration, you could go, they did not oblige nobody... thus I went in the department of special education, but I followed it, and I liked it in the course of time...
4.4.2 Symbolic aspects: professional status

Similarly to previous research findings, this research indicates that teachers report that they are satisfied by their job. Nevertheless, this is their initial statement and probably not representative of the whole story. While they speak about their everyday work life frustration, stress and disappointment are often revealed. It is quite possible then that their, at ‘first glance’, declaration of satisfaction is a rationalisation of the unchangeable reality regarding their professional options.

**Interviewer:** Let’s speak about the satisfaction that you take from your job. Which is the objective of your daily job?

**Mary:** When I come to my work, I am interested exclusively in this. I mean, that I forget everything, the personal matters, things that have to do with my family, I forget everything. When I start speaking with the kids, every single thought slips away from my mind. It is like a magic thing! It absorbs me. I give myself as if I would be the only responsible in case that something goes wrong. It’s for this reason, that when I finish my job, I am really a shred, I am so tired, I am exhausted. At the psychological level, because, at the physical level, I cannot say the same. I feel that my day was o.k. when I see the children happy, having passed nice with me. This is the thing that makes me feel nice, too. When the time passes, and I see that they have learnt certain things that I have taught them, this is the point. It gives me happiness. I can say o.k. we can manage it (she laughs with satisfaction).

My everyday objective is to teach them something different. It makes me so stressed. I think it at home, what I have to do, in which ways to say it each time. As, each year I have different children. When I return home, apart from the tiredness that I feel, I feel o.k., kids have gone happy, I have achieved something good. I am always optimist. I want pupils to learn and feel happy at the same time.

**Interviewer:** If someone asked you whether you were satisfied from your work, what you would say?

**John:** I am, yes, I always say that... what I see, because our work has many advantages... it provides us with free time, when we discuss it with friends etc., who have other jobs, one of them is director in a bank and because in the past, from these faculties they could become schoolteachers, they could go enter the last year, rather one half-year period, and then they could be appointed straight forward, and many of them have chosen it, he is from an economic faculty, like my son, he tells me: “I made the biggest stupidity in my life then”, I ask why, you are now a director, you take at least one million Drs., and he says: “to do what with it?... how many hours I work... from the morning I am there up to...whatever time of the day you call me you find me there” he says, “you find me in my office... up to 7 o’clock in the afternoon... there is no working schedule, there is insecurity, I should go to meet the customer out of the day schedule, etc, the a, the b, I should bring customers in the bank, capital, a thousand of preoccupations”, he tells me, I cannot sleep during the night (out of stress)... therefore, I would rather earn half this money”, he says, ‘and to be like you’, to have 3 months holidays during the summertime, to rest myself, to have vacations during Christmas, Easter, all these are unknown things for us”. Therefore, we have these advantages, we have also the few hours that we teach, all right, it is also to like the profession, if it tires you also... you see some people hearing the children and they say: “how can you do it, we have two or three kids and we cannot bear them, how you can bear them all day in the school?”, all right, but if someone likes it, I mean the subject, it does not tire him... and I like it, I like the profession...

Helen says she would not change teaching for another job, in spite of the fact that she considers her
profession as being socially devaluated.

**Interviewer:** If you had the opportunity to enter another occupation would you change it?

**Helen:** I changed profession in order to become a schoolteacher (laughing)

**Interviewer:** yes, now would you change having the experience of the profession?

**Helen:** no, because it is something that gives me satisfaction despite of the... I would not change my profession.

In the case of the focus group the main response to the question concerning the opportunity to enter another profession is that after twenty-five years of teaching it is tough for teachers being in the classrooms.

As for her future plans and ambitions Helen reports that:

**Helen:** ... at the moment my aim is to be able to teach, with the new textbooks from the next school year, I would like to have the experience of all classes......to become familiar with the teaching material of all classes.

She thinks, however, that the teaching profession is devaluated by a series of agents. Firstly it is devaluated in the public discourse adopted in the mass media. She thinks that the parents and the society as a whole are getting a partial view on what happens in education through the mass media which are seeking for attractive stories to be reported in the news and do not offer sufficient ‘follow-up’ in order to actually inform the public.

**Helen:** You see, some times we are getting fragments of the picture and not the whole story, something that does not allow us to come to the right conclusion ...

Teachers feel depressed by what they perceive as lack of social recognition regarding their role in the intellectual and moral upbringing of the children. While society as a whole invests immensely in education, the educators are socially undervalued and distrusted as professionals.

**Helen:** I think that, in general, the prestige of schoolteachers has been lost. That is to say your parents and my parents even if they disagreed with the practices of the schoolteacher eh...to me or to you they would never have given the right to invalidate our schoolteacher, to disagree or to come to open juxtaposition with them. My mother says something and I feel that I have to listen to her.

**Helen:** education is passing through a crisis, yes I believe that this is true because of a combination of factors...a combination of factors...has many times contributed to the invalidation and degradation of the profession, ...I said to you that it is not only the parents, it is not only the school-teachers it is probably a more general, ... a general social phenomenon which is named “school-teacher”. The answer to the question what a schoolteacher is, the first thing that people say is: come on you have long holidays, you relax, they cannot know what is the experience of being in a classroom, what preparation, how much effort it takes for one to be able to teach in a class.

Mary believes that there is lack of respect regarding the teaching profession and she blames the family and the state. More specifically Mary reports:

**Mary:** When the family devaluates teacher at home, when they speak in a bad way about the teacher, then the child that has heard all these, comes to school and doesn’t pay any attention to the
teacher. The result is that kids don’t learn anything. This is so bad. ... I don’t want to declare a cer-
tain disappointment, but I see the reality like this. When even the state itself, does not anticipate you
with dignity, to give you the material and technical infrastructure that you need, to give you a de-
cent wage, e.... I believe that you also are not disposed, to put it simply, to offer to the children.
When daily you enter in the classroom and give your soul and then, the moment comes that you take
your wage and you take peanuts and you can realise that it is not enough for living, which dignity
can you have? And how do other people can face you? Because, we have to tell the truth, in order
to be decent, you should have a certain appearance. In order to have this appearance, you should
also have the respected economic capacities. How would you have it? Otherwise, each day you will
be dressed in the same clothes. Unfortunately, I believe that the state faces us without dignity in this
issue, as far as our economic earnings are concerned.

Professional teaching may still be carrying the historical weight and tensions of an institution that
was developed when a private activity of raising children was differentiated into a public service
aiming at political socialization and social reproduction . The professional status of teaching may
still be challenged by the fact that its knowledge base is considered as neither specialized nor
monopolized by the teachers.

The school has never been an institution aiming at producing new knowledge and innovation.
Socio-economic and technological change has always found schools been left behind in reproducing
traditional knowledge and struggling for keeping pace with change, if not resisting change . In
recent times the growing distance between school knowledge and social and technological change
are developing a stressful situation for the teacher, who is struggling between an institutional role of
social control and a humanitarian prospect for being beneficial to the children.

4.4.3 Work-life balance

Teachers feel obliged to separate their work from their personal lives. In this sense the subjectivity
has no place within the public space of work.

Mary: I try to compartmentalise work and personal life and keep them distinct... When I leave
school and go home, I am at home. I am a mother with my children...I try to see it as a separate
piece, and I will do what I can...really,...,I work again...I am not indifferent, I get prepared for my
work at home.

As far as free time is concerned this seems to be a gender issue. Mothers in particular do not have
any free time.

(Focus group) Valia: me as a mother I do not have free time, only in the summer...sometimes my
free time is also work. You cannot leave all the problems out [of your personal life] ...you cannot
leave the problems in the classroom.

Dionisis (male) I have a lot of free time...

Sophie: if you do a second job in the afternoons or during the weekends then there is no free time.
5. Conclusions

5.1 Restructuring and professional teaching

Structural changes that took place over the last thirty years in the Greek society, such as further urbanisation and the restriction of the agricultural sector are reflected in the transitions in the socio-economic characteristics of the teaching profession. The three life histories that we analyse in this research indicate that while teaching was part of the urbanisation process for the agricultural social strata in the past, in the most recent period teachers mainly come from a middle class background. This is a research finding supported by other secondary data as well, but in order to be established it would presuppose a large scale empirical research.

Globalisation and expansion of middle classes seem to affect dramatically the social position of teachers. Within an increasingly competitive environment, teachers no longer represent powerful social strata. Global capitalism, based mainly in high technology services and stock-exchange capital, tends to marginalise social groups working on traditional sectors such as general education. The democratisation and welfare state expansion that took place after 1974 and during the 1980s have benefited the teaching profession in terms of economic and social status and have contributed in the professionalisation process of teaching. On the other hand, enduring features of the Greek political culture, most notably clientelism, are substantially affecting teachers’ personal and professional life.

While older teachers think that teaching in their case has contributed in upward social mobility, younger teachers feel that teaching is being socially devaluated. This is a research finding compatible with the structural changes affecting welfare state institutions and education in particular since the 1990s.

Welfare state restructuring, restrictions in public spending and the neoliberal ideology with regard to public services are gradually affecting the social organisation of schools as institutions and subsequently teachers’ work life. The role of the private sector and especially the role of parents in financing various school activities is a new situation which dramatically changes the social relations within the public schools and the position of the teachers.

Some striking generational differences emerge with regard to the teacher-parents relationship. Senior teachers feel quite respected by the parents and relatively confident regarding their professional knowledge, identity and status. Younger teachers feel that they need to struggle in order to gain parental respect. Younger generation teachers, in particular, tend to perceive the parents as the receiving end of their services. This is not the case for their elder colleagues who mainly address their own consciousness and the children as the final recipients and judges of their work.

Today in Greece teaching in the public sector is still perceived as offering a relatively secure and stable professional life. However it is considered as an underpaid profession and of a low social status. In terms of work-life balance teaching is considered as a professional career which allows space for a secure personal life [it offers tenure and a relatively stable, although low, income] with lots of holidays. This is perceived as one of the main advantages of the profession which provides for a career compatible with the family strategy, especially for women. Gender along with socio-economic background is a factor that accounts for internal hierarchies and intra-professional mobility in teaching.
5.2 Restructuring and Professional knowledge

Primary school teachers have low self-esteem with regard to their professional identity. They think that their professional knowledge is superficial and it lacks scientific grounding, since the teacher ‘knows a little about everything’. They perceive the professionalisation process as a challenge and they think that they have to convince the parents and the wider society about their professional/scientific identity.

Teachers understand as substantial knowledge resources their experience as this is exchanged with their colleagues. The anxiety of practice and the pressure of time do not allow much space for theoretical reflection. They value most the ‘practical’ rather than the theoretical knowledge. In this sense they seem more concerned about tacit rather than explicit propositional knowledge while their concept of knowledge at work is more of that of an apprenticeship than of a profession.

It is questionable to what extent teachers are the principal agents of innovation in education. In several cases new knowledge and pressure for adaptation to the global trends is coming from other agencies and most notably the parents. Middle class and relatively higher educated parents in particular are the most competitive social agents in education who develop closure strategies and challenge the professional expertise of teachers.

The constant concern about praxis and the continuous pressure coming from apparently invisible but present governance mechanisms lead to an emphasis on performativity rather than on a reflective professional action.
Chapter 5
Restructuring professional lives of Finnish teachers

The case study report of Finland

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1. Introduction

The aim of this report, which is a part of the work package 4 of the PROFKNOW\(^{32}\) -project, is to understand Finnish teachers’, working at the lower level of the comprehensive school, views on and responses to the structural changes of the Finnish comprehensive education and school. The changes in the comprehensive school are connected to the broader phenomenon of restructuring of welfare state institutions\(^{33}\). In this report, the nature of these changes and their contribution to the lives of teachers is examined by listening to the professional actors’ own voices, their accounts on their working conditions, professional knowledge, social position, and on how these have changed during their careers. Alongside interviewing the teachers, their work was observed during a fieldwork in order to gain a picture of what is happening in a lower level comprehensive school today, and in order to contextualise their views and accounts. Teachers of different age cohorts and with different amounts of working experience were chosen in order to look at them as representatives of different generations.

The overarching ambition of the PROFKNOW -project is “to understand knowledge ‘at work’ among professional actors situated between the state on one side and the citizens on the other side”. Thus, we will examine how restructuring of the institutions of the welfare state (the state), the society (the citizens) and the profession of teaching contribute to professional lives of teachers. We use term restructuring to refer to structural changes on various levels: to a change on regulatory, governmental level, such as making welfare service organisations and professions more efficient and accountable for they work by, supposedly, for instance, imposing policies of de-regulation and de-centralisation. It also refers to socio-economic changes, such as the economic recession of the 1990s and its aftermath, to societal changes, such as falling birth rates, immigration and increase of special-needs pupils, and to changes on local level, in the schools and the teachers’ work, such as changes in curricula, increase in need for documentation and emphasis on accountability and efficiency, changes in management and organisation of work.

There is a relative concurrence and interconnectedness in the above-mentioned restructuring measures, as they can be considered as connected to neo-liberal economic restructuring (See Beach 2005). By paying attention to this interconnectedness it is possible to think of them in terms of their implications to different generations of teachers and their relation to identifiable periods of the welfare state, the society, and the professions.

1.1. The interviews, the fieldwork, and their methodology

All the interviews and the fieldwork were conducted in a same lower level comprehensive school. Four teachers of the school were interviewed and followed around. The school was chosen by contacting the lower level comprehensive school headmasters of a town. They were asked whether they had three teachers of different ages that would be interested in to participate. One of the headmasters seemed to be more willing than others to participate, and she invited us to the school to talk to the teachers. We went to the school, presented the study and asked for volunteers. The meeting was held in the staff room of the school during a break with the most of the teachers present. The teachers discussed the matter among themselves, and finally three of them volunteered and sacrificed themselves for the study. The choice was made collectively without much pressure from the headmaster. The individual teachers could, in the end, decide for themselves whether to

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\(^{32}\) Professional Knowledge in Education and Health: Restructuring work and life between the State and the citizens in Europe.

\(^{33}\) These changes were examined in work packages one (Goodson & Norrie ed. 2005) and two (Beach ed. 2005) of the project, in Finnish context particularly in Moore (2005) and Moore et al. (2005).
participate or not. We did not get then a teacher with a very long work experience. A fourth teacher with a long work experience was persuaded later to participate by a participant teacher.

The first round of interviews and the fieldwork were conducted in April and May 2005. Both a life story interview and a semi-structured thematic interview were conducted with each teacher. During the first round, two life story interviews with female teachers, born in 1962 and 1976, were conducted. Three days of fieldwork was conducted with each of the three teachers, with a man born in 1967 and women born in 1962 and 1976. During the second round in November and December 2005, the male teacher was interviewed only once in a way that a thematic interview followed a life story interview within a same session. The thematic interviews of female teachers were conducted. The fourth teacher, female born in 1948, was interviewed once, in a similar manner as the man, and followed around for a half a day in May 2006.

The methodological guideline of both the life story and the thematic interviews was to avoid leading the interviewee according to the interviewer’s assumptions and views on the issues in question. In the life story interview, the interviewees were simply asked to tell the stories of their lives, and it was mentioned, that the researcher was especially interested in their professional lives, in order to motivate them to pay special attention to their professional histories. They were not discouraged to tell about their personal lives as well. During the interview the interviewer asked questions in order to motivate the storytelling. These questions were made in a manner that followed interviewee’s story. The attempt was to let the interviewee decide the storyline her/himself.

The thematic interviews were semi-structured in a sense that the given themes were covered without restricting interviewee’s accounts too much within each theme. The interviewer asked more precise questions within each theme boring in mind the methodological guideline. The aim of the both, life story and thematic, interviews was to find out the things that the teachers themselves brought up and, thus, considered as significant in their lives and work.

Three days of fieldwork were conducted with each of the three teachers, and a half a day with one of them. The guideline of the observations was to pay attention on the activities of the teacher. The observer wrote field notes, in a colloquial manner, which consisted of reports on what happened and when: what the teacher did, and how the pupils responded, and what was happening in different settings, such as in the classroom and in the staff room, and during the excursions etc.

The data consists of 62 pages of interview transcripts, translated from Finnish to English, and of 65 pages of field notes in Finnish. This material was further analysed thematically. Short biographies of each teacher were produced, and their answers on different themes were gathered, along side with the analysis of the work packages 1 and 2, and other sources in order to explicate the relevant structures and structural changes in relation to the themes.

1.2. The theoretical position of the study

In this report, the teachers’ responses to the structures and to the structural changes of different institutions are approached by viewing the organisation of teachers’ work, and their responses as socially conditioned practices. These socially conditioned practices “bring together two states of history: objectified history [...] and embodied history” (Bourdieu 1981, 305).
Objectified history is understood here as an entity of historically formed, institutional and structural ‘objects’ with which teachers interact. This kind of objects are the various procedures, regulations, rules, job descriptions and instruments used in work, knowledge sources, pedagogical ideas etc. which are connected to the conditions, organisation and management, professional knowledge and expertise of the teacher’s work. These institutional and structural objects, understood as objectified history, are of different importance, interest, desirability and preference etc. for different teachers.

The teachers’ ‘difference’ is approached in terms of their structural locations and their cultural belongings. First, they occupy particular positions in social space in terms of various factors, such as socio-economic status, professional status, gender, generation etc. Second, they are different kind of in terms of their habitus, which refers to their dispositions, capabilities, aptitudes and interests that are accumulated and ingrained in the past practices in different areas of life such as family and hobbies, but especially in professional education, work and career. This historically accumulated entity, habitus, is what is referred to as embodied history. Thus, embodied history can be understood, for instance, as the teachers’ desires and skills to fulfil the new institutional expectations and job requirements, their preferences for particular tasks, and their manner or style to carry out those tasks.

Objectified history and embodied history are ‘brought together’ in practices, in which teachers interact with the various objects, which may be tangible or intangible: instruments, documents, ideas, people etc. This encounter of these two states of history is influenced by the agents’ relative positions in the social space. Information about the practices can be acquired through observing and interviewing. The answers in interviews can be seen as products of practice in which interviewee produces linguistic products according to her/his habitus. The answers and also actions can, thus, be seen as instances in which objectified and embodied histories meet and interact.

For us understanding the teachers’ accounts is not a phenomenological “projection of oneself into the other” but rather an understanding of the position that the interviewee occupies within a given field under study. Objective conditions that are associated to the positions affect the lives of the individuals belonging to particular social category by imposing the possibilities and necessities to realize oneself as a teacher. (Bourdieu 1999, 613-8.)

In addition to the objective conditions, the positions that interviewees occupy and the dispositions, according to which they are inclined to act, the conditions of the interview situation may contribute to the interviewee’s accounts and views. In the interview situation, both the interviewer and the interviewees have expectations and anticipations on what the other might represent. According to Bourdieu (1991, 77; See Thompson 1991, 19), the speaker assesses the market conditions in which s/he produces expressions and actions. S/he anticipates the likely reception of his or her expressions and linguistic products, which anticipation operates as internalized constrains on the very process of production. Thus, the specific market conditions of the interview situation are assessed by the interviewee on the basis of how s/he sees the interviewer and the interview situation.

The male teacher’s reference to the observer-interviewer can be seen as this kind of an assessment.

*I think for me it's alright if someone is watching in the class, it doesn't basically affect my work.*

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36 Determinant structure which is a real danger in studies of institutions (Houtsonen 2003).

The market is here understood as a site of symbolic exchange, where status and prestige are at stake, not merely as a site of exchange of material goods.
Should an official delegation come to watch, I don't know about that then, as that would make a difference.

As the observer-interviewer is seen in comparison to an ‘official delegation’ ‘that would make a difference’, one could say, in spite of the fact that the teacher claims that it does not affect his work, that the observer represents, for him, a sort of a public that is situated outside the school community. Teacher’s interaction with the observer-interviewer obviously differs from his/her interaction with the colleagues, pupils and parents.37

During the observation, it was apparent that the teachers did alter their ways of working because the observer was present. As Bourdieu notes (1991, 77), a certain kind of censorship, that stems from the structure of the market, modifies the expressions of individuals as it is transformed into self-censorship through the process of anticipation.

1.3. The research problem and questions

Instead of trying to generalize something about teacher’s work and views, this report aims to describe the professional strategies that the teachers of specific, identifiable backgrounds use in order to accommodate to or resist the changes brought by the restructuring. Mapping these strategies is not a basis for generalizations but for understanding the multiplicity of contexts in which the restructuring works. The analysis of restructuring institutions or the analysis of individual actors’ accounts alone wouldn’t be able to grasp this multiplicity, as viewing the both at the same time as practices is.

The questions we are posing in this report are: How do the teachers perceive and respond to the structural changes in working conditions at school, in their professional knowledge and social position? By analysing structural changes and the teachers’ responses to them in terms of their working conditions, professional knowledge and social position, we are able to find out what are the professional strategies they use in order to cope with the changes, and find answers to a question: How does restructuring contribute to the professional lives of the teachers?

2. National and local contexts of the teachers’ work

In this chapter a brief history of the Finnish school system is provided from the 1970s till today. The relevant structural changes for the interpretation of the interviews and observations are mapped. The local context of the study, a description of the lower level comprehensive school, is provided as well, and the changes in national context are connected to those in local context. This description is mainly based on the findings of work packages one (Moore et al.) and two (Moore 2005), but also on some other sources.

37 The teachers had different styles in this respect. A female teacher, born in 1962, told a lot about her personal life during the interviews. Her directedness was also apparent in the way she worked and interacted with pupils and colleagues. Another female teacher, born in 1948, brought up very little about her personal life as did the male teacher. Especially the male teacher emphasized, for instance, the importance of keeping professional distance to pupils’ parents, which attitude was also perceptible in the way he worked in the class room and with the colleagues. Thus, the different teachers saw the interview and observation situations according to their different ingrained dispositions and styles.
2.1. Changes in the school system, teacher education, administration and financing

Before the comprehensive school reform of the 1970s (1972-77) the Finnish school system was divided so that from elementary school children continued studies either at grammar school or at secondary modern school. School reform meant that all the children would study in a single comprehensive school (classes 1-6 and 7-9) after which they apply for either the general secondary high school or vocation school.

Likewise, teachers and their education were divided into grammar school teachers and elementary school teachers. Elementary school teachers were educated at teacher seminaries while the education of grammar school teachers took place at universities. In the early 1980s, teacher education was modified so that the university faculties of education were established, and all teacher education was transferred into the universities. From the old grammar school teachers became subject teachers, who enter first the subject departments and take their teacher training at the faculty of education during their studies, thus continuing the old grammar schools model. From the former elementary school teachers became class teachers, who enter the teacher education programmes at the faculties of education.

The comprehensive school reform, in the 70s, meant also the intensification and centralization of state educational administration. Welfare state expansion and centralised administration continued until about the beginning of the 1990s. Since then the state educational administration has been decentralised and local actors have been given more decision-making power. This has meant for instance the Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School (National Board of Education 1994) that obliges municipalities, schools and teachers to prepare their own curriculum based on the national guidelines. In addition, it has meant the obligation to evaluate the education provided.

Since the change in the beginning of the 1990s, financing has been based on unit costs instead of ‘ear-marked’ money and decisions about allocation or resources are made more at the local levels. The management is organised around goal steering, evaluation and accountability. (Simola 2005, Webb et al. 2004a; 2004b.) The restructuring measures were introduced in the context of the economic recession of the 1990s. Despite the recent economic recovery, the financing of education has remained somewhat precarious and educational budgets have been tight in many municipalities.

In addition, schools have been affected by societal changes such as the falling birth rates, smaller age groups, internal migration and external immigrants and persistent social problems with some families.

2.2. Changes in the school and the teacher’s work

After the comprehensive school reform, in the 70s, significant changes have taken place inside the school and in the everyday work of the teachers. Simola (1995, 2005) has studied these changes by looking at changes in curricula, teaching practices, and in ideas and discourses of learning and teaching. According to him (1995, 336-7; also Webb et al. 2004a, 84), as the Framework Curriculum (National Board of Education 1994) was enacted in 1994, the control mechanisms that had before controlled teaching practice and contents, such as subject-based curriculum, compulsory teacher’s diary and officially accepted school books, were replaced by the school-based curriculum incorporating integrated topic work and accompanied by more active learning pedagogies. Simola (1995) describes this as a change from the control of the contents of teaching to the control of results and of the attainment of goals. Teacher’s role changed from the handler of the subject-contents to the accomplisher of the goals of the curriculum.
In addition, the school inspector visits, which were before organised by the school board, were replaced by the supervision of the head master. Teachers got a greater autonomy in their classrooms. According to Simola (1995, 297), the control of teaching was replaced by the control of learning. The attainment of the learning goals was placed under supervision and control instead of a teacher’s activities in the class room.

The curriculum work came with the reform. The organizers of the education were obliged to plan their own curricula according to the national frame. Thus, the curriculum was municipality- and school -based. It was created in each school and in each municipality according to a common frame that included regulations of the distribution of lesson and some loosely determined common values and goals. The teachers participated in the development of the curriculum.

Changes had gradually started to take place before the framework curriculum. For instance, in 1980s, the term and practice of continuous evaluation was introduced. According to Simola (1995, 335), consequently, the distinction between pupil’s personality and his/her evaluation grew blurrier. The teacher’s role as a conductor of classes’ or group’s learning changed gradually into a role as a supervisor of individual pupils. However, this has not necessarily meant individualization of teaching and personalization of the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. According to Simola (2005, 463) the Finnish teachers still seem to emphasise the importance of keeping a certain professional distance to the pupils and their homes and problems.

Current National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004: national core curriculum for basic education intended for pupils in compulsory education (National Board of Education 2004), which was enacted in 2004, is a turn back to a more centralized model, after a decade of decentralisation of the curriculum. It aims again to increase uniformity of the schools and teaching on a national level. Despite the more precisely specified principles and regulations, the providers of education still plan and develop the local curricula.

The administration and management is brought down on the grass root level, where teachers are obliged to participate in decision-making processes. Even though the school head master still holds the formal decision-making power, one could also think – on the basis of the observations of this study, which will be looked at in section 4.1 - that, the control of the head master is gradually being replaced, at least in the school of this study, by the control of the school community that sets the common goals and values. The development-discussions with the head master are introduced. Thus, the self-evaluation, the self-control and self-development have become important mechanisms and issues. Emphasis is placed on an idea of a teacher as a researcher and an evaluator of her/his own practice.

In addition, recent changes have brought with them new duties that teachers have to fulfil in their...
everyday work. These include various meetings, the curriculum planning work, participation in administration, documentation and self-evaluation, and ever increasing co-operation with parents and collaborators outside the school. The national core curriculum emphasises the schools’ and the teachers’ initiative in the co-operation with homes, parents and guardians.

The new information technology has brought challenges for the teachers as well. The teaching of these technologies is more and more included in the curriculum. Advances on this field are constant, which is a challenge for teacher education and training. Another change concerning the IT is that the pupils are increasingly capable of using these technologies, as many families have today computers and the internet available at home. In a broader scale, it might be that these new technologies are challenging the monopoly of the education and the school as providers of information – they provide the pupils with an alternative source of information.

2.3. The school of the study

The four teachers that were interviewed and observed were working at a lower level comprehensive school maintained by the municipal. The school is of the biggest in the province and offers a place for more than 400 pupils. There is one pre-primary class, one special education class and 17 general education classes.

The town, where the school is located, is a centre of commerce, culture and administration for the surrounding region. It is located in a peripheral region where standard of living is below country’s average. Nevertheless, it has benefited from the states new regional policy that emphasizes the centres of growth and excellence. The town is also an educational centre of the region with a University, a Polytechnic, a Vocational College, an Adult Education Centre and a Sports Institute.

School building was constructed in the late 1980s, so it is still quite comfortable, spacious and in good order. Although the general impression of the school was somewhat institutional it was otherwise clean, safe and modern. The classrooms are well-equipped and spacious. The equipment in the classrooms seems to be from the time the school was built – there are usual blackboards and overhead projectors. The computers in two computer classes are fairly old and there are no other visible accessories or peripheral devices. The music classroom is well equipped with a piano, drums, a bass, guitars and the more common school musical instruments, such as xylophones. The handicraft classrooms have state-of-the-art machines and instruments and plenty of working space and the dining room is clean and modern. The school has a library and the pupils can also easily use the mobile library services each week and there is a municipal branch library close to the school. There is a playground, a climbing frame, swings, a sports ground and shelters in the schools yard. The learning environment of the schools covers also the nearby nature, ridge, river and islets.

Staff room appears to be rather conventional with lockers for each teacher, a corner with sofas and armchairs for relaxation and a conference space with two big tables surrounded by chairs. The notice boards are covered by schedules, working orders and notifications about current matters. In shelves there are professional literature, newspapers and magazines. The room is equipped with two relatively new computers with fast internet connections. There is also a small but modern kitchen for the staff.

The residential area surrounding the school is quite new, consisting of detached houses, terraced houses and small blocks of flats. There is a general impression of people being well-off. The housing estate is very nice, peaceful and close to nature.
3. Life histories

In this chapter we will introduce our participants by providing brief life histories of each of them, and their accounts on their current interests in work and life. These portraits provide contexts for the interpretation of their activities, accounts and views in the following chapters. The participants are given pseudonyms according to which they will be referred to.

Sirkka is the female teacher born in 1948 with 33 years of work experience as a teacher.

Tuula is the female teacher born in 1962 with 16 years of experience.

Martti is the male teacher born in 1967 with 11 years of experience.

Niina in the female teacher born in 1976 with 4 years of experience.

In the end of this chapter we will draw some issues on their life stories, which might contribute to their habitus, their dispositions, interests, preferences and aptitudes. Their accounts on their past life, childhood, education and career give a glimpse to the conditions in which their habitus was formed. Also their ways of talking about their lives, what things they emphasise and bring up as essential, can be read as products of their habitus.

3.1. Sirkka

The childhood family of our oldest informant, Sirkka, consisted of a father, a mother and an older sister. Both parents were civil servants, father working in a managerial position and her mother as an official, both in the General Post Office. Her family used to move a lot from a place to another because of her father’s work.

After she passed the matriculation examination she was admitted to the teacher education institute which was transformed from an old type teacher seminary into a university faculty at the same time. Thus she was among the first group of class teachers for comprehensive school who graduated in 1973. She specialised in Primary Education and in Physical Education but thinks that she did not get anything useful to adopt to her work from the teacher education:

Like thinking back now, I mean, you didn't get anything out of it, you needed to take some exams but you never got to do any work. I can't remember that we ever got anything concrete for this job whatsoever, for everyday work.

After graduation she first worked for two years on the West Coast in a small, nice school. Then she worked for five years on the South Coast. There she was shocked as she had to work first for a year in a very big school, where pupils had even problems with alcohol. After that she went to work in a lot nicer school. Finally she has been working ever since in the same town though changing schools three times. As she first came to the town, she took additional studies in order to enhance her grades. By doing that, she tells that, she managed to get a permanent post before some of her colleagues. There was a system, where the teachers were queuing for permanent posts at that time. She states this having been a good experience as her hard work was worthwhile.

She has worked for 33 years now, and has two years left before the retirement. She was married but divorced in the 1980s, and she hasn’t got any children of her own. She does not talk much about friend or personal interests, which may be because the interview focused on her working life.
3.2. Tuula

Tuula’s father was a construction worker and her mother a clerical employee. The family lived in a detached house in a medium size university town. Her sister had a troubled puberty, and so she decided to be an easy and obedient child. She went in for sports, first as an athlete and then as a trainer. She describes herself as always being hard-working and so earning own money during the school and university holidays and by training youngsters. All in all she considers having a stable childhood.

Tuula got engaged after the matriculation examination in 1981. Her husband is a construction worker just as her father was. Their children were born in 1987, 1988, 1990 and 1993. The oldest child was diagnosed in 1992 with a progressive fatal illness and she passed away in the spring 2005. The family started to build their first detached house in 1989. Her father died during that process in the spring 1990.

The family’s life was practically organised in terms of their ill child until her death.

*Our life was mostly about taking care of Liisa and her affairs. ...So basically ever since 1992 we’ve been giving up and living in sorrow, as for 13 years our child got worse. ...Now there is a new phase beginning in their lives.*

Tuula does not consider herself ever being a good pupil, only such persona who works hard. She had problems in languages and was an au pair in England. She took the matriculation examination in the spring 1981. She was not admitted to the university in her first attempt, but as she retried successfully in 1982 she was also admitted to the nursing school and kindergarten teacher education. She graduated in Educational Sciences and completed her teacher training in 1988. She describes herself again as being a hard-working student, now at the university.

*But I don’t think that I was a good student; I was just hard-working. I had what it took to please every teacher, to spot what each of them liked.*

She has been working as a teacher for 16 years since 1988, except for maternity leaves in between. Initially she had an idea to become a teacher at the upper level of comprehensive school. Other options were nurse, optician and psychologist. As she lived near the university and saw it almost daily, she thought already early on that she would like to study there.

She considers that a permanent teaching appointment is very important in teacher’s work, but it might be a long and difficult process to get one. For instance, she has worked at the same school for her whole career, first as a substitute teacher and now in a permanent post. She has been teaching the forms from one to four and she likes the system of having an ‘own’ class for several years.

She explains that some families with ill children have been their most important social network during the past few years. Colleagues are also important and she particularly socialises with some older female colleagues in her free time. They may go outdoors, exhibitions and concerts together. There are still some friends and families from the student days, but most of those relations have faded away, perhaps due to her child’s illness. She tells that she is rather outgoing but her husband mostly stays at home.

However, she seems to be very home and family oriented person. So, she has not got any specific hobbies or interests, but rather goes to walk, concerts, exhibitions and shopping with her lady friends. She explains that the taking care of her child’s illness has taken most of her energy.
Thus, the daughter’s illness has had a bearing on her working life as well. Actually, she has felt herself awfully tired for the whole of her working career. On the one hand, the work has been a sort of therapy for her, since at work she has not had to think about the hardships at home. On the other hand, she has not brought duties home. In addition, her husband started to drink, the thing that she does not talk much about. However, she believes that though the drinking is partly due to the hard times their family has gone through, she reminds that his parents used to drank too.

3.3. Martti

Martti’s father had an animal transportation business and his mother was a private caretaker who was at home all through his childhood. He has just recently married, but does not talk much about his personal life.

He recalls that was not a good pupil at school, and probably without a firm and strict teachers he would have been more troublesome. He assumes that if he was given a diagnosis then, he might have been “one of those ADHD cases”. Indeed, he was diagnosed as having reading disorder which bothered him until a bit after the beginning of the upper secondary school, and during the university years it finally disappeared completely. In the upper secondary school he had “a sort of break in the studies” and the studying went better for him. He realized that in order to succeed and learn things one needs to work hard. He passed his matriculation examination and finished upper secondary school in 1986. After that he worked as a lorry driver and as a gardener assistant for a year. Then he did his compulsory military service, after which he studied for a Physical Education Instructor in the Sports Institute for a year.

First, he planned to start studying Horticulture at a university, but this vision was crashed when he realized that “the wages aren't that good and there's a lot of work”. Moreover, advanced studies in Physics at upper secondary school were required, so it was a mission impossible for him then, having not studied advanced Physics. He considered also catering business as an option, but because of the irregular working hours he didn’t consider that option agreeable either.

He describes himself having been “a sort of a persistent applicant” since he applied for teacher education four times before he got in. The idea of becoming a class teacher got stronger along the way as he worked as a school assistant for a year and as a non-qualified class teacher for another year. He studied overall for five years of which three and a half years full time. He got a job as a class teacher and left his studies “sort of hanging in the air for a few years”.

He states that he had during his studies a clear vision about what a good teacher should be like, and what he needed to get from the university studies, because he had been working in school for two years. Though he says that he got plenty from the university studies, he adds that the studies included also a lot of stuff that was useless or wasn’t “concretely useful for the job”, which he found difficult to accept.

Then again, what was really good about all the practical training and all was that there was this realistic view to what you can do with the pupils, and what the working is like. These kinds of subjects I felt were ok.

During his studies he worked all weekends, which he considers having influenced his performance in studies. Also, there were lots of changes and incidents in his personal life then. He specialized in teaching school beginners and he became particularly interested in music.

And then I went to the university and started studying music there, and I was like wow, this is nice,
this is fun. I was really eager to learn. But then I felt that perhaps I was too old to learn to play the piano for example, as I hadn't done that before. But that was another eureka for me, to be able to learn at that age if you just put your mind to it.

He found the music teachers in the university inspiring.

They made me believe in myself somehow. They were quite strict perhaps, but the atmosphere was positive and they got at least me believe in myself. Perhaps because they saw that I learned something, for there were those, too, who weren't motivated at all.

Before he was admitted to the university he worked as a school assistant in a special school for a year and another year as a non-qualified class teacher. After some three years of study he got a temporary post as a non-qualified class teacher. Consequently, his studies were “hanging in the air” for few years before he finished them.

He has worked as a teacher in a town nearby for four years, and has now been working in this town for six years. He believes these changes have made him a better teacher.

I would have probably got the permanent post, but fortunately I didn't stay. I think that all this changing of the schools has made me take different viewpoints to my teaching, and I've learned something new in every school. I suppose it's easy to have a narrow view if you work in the same place all the time.

He is enthusiastic about dancing which is almost a second job for him. He thinks that his dancing hobby has also influenced his music skills. Again there were important persons involved in this hobby. Her sister used to take dancing lessons and trained him at home. Later girls’ P.E. teachers at the upper comprehensive and secondary school was important as she arranged training and ensembles.

3.4. Niina

Niina has lived mostly with her mother because her father wasn’t around at all. The first four years of her life they lived with her grandparents in their house in the same town she is currently living in. When she was five, her mother met her present husband, who has been basically like a father to her ever since. They moved to a town nearby when she was in second class. She got a step-brother at the age of 11. They moved back to a quarter of the town, to a house of their own, in 1989. That year she went to the upper comprehensive school in the town centre. Her grandfather, who had been a significant person in her life, died when she was transferring to the upper level.

She went to the upper secondary school in 1992 and passed her matriculation examination in 1995. She met her present husband, with whom she has been together ever since, in 1992, between comprehensive and upper secondary school. She moved away from home to live with her husband at the age of 17.

They got married in 1997 and their first child was born in 1999. She was 22 years old at that time and studying at the university. Her husband is a carpenter by occupation. They have been moving from house to house as the husband has built them and after few years they have sold them.

In 1995-96, after upper secondary school, while working as a school assistant for a visually handicapped child, she took basic studies in Education Sciences at the Open University. After that, she applied for both the special and the class teacher education, but was not admitted. She continued as a school assistant and took at the same time basic studies in Special Education. She applied then
only for class teacher education, to assure her entrance, and was admitted to the studies. But during the interview she was planning to apply for special teacher education and study the maternity leave. Indeed, she was admitted to study in a year-long specialisation programme.

After upper secondary school she worked, for two years, as a school assistant for a visually handicapped child. The first year she worked in an ordinary elementary school and the second year in a special school. She did this partly in order to get work experience which would give additional points when applying for the class teacher education. During her studies she had temporary posts as a class teacher in the school she currently works in and also in other schools.

She started to work in her present job in 2001, so the interview happened in her fourth year at the same school now. She has a contract until further notice, which means that, if her job here finishes, the town is obliged to offer her another post in another school. She is going to go to a maternity leave soon after which her post in the school is uncertain though the town is obliged to find her another post somewhere else if there are not enough pupils in her old school.

3.5. Conclusions on the life courses

Each teacher brings up particular things in their life stories which can be considered as important, contributing to the formation of their habitus and their particular professional styles. Starting with their experiences in school as pupils, for instance, Tuula states that she never was a talented or especially good, but a hard working pupil. Also Martti says that he realised the meaning of hard work later in upper secondary school. Their emphasis on importance of working hard to achieve something may be due to their family backgrounds: Martti’s father was an entrepreneur and Tuula’s a construction worker. Their families were non-academic families, in which one might expect that practicality is preferred to the encouraging of children to theoretical thinking. Thus, they may have adopted a tendency to emphasise in their professional styles practicality over theoretical reflection.

Tuula’s life has been shadowed by the illness of her child. As she also states herself, this has sensitised her to adopt a professional style that emphasises emotional sensitivity and consideration of others’ feeling. Also the teachers’ passionate hobbies and other personal interests, such as Martti’s lifelong avocation of dancing and later music, contribute to their professional interests, styles, preferences and skills, as Martti states having gain a lot of tools for his work from his dance and music teachers, and having been able to transfer skills acquired to other areas of his work as well. In addition, he, as also do the other teachers, seems to enjoy using his own personal strengths and skills, for instance, as he is enthusiastic in organising pupils’ performances and plays.

The teachers seem to have differing thresholds of talking about their personal lives. Tuula seems clearly to be inclined to talk about very intimate things, whereas Martti and Sirkka do not seem to initiatively bring up any things, at least not any details, about their personal lives. They might refer, for instance, that there were changes in their personal life at particular time, as Martti does, giving nothing specific of them. The interviewer gets an impression that they interpret the interview situation as a more formal occasion than Tuula, and also Niina, do.

Considering the structural changes, all the teachers are educated in university level. Sirkka got her training in a group that was among the first groups educated in university instead of former teacher seminaries. Sirkka states that, as she was a student, there was not much practical training included in the teacher education. The others reported having some practical training in their studies. In addition to this, it is hard to discern any specific changes in teacher education according to the interviews.
The changes of the 1990s can be considered as another significant watershed - then the framework curriculum was enacted, mechanisms of control and supervision were transformed, and the administration of education decentralised. Sirkka and Tuula entered the work life as teachers before the reform. They both have accounts on the change which will be investigated later in this report. The interviews don’t give much insight about the newest reform, the introduction of the national core curriculum.

4. Thematic analysis

4.1. Working conditions

The conditions of the teachers’ work are approached in a broad sense in this chapter. First, the everyday work of the teachers is generally described, mostly on the basis of observations, in order to provide a glimpse of what is happening in a Finnish lower level comprehensive school, what constitutes the core tasks and activities of the teacher’s work there. Then, the themes concerning working conditions, which the teachers bring up, are presented. The topical issues for the teachers concerning working conditions are brought forth, and their accounts and views on these are analysed. Finally, the teachers’ responses to the recent changes in the school and the teacher’s work are analysed.

The everyday work of the teachers

This description of teachers’ everyday work is mainly based on the events observed during the fieldwork. Tuula, Martti and Niina were followed around for three work days, and Sirkka for a couple of hours, about a half a day. This description clarifies in a very general manner what takes place in a school and what a teacher’s work is like.

Tasks and duties, working hours and the schedule

Teacher’s daily tasks and duties include in addition to teaching the pupils and keeping the order in the classroom, which seem to be their core activities (both in terms of actual relative portion of the working time they take and in terms of how the teachers perceive their core tasks), preparation of teaching and other activities, correcting and controlling pupils’ homework, evaluation of pupils’ written tests and their classroom work (continuing evaluation), tending the pupils, keeping watch on them and securing their safety during lessons as well as during breaks and excursions outside the school, meeting and communicating with pupils’ parents, co-operating and planning with colleagues and other workers, such as school nurse and school welfare officer, and participating in decision-making in the school. In addition, teacher’s work includes curriculum planning work, which, however, was more predominant during the period of the framework curriculum more than now, and planning and discussing on different kind of issues, strategies and such.

The teachers’ working hours are mainly from 9 am to 1-2 pm. This time is used in teaching. In addition to this teachers do planning, evaluating etc. tasks in the afternoon from 1-2pm to 3-4 pm. Some of them, according to their reports, stay at school, and some bring work to their homes, where they do it when it is most suitable for them.

The teaching work in the classroom is organised according to the timetable which is a framework for the daily activities. The organisation of the timetable is decided by the head master, whose task is to plan the schedule and distribute the lesson, according to the distribution of lesson determined
by the Ministry of Education. However, teachers do participate in this process in numerous meetings and discussions.

Within the framework provided by the timetable a teacher has some freedom to alter the timetable whether independently or by agreement with the head master or other teachers. The female teachers, Sirkka, Tuula and Niina, are engaged in close co-operation with their parallel class teachers. Together, with their parallels, they plan their timetables and other activities, such as examinations and some of the excursions. They also distribute some of the lessons so that the teacher, who is most interested in or competent in a particular subject, teaches all the pupils of the parallel classes. In addition, they can substitute each other in each other’s class rooms if necessary and share the work load of examinations and grading.

Also Martti changes lessons with his colleagues, even though he doesn’t have such a close co-operation with his parallel class teachers as the female teachers do. He likes the possibilities that the big size of the school offers for him to change lessons with colleagues and concentrate on his strongest areas instead of teaching everything as is often required at a smaller school.

Teaching

The content base of the teaching in the classroom is provided by the textbooks, teacher’s manuals etc. and by the teaching curriculum. Teaching is based on the curriculum, but the teaching methods and styles may vary considerably, because they are not regulated by the curriculum. Teachers may adopt different kind of pedagogical styles and approaches to teach the material defined in the curriculum, in the text books etc. Certain contents have to be covered, but how this is made, is strongly up to teacher’s choice. The teachers, who were observed, are rather conventional in this sense. Their teaching relies quite firmly on ready-made material at hand, on textbooks, handbooks and teaching curriculum. Even thought the teachers do have parts of the lessons that are not structured by the textbook, these parts are limited within the time and space of the lessons which seem to follow quite strictly the instructions of the teaching material.

Various teaching methods are used from conventional lecturing, asking pupils questions about previous lesson or home work assignments and doing exercises in the classroom, to more ‘constructive’ methods, such as use of a meeting form, where pupils engage in discussion and make decisions themselves. The teaching methods are obviously adjusted to the developmental level of the pupils. They seem to depend on whether the pupils are, for instance, second-graders or fifth-graders. The second-graders are taught in a more structured and rigid manner than the more independent fifth-graders.

The meeting form was used, for instance, in Martti’s class of fifth-graders during the observation. The class was writing a story book in a Finnish lesson. They held meetings, where they decided on the story line of the book and on who was to write which part, and on how was it to be sent to the next writer etc. Martti supervised the process and made sure that the meeting was advancing and decisions were made. However, for instance in this case, it was obvious that the limits of pupil’s initiative were clearly drawn by the teacher. When, for instance, time was up for discussion, Martti commanded pupil’s to make a decision. Thus, here the time and space of the activity were quite

40 There is some space for the school and the head master to decide about the allocation of hours of different subjects among the teachers. Teachers should collect the minimum level of teaching hours (compulsory hours) in order to get the basic salary. Extra hours are seen as valuable because they produce extra salary. But teachers are often willing to allocate the hours so that everyone has at least the minimum. For instance, in a small school it could be possible that there is not enough hours for a special teacher and therefore she gets the teaching hours of Religious Education. Naturally, teachers also compete about the teaching hours and especially as the retiring years are approaching teachers want to have lots of extra hours (if they are not too tired) in order to get rather good retirement benefits.
It seems that the active learning pedagogies, such as ‘humanistic-constructive pedagogy’ or such, that emphasise, for instance, the pupil’s initiative, are clearly not something that is promoted in the work of the observed teachers. They seem to be rather conventional and conservative in their choice of methods. This concurs with Simola’s (2005, 461-463) interpretation of the ‘pedagogical conservatism’ being a notable feature of Finnish teachers’ professional ethos. Despite of the broad changes and restructuring tendencies, the teachers seem to rely on the old methods proved to be well-working.

Maintaining the order

Maintaining the order in the classroom is an obvious core activity of the teachers. The methods vary according to the age of the pupils and according to teachers’ styles and approaches. During the lessons the order is kept verbally by ordering pupil’s, telling them what to do and leading their activities. Teachers hold control over class also by walking around in the class room, checking pupil’s work and giving individual help and guidance to them.

Teaching of the second-graders in the classroom of Niina, who teaches also fifth- ad sixth-graders occasionally, is strictly structured by orders of the teacher. When disorders occur, sanctions are put in action immediately. For instance on an occasion, a pupil was reading a text in the classroom and made a mistake. Other pupils found this amusing and started laughing. Niina immediately asked pupils to stop laughing and reminded them that the mistake made was not something to laugh at, and that everybody made mistakes sometimes. This kind of strict control over the moral order and pupils’ behaviour is apparent in Niina’s lessons with second-graders, and also in Tuula’s and Sirkka’s lessons. The misbehaviours are dissected and sanctioned immediately when they occur. Detentions and the kind of sanctions that are executed long after the occurrence are obviously not very suitable for the youngest pupils.

Martti states that ‘a pedagogical leadership in the classroom’ is one of the teacher’s core skills. His order-keeping in the classroom seems to rely on readily established authority and on the order that is, supposedly, built over time with the group. He is quite strict and firm with the demands he places on pupils’ behaviour. He seems to refer to principles and rules in his interaction with the pupils. He uses expressions such as “you should have done this assignment” and “you must [do this and that]”. He states that the pupils should know how to behave, and understand what is positive behaviour, for that is one of the keys to a good life. I mean, if you’re going to do well in the future, in the working life and all, you must know how to behave correctly and politely, and you need to have basic manners.

Tuula’s maintenance of order with her third-graders seems to rely also on readily established authority, but in a different manner than Martti’s. As Martti’s style seems to rely, explicitly and implicitly, on shared principles and rules, Tuula’s style emphasises relationships, empathy and taking other’s feelings into account. Of course, there are unambiguous rules in her class room as well. Nevertheless, she seems to encourage pupils to share their feelings with others more than Martti. This mentality is apparent also in her statement that for her “[i]t would be a very important thing if I could pass on some sort of humanity and consideration towards others”. In addition, it might be connected to her personal life experiences and hardships of having had a child with fatal illness. A similar style is also perceptible with Sirkka, the most experienced teacher, who teaches the second-graders. Sirkka states that a teacher should strive “to create a kind of atmosphere in the

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41 See e.g. Patrikainen 1997.
class that allows the children to be safe and fearless”. For Tuula, a very important thing to accomplish is a state of affairs where “the children can spend a comfortable day here at school”, especially because many of them might live in a stressful situation at their homes.

Niina teaches most of the time second-graders but occasionally also fifth-graders (Visual Arts) and sixth-graders (Religious Education). In a Visual Arts lesson with fifth graders, she seemed to have some problems with order-keeping. The pupils, mainly boys, challenged often her instructions and orders. It seems that as she is a younger teacher and as she doesn’t have established authority in the class of these fifth-graders, who she only occasionally teaches, it takes a lot of effort to achieve order. In addition, she doesn’t seem to have, most likely due to her short work experience, such elaborate accounts and views on maintaining the order as the more experienced teachers do – she places more emphasis on the knowing well the subject contents, when she describes the core skills of a teacher and her strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, she manages to deal with the situations fine.

Lining pupils up is a strategy used when pupils are brought from one place to another. Pupils are, for instance, brought in the dining hall in pair-lines. The meals are also in other respects instances of strict order keeping. First, before going to the dining hall, pupils line up to wash their hands. In the dining hall teachers keep watch that pupils eat all they have chosen to take on their plates and behave well.

During the breaks, teachers take shifts in keeping watch of the children. The teacher is usually just present in the school’s yard and walks around there. The children play games or just talk with each others there. During the observation, there was no need for the teachers to interfere.

The excursions and work outside the classroom

Keeping the order was the main task of the teachers during the observed excursions to the theatre, with Tuula’s third-graders, and to the swimming pool, with Niina’s second-graders. Tuula brought her class to a children’s theatre performance with her two parallel class teachers and their pupils. Pupils biked to the theatre in a line. One of the teachers was driving in front of the line and one in the end of it. Another line was formed in the theatre entrance. Responsibility was shared among the teacher which made the controlling the pupils during the excursion smooth and effortless. Niina did an excursion with second-graders to the swimming pool. She brought the pupils there by bus. Lines were formed when the pupils move from one place to another. At the swimming pool there were swimming instructors who took the responsibility during the swimming. Niina kept watch on the side of the pools.

In the staff room, the teachers plan lessons and other activities alone or with colleagues. They gather around a couple of large tables in the conference space to work there. There the meetings are also held. The meetings that were observed were quite loosely structured discussions. Usually, the headmaster asked the teachers’ opinions on the issues. Occasionally, they also voted on the issues by raising hands.

A lot of informal change of information takes place all around the school between the teachers and also between the teachers and other workers and the head master. The work is organised and managed continuously through these encounters. For instance, the teachers of the parallel classes, who are engaged in close co-operation with each others, tend to, occasionally, briefly discuss on various daily matters between the lessons or sometimes even during the lessons. The parallel classrooms are located side by side, so they are able to reach each other immediately.
**Conclusions on the observations of the everyday work**

The teachers’ work and activities in the school seem to be centred around working with the pupils, maintaining order in the classroom and other settings, and teaching the pupils with various methods. The pattern of the teachers’ activities with the pupils seems to be one in which the establishing and maintaining the order comes first and is sort of a prerequisite for the teaching work.

Considering the order-maintenance, the overall impression is that the pupils are very obedient, at least were during the observations, and do not cause very much problems to any of the teachers. The most of the time teaching and order-keeping seems to go very smoothly and easily, and the teachers and the pupils seem to enjoy the schooldays. Humour and jokes are also present during the days between the teachers and the pupils. Pupils are confident to occasionally make fun of the teacher and vice versa - the atmosphere is safe for such self-expression. The teacher’s personality seems to play a big part. In addition, it is apparent that in every instance the pupils’ safety is well taken care of. They are under constant surveillance during a school day.

The teachers’ work is organised in various meetings, encounter and planning sessions at the staff room or at the corridors or other spaces. The meetings vary in terms of size and formality from the official ones with all the teachers present to the in-official ones held face to face between, for instance, the teachers of the parallel classes.

**The teachers’ accounts on the work environment**

**Large teaching groups as a problem**

The teachers bring large teaching groups up as a general problem. In the school group sizes are relatively reasonable compared to some other schools. Martti has taught very big classes before, once a class of 38 pupils for three months as a substitute teacher, when he was still a student, and in his previous school he had 29 pupils and plenty of problem cases. At present he is satisfied with having 24 pupils. He states that up to 25 pupils it is OK, and it doesn’t affect the teaching methods. To have more pupils in a group has effect on the meaningfulness of the job.

Tuula thinks that she has too many pupils in her class of 26 pupils. It is hard to give enough attention to them individually. According to her the pupils today need much attention.

"That's definitely what I'm not satisfied with, having too many pupils in classes. The children today are so talkative and lively, open and outgoing, and they'd need so much of attention. Quite a few of them have been the apple of their parents' eye at home and they just can't get enough of attention at school then. So that's really the only thing I'd like to... 26 pupils is too much already, 20 should be the absolute limit in the first class, as it takes a lot of energy working in the fuss of a big class.

A notable thing is that the emphasis on individualised teaching methods is not apparent in the teachers’ accounts. For instance, Tuula refers to pupils need for attention, but not to curricular or pedagogical need for giving it to individual pupils. The teachers have enough trouble to giving the pupils the basic attention individually.

**Work-life balance: the tiring work of a teacher**

The big groups among other issues, such as growing number of pupils with special needs, hardship in their personal lives, feelings of inadequacy due to various issues, contribute to the teachers’ workload. Tuula feels that she has often been tired because of the hectic workdays and family worries and therefore needs a plenty of rest.
I sometimes question the sense of all this, being so tired after the work day. ...It's all that hubbub and hurly-burly that does it.

Nevertheless, Tuula also feels that her job has been a means to manage with her hardships. It has been a sort of a refuge for her, where she has been able to concentrate on something else than on her family worries.

Niina tells as well that she feels extremely tired after the school-days. She feels that that she is in a hurry all the time and gets the feeling of inadequacy.

Sometimes after the workday I feel my head's going to explode, I mean, all that going on all the time, several irons in the fire, and... But I've been holding on just fine, there haven't been any signs of exhaustion, I mean, not total, but it is quite tiring, at least now that I'm studying almost all the time besides the work.

In addition, she states that she should get better in her ability to tolerate failure.

[S]o that you wouldn't always have to get there, try to reach perfection, like with the pupils, too. You should accept it that things don't always succeed perfectly. I tend to keep dwelling upon things that don't go as expected. So I could develop in that sense.

Martti also reports that he feels always inadequate, and in order to cope with this, he has to find motivation to prepare himself well.

I always feel somewhat inadequate, as there are so many, you have to teach so many different subjects. But it's partly about finding the motivation to prepare then, get knowledge.

He often finds the teacher’s job quite tiring, but it seems that he has still energy to participate in his hobbies, dancing among others.

Many times I wondered that after driving the lorry for 14 hours I still had the energy to do other things, but very often I'm really dead after a school day. I need to get some rest and take a nap when I get home. I have all kinds of hobbies in the evenings, but it's just so [...].

It seems that he gets easily motivated on the things he loves, for instance, on organising pupils’ plays and performances and doing creative things with the pupils.

Sirkka emphasises the importance of taking care of oneself and one’s physical condition and strength as means of succeeding in the work.

[I]t's having the strength that counts. It's a basic thing. I mean, if you have the strength, then you're happy and on a good mood, and you're able to be there for the children in the class in all situations. But if you're tired, you're physically in a bad condition, then you're nervous, and that creates a tense atmosphere in the class right away.

One has to consider the fact that large group sizes and teacher’s workload have been topical and focal issues in the teacher’s professional discourse. This discourse might contribute to the fact that the teachers tend to bring these issues up. They seem to have quite a clear view on adequate group sizes. Their views on workload are, on the other hand, more scattered. They seem to connect the coping with the workload to their own personal abilities such as motivation, physical (and mental) fitness, and for instance, to the ability to tolerate failure. It is hard to say, whether these accounts are due to the general emphasising of the issue of coping in the work or talk about work-related stress,
or due to a real increase in the teachers’ workload – especially, because one gets an impression that these things were in relatively good shape in the school, and the teachers were generally very satisfied with most aspects of their working conditions.

The teachers’ accounts on work community and co-operation with colleagues and others

The teachers describe their school and work community in very positive terms. The female teachers find the atmosphere good, the colleagues very nice, and the headmaster excellent. Martti also considers atmosphere being “very nice” but also “quite neutral”. He does not seem to experience atmosphere in such personal terms as for instance Niina does describing that she feels almost like home in the school.

Niina praises the ambience at her work: “This is a familiar place with a really good atmosphere”. She used to work as a school assistant at her present school for a year. During that time she familiarized herself with the school community and found that working there is extremely nice. Now it feels like home, at least almost. She thinks that relations and atmosphere are wonderful at the school though from her point of view teacher don’t spend that much of their spare time together.

Nevertheless, for instance, Tuula states that she spends some of her spare time with her older lady colleagues. It seems that especially Tuula and Sirkka, who had been working in the school for a long time, have found positions in school community where they feel themselves quite comfortable.

Intensive co-operation with parallel class teachers

The female teachers, Sirkka, Tuula and Niina are engaged in close co-operation with their parallel class teachers. Sirkka says that there has happened a major change in the way the colleagues co-operate with each other. In the old days teachers just did their work inside the classroom and kept their knowledge tightly in as their without much discussion or sharing with the colleagues. But after moving to her present-day town she has realised that there is an atmosphere of common planning

and sort of keeping your doors open, and talking about how we've done with this and if there's any help for that. I can't really say, I suppose it could be that the general development has been like that. But here in our school we do plan nowadays, there are three of us teachers planning every week, on Mondays. So that's great support and a kind of relief. But even in this school I've been working without a contact to parallel class teachers, without any common planning.

Tuula has worked in a parallel class for 11 years with one colleague and for 6 years with another colleague. The collaboration has been both very intensive and extensive. She plans the teaching, examinations and pupil assessment in company with these colleagues, so that their classes progress in a same pace. They also share teaching methods and other ideas and make plans for class excursions together. In addition, they have exchanged their teaching tasks in certain subjects, such as Religious Education and Handicrafts, according to their strong areas. Finally, these women are good friends and often see each other in their spare time as well.

I see it as an asset and an aid in this job, working together, absolutely. It gives you many new ideas, and then, when one is worn out, another one can say that this is what we’re going to do now. So it is a strength saving way. There’s always someone who can think of something, and if there isn’t, we work together to solve the problem.

Niina and her parallel class colleagues have almost semi-formalised their co-operation, with thematic weekly planning etc.
The cooperation is continuous, really, but we usually begin each week with a sit-in, one hour every Monday morning. And there we, the first thing in the autumn we make a weekly plan, a themed plan for each week of the school year, and then we like meet every Monday, and plan the upcoming week in more detail. Everyone has been able to present their ideas, too, about what to do. So, the support from there has been priceless. I've been talking about this with my fellow students, and indeed the first couple of years have been the toughest, but I've been quite safe here with them.

Lack of co-operation

On Martti’s form, there is not much cooperation between parallel classes. He would like to have more cooperation, but he thinks that time is not right for that.

Perhaps the atmosphere just isn't right, or we don't have a desire to work together. Of course it would be nice to cooperate, as we have three parallel classes. But if people are pedagogically far apart, and if they're not ready to spend time on planning together, I mean, I'm here quite often in the afternoons, planning. And the colleagues don't like to do that, they want to do planning at home. So it's quite difficult to work together then. It would be nice of course, if I had colleagues who'd like to do that.

Thus, the prerequisite for cooperation seems to be shared views and understandings regarding the work. Nevertheless, Martti thinks that the basic cooperation is alright, and help is available, when needed. He considers atmosphere being “very nice, quite neutral”. However, he doesn’t consider any of his colleagues being inspirational for him because one can really rarely see others working with the children.

Each of us work in our own way, in our own classes. […] We all teach behind our own doors.

There seems to be an established culture of co-operation, birth of which Sirkka states having witnessed, in the school, as for instance Tuula states that she has worked for 11 years with her parallel class teachers. However, it seems that the teachers have differing interests concerning co-operation, and are able to work without engaging in it if they will. In Martti’s case, this causes for him an obstacle to fulfil his wishes for co-operation with his parallel class teachers.

Co-operation with others

The teachers report that they have to cooperate with the outside colleagues only if there are problems with some pupils. For these occasions, there is usually a pupil welfare group that consist of the school nurse, the school welfare officer, the special education teachers, the headmaster. Sometimes the class teacher is also invited to participate a meeting, but once the group has a hold on the issue the teacher’s presence in not necessary anymore. The pupil welfare group contacts the social authorities and the parents if necessary and the class teacher might be invited in the meeting again.

Regarding the schools co-operation and communication with the social sector, Martti states that the co-operation is not necessarily easy. This is, he thinks, because of their higher threshold, when it comes to intervention concerning problematic pupils and families.

I suppose the social sector wrestles with such difficult problems that they have to keep quite a high threshold for custody cases and stuff like that. It's just that I've got an impression that they keep following the children's situation far too long, until something concrete happens then.

By contrast, the cooperation with the school nurse and the school welfare officer goes, from his
point of view, very well. He sees that the problem in school nurse’s and school welfare officer’s work is the lack of time.

I've worked really well together with the school nurse; it's just that she hasn't got enough time either. I mean, if you have pupils who would need a bit of counselling, or if they have something of a psychological problem, the school nurse should have time to concentrate on these pupils. But at the moment the basic issues take up all the time, vaccinations and all kinds of procedures, and there just isn't enough time for preventive work. There's the same problem with the school welfare officer as well, there are far too many pupils to be able to really go into the issues, you know, on a personal level.

Tuula states similarly that a school welfare officer and a school nurse cannot visit the school often enough. In addition, she would like to see more resources put in special education as there is, according to her, a notable increase in need for that.

The teachers’ accounts on working with the parents

Sirkka states that parents have become more active and the schools have become more open and accessible to parents. The teachers meet the parents more often, message booklets are travelling between school and homes in pupils’ rack-sacks, and private conversations are arranged between the teachers and the parents. In the old days, the interaction between the teachers and the parents was much more formal and the teachers were more respected and had a lot more authority.

Tuula thinks that co-operation with parents is a big help in the job. Her experiences have been quite positive.

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to get to know the pupils' backgrounds and cooperate with the parents?

Tuula: Absolutely. I've been calling a few a homes this week, to talk. It always helps to know the family and to have good communication with them, it's a big help in this job, definitely.

Interviewer: The families are mostly willing to cooperate then?

Tuula: I must say that I've primarily had awfully nice families, I really haven't had bad experiences at all during the whole time. The parents have been so compassionate and cooperative and on the same page, so it's been quite alright. This morning we were sitting in a meeting and the atmosphere was so warm, and we saw eye to eye on things. Most of them are really nice, fortunately.

Niina also has managed to build up good relations with the pupils’ parents.

I've met all the parents, my pupils' parents. We've had sit-ins in the first form and in the second form as well, 15 minutes with all the parents. All of them have participated, from every family, and at this point I have a very positive feeling, at least I haven't had any of those so-called problematic parents so far.

In the early years of his career Martti used to cooperate with the parents a lot. He arranged several parents’ evenings, hiking and other stuff outside the class room. Since then, he states that he has started to keep consciously distance to the parents in order to keep his privacy and leisure time intact.

But then I, somehow I began to feel that the parents got too close, started calling me on
inconvenient times, the teacher got too close and they felt they could contact me because of this and that, I mean, even really minor matters. And then I started to feel that it was a bit annoying. I've been quite conscious about keeping the distance nowadays, I mean I take care of the obligatory parents' nights, and if somebody phones, I answer, and I phone them myself if the situation calls for it, whether it's good or bad.

He has also worked with quite difficult parents. According to his experience, when he has had problematic pupils, the real problem has often actually been the parents. He thinks that many of the pupils' problems are due to parents' disability to set limits to their child.

They haven't been able to set the limits, and then, when the school has done it, it's been difficult for the parents to accept that. We've been in a sort of cross-fire then. Sometimes we need to discuss if it's worth detention when a boy throws a chunk of Blue-Stick to another boy's eye. I myself don't tolerate violence. And if a mother thinks that it must have been an accident, then it's not like we see eye to eye on things.

Here, Martti describes the conflict with the parents in terms of principles, which is consistent with his professional style: disagreement raises on the issue of what is considered as deliberate violent act and what as an accident.

Also Sirkka connects the problems to the ignorance of the parents and their inability to understand their children’s needs.

I've been fed up with all this during my career, there have been troublesome, difficult classes, and difficult parents, and ill children, and ignorant parents, who haven't understood that their own child needs help.

Martti’s relation to parents is quite different compared to that of Tuula’s and Niina’s. Martti keeps conscious professional distance to them. He reports nowadays only taking care of the obligatory parents' nights and emerging problem-situations. Tuula and Niina are more active in promoting their co-operation with the parents, as for instance Niina reports meeting all the parents personally on a regular basis. They also describe their relationship to the parents in emotional and intimate terms. Martti’s co-operation seems to be limited in the problems and conflict situations, and is described in terms of norms and principles. These different styles of co-operation are connected the obligation of being initiative in co-operation with parents that is stated in the new national core curriculum. Tuula and Niina seem to accommodate to this new demand, Martti seems to resist it.

The teachers’ accounts on management, monitoring and supervision of their work

The teachers find their work very independent. The teaching curriculum, which is the national core curriculum, alongside with other rules and regulations, provides a frame for the classroom work within which the teachers state being free to realise their own ideas. Tuula comments on the curriculum, and sees the uniformity on national level as a good thing.

Well, the curriculum is brand new and already in use, so you can't do anything about it. Of course, within the school, all of us are able to influence on the emphasis and stuff like that, and we talk about those things a lot, but the frame practically comes from above. Which is good as it is, concerning the whole of Finland, it's not so wild what is taught on each form, but...It's good, really, to have the instructions.

According to Martti, it is obvious that the curriculum sets the basic framework at school but there is plenty of pedagogical autonomy in teacher’s job regarding teaching methods and emphasis of
Well, of course in principle the teaching curriculum sets the frame for what has to be taught, so naturally you can't teach whatever you want. That's clearly what steers the teaching of course, but then again there's a lot of pedagogical freedom, I mean, you can decide how you take care of all that and in what depth, that is, how many lessons you want to spend on each issue. ...so it's mostly up to yourself to decide what to emphasize.

Sirkka has witnessed the change in the monitoring of teacher’s work in the beginning of the 1990s. She states that the rather loose internal responsibility to develop, plan and evaluate one’s work has substituted for the former stricter, though occasional, control by the school inspectors.

AFTER THAT [change in the inspection system] you started to notice that your own control is more important, your inner control. I mean, gosh, it's not my own control if I write things in the diary, it's in my head. It's not like work morale would have weakened, on the contrary, you started to take responsibility yourself, and you were much more conscious of your own morals. Naturally, it's not about, you know, just writing something for the sake of writing it, but it's what you do, concretely in your work, that's what counts.

Sirkka prefers the way that overall monitoring of teacher’s work has changed during the past twenty years or so due to restructuring in educational administration.

Martti emphasises, similarly to Sirkka, the meaning of the strong working morale since the work isn’t too much monitored.

Makes you feel that every teacher should have a very strong working morale to take care of all the duties then. If someone doesn't, it's not much we can do about it. It easily sort of goes to a situation where people accept that someone just isn't taking care of their duties. And that's just the way it is then.

Also, Niina states that because the work is very independent the teachers are also responsible for their own doings. The headmaster is not constantly monitoring them though she is the immediate superior. However, they have annual ‘development discussion’ with the headmaster which is one occasion to discuss and possibly correct things if needed.

The teachers consider parents and colleagues as a more important external control of the work than the headmaster, whose task the supervision of the teachers officially is. Sirkka states that,

of course officially our work is controlled by the headmaster, but it's not like [s]he'd be able to do that in practice, really, except when there's stirring of some kind, good or bad. Quite often it's something bad, parents contacting the headmaster or something like that. That's one of the control areas.

Considering colleagues she states that

there's quite a strong control coming from the colleagues, that's really quite strong. [...] I feel that we're pretty aware of our colleagues, like conscious I mean, we know what type of persons they are, or what kind of teachers. Who takes care of their business and how, and what the work morale is like, sort of, I mean it's there, even if we don't talk about it, it's still there, the knowledge, the awareness. And of course you're aware of the fact that others are controlling you, and that sort of keeps you going the right way.
Sirkka describes the control as an awareness that is scattered all around in relations between colleagues.

**Participating in decision-making**

The decision-making in the school is rather open, though not formally democratic since the headmasters basically have all the formal decision-making power in the Finnish schools (Pennanen 2006, 71-6). The headmaster does not give orders from above and all the things, such as purchasing, division of lesson hours and combination of classes, are thoroughly discussed and negotiated so that all the teachers have an opportunity say their opinion. Niina states that,

> well, what we do here is that the headmaster presents a lot of issues [s]he could decide alone, too, [s]he presents them to us on the field, in teachers' meetings, asking for our opinions, and sometimes we've even voted on them to see what the majority thinks, and decided on the basis of that then. [S]he's really quite flexible and lets us to be heard, too.

Also Tuula feels that she has enough opportunities to participate in the decision making processes. She finds the school functional in a sense that everybody can influence the matters there.

> We discuss a lot of things in meetings. I mean we have quite a functional school, everybody can influence here if they just want to. We discuss and... I mean we don't have a dictator here to rule from the top. Of course it's needed in some issues, but anyhow, we have a possibility to influence the matters here in our own school, and we manage to do that in quite a positive atmosphere.

However, she realises that there are many things that she cannot really have an influence on, as these are decided somewhere further off, at the headmaster’s office or a local school office, in the town board, council or executive committee, in the National Board of Education or in the Ministry of Education. However, she sees the common curriculum is a good frame within which there is some independence and autonomy to carry it out.

> Of course the teaching curriculum is quite authoritative, and the headmaster makes the timetable, places the lessons, and the amount of the lessons is dictated by, well, naturally, the financial situation and things like that. So there's this frame given from the outside, and then you can decide how to carry it all out.

The financial matter, purchases and such are taken care of by the headmaster. Distributions of lesson hours, practical matter, leaves and such, and excursions, as far as they depend on the financial issues, are decided by the headmaster as well. Nevertheless, considering teaching work the teachers, their scope of individual decision-making and independence seems to be very broad, as also Niina states that

> concerning the teaching work itself, there's not much you couldn't decide by yourself. Starting with the set books, we're allowed to choose them ourselves.

**The teachers’ accounts on the changes in the working conditions of the school**

Sirkka thinks that the whole culture of school has changed. It has turned into a more open, relaxed and free organisation. In addition, nowadays it is thought that the problems that the teachers may have with some children and families are not personal problems of the teachers, but indications of more general problems. Thus, the issues are discussed and shared more openly with the colleagues.

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The position of headmasters has become managerial and powerful since the beginning of the 1990s especially due to increasing demands for school-specific curriculum, development work, evaluation and financial administration.
and one teacher is not blamed of having these personal problems with someone. However, she does not deny that there might be personal aspect involved with these problems as well, but in general she considers that the problems the teachers encounter at school are reflections of the more general problems of the society as a whole.

Teaching and learning

Regarding her basic tasks as a teacher Tuula does not conceive a lot of change.

*So teaching the first and second formers to read, it’s pretty much the same every year. No significant changes are made there. ...It’s usually the same with the first class: doing a lot, making stuff, playing games, reading fairy tales. And that’s pretty much the same.*

Regarding the teaching and learning she reckons that nowadays there is more emphasis on exploring and experimenting than before, but that this is not easy to arrange with big classes. In addition, in these days pupils are more diverse than before, their level of proficiency varies and there are more and more learning difficulties. Consequently, the teacher’s work is increasingly demanding.

Martti states that today the pupils are fluent with modern equipments such as computers, cameras and video cameras. He recalls that in his time they just read and filled in the work book, and excursions to the nature in biology or geography lessons were rare, whereas nowadays they go out a lot to examine things and then discuss about issues together. In addition, they are more talkative and active than before. Related to this, also the teacher’s authority has decreased, according to Martti.

However, as noted earlier, the ‘active learning pedagogies’ seem not to be immanent in their talk at all. They talk about teaching and learning in rather traditional terms.

Pupils with learning difficulties

The teachers state that there has been growth in the number of learning difficulties during the last few years. However, they also suspect that the growth may be due to more precise diagnoses or research methods. Martti states that

*it is visible on the national level that the amount of special education given has doubled, or has it increased even more than that. I suppose the amount of special education pupils has grown strikingly then. Or is it just that they are more precise in giving diagnoses nowadays? ...I suppose there have always been reckless parents, but I feel that somehow there's more of this recklessness nowadays.* (M67)

Also Niina mentions the increasing number of children who need special support.

*I mean, there are more of those who need special support, I think, or could it be the research methods have developed so much that they are found more easily nowadays. But it's funny, like during those years when I worked as a school assistant ten years ago, it's exactly ten years ago this autumn, I mean the number of these special needs pupils has grown by leaps and bounds since that. And there's been even more during these four years. I don't know the reasons for that.*

Immigrant pupils

Tuula says that since 1983 there have been Vietnamese, Russian, Turkish and some other individual immigrant pupils in her school. And these immigrants involve some additional cultural and
language challenges. For instance, in some cultures, contrary to the Finnish culture and law, the physical punishment of children is allowable. Then the teachers’ strategy has been not to contact the family in minor matters, because they are afraid that the child would be physically punished. The other teachers did not bring up this issue.

New, additional tasks

The new tasks, such as planning, documenting and strategy work, have been introduced during the teachers’ careers. The teachers have quite an extrinsic stance towards these tasks. They find them useless and irrelevant for their work. Tuula claims that today there is a greater amount of extra paperwork than before.

Oh yes, there’s been indeed much more [paperwork] during the past four or five years, compared to what it was ten years ago. In addition there are more and more strategy meetings. ...The strategy issues are very much ‘in’ right now.

Martti is irritated about the increasing and, according to him, irrelevant paperwork during the past few years.

That's [paperwork] clearly something that has increased since I was in my first job. Yes, I feel that I have to be filling in all these questionnaires and reports and what not all the time, and they're just, well, I suppose they have these job satisfaction inquiries and stuff like that in other places as well. And pondering and mulling over things for each form, each class, there's clearly more of that. It's sort of invisible work as it doesn't show anywhere really, it doesn't affect the pupils, and yet you need to have all those pieces of paper filled in and returned to the headmaster.

Furthermore, development, evaluation and curriculum assignments, which were introduced some time ago, are time-consuming. Moreover, Tuula thinks that these new duties do not in fact make their job any easier - quite the contrary, it actually hinders them to accomplish their more important work.

Of course the job has changed a lot nowadays. There’s awfully much of filling papers and all now, and all kinds of strategies that aren’t making our job easier. And we’re always making these evaluations and assessing the teaching plans and all, which is not actually developing our job at all, so that’s not a good thing, not a nice thing. If only you’re left in peace to do the classroom work that would be good.

Nonetheless, Tuula argues that the headmaster has shown the teachers sympathy and confidence, there is not so much paperwork than in many other schools in town.

The teacher’s do not appreciate at all at the new tasks, strategy work, evaluation and development work, which are additional to teaching and working with the pupils. They all see these tasks as burdens from which they would gladly free themselves. They see that the work done does not actually develop their job at all. Quite contrary, it irritates and strains them. In addition, they do not explicate much of the contents of these new tasks. Thus, they seem to have quite an extrinsic relation to them.

Resources, equipment and training

Since the early 1990s economic recession the school finances and resources have continuously been tight and uncertain, as Tuula states.
Interviewer: And the financial situation has gone worse here?

Tuula: Yes, in everything. During the depression years we economized and thought it would just be for the depression, but it sort of stuck then. Every single year it's the same, at the end of the year we're always afraid that the money is, that we've spent too much, and so we're very careful with the money all the time.

Thus the school and the teachers have had to spend money very carefully. For example, they have to recycle the old text books and atlases and be very cautious when buying new supplies and equipment to the school. Tuula claims that the school computers are outdated.

For instance the computers in this room are good as trash already; they're no good at all. ...We have a computer class, but they, too – they're five years old and that’s hopelessly too much.

Nevertheless, for instance, Niina is quite satisfied with the facilities of the school.

[T]he school is modern, a lot of equipment and teaching equipment. And what I've seen in those other schools, I think this is as good as it gets.

Tuula complains that there is not enough training so that she could develop new skills required by teacher’s work nowadays.

There's never enough. If you pay for it yourself, then there is. Then there are these things offered by the municipal, they're usually all. Well, I suppose the municipal doesn't offer much itself, but I mean when it arranges these tutors and all, they cost money and then you can't afford to participate. Maybe one or two teachers from each school are allowed. Of course the purpose is that everyone could participate during the school year, but not all of us can take the ones we want. The free ones we can, of course, but not the ones with a charge, really. (W76)

Especially, she considers that her shortcomings and thus desires for further training are in the areas of computer skills and special needs children, especially “hyper-active children” and all of those “who stay behind” and those with learning disabilities. She insists that teachers would “practical methods to help those children”.

In addition, the teachers claim that the school nurse and school welfare officer do not have sufficient time resources to meet the current demands, such as increasing number of pupils with special needs.

Conclusions on working conditions

In this chapter, we approached the teachers’ working conditions in a broad sense, first describing the everyday work, and then analysing the issues the teachers bring up and, thus, find focal as contributing to their working conditions.

Considering the teachers’ activities and their main tasks at the school, it can be concluded that, quite naturally, the teachers’ activities are concentrated in teaching and educating the pupils and keeping the order in the school. The teachers seem to have quite a critical and also extrinsic stance towards the additional tasks of documenting, curriculum work, evaluating and developing brought by the educational restructuring. They would like to concentrate on their main task of teaching. They are quite satisfied with the management and with their head master, who tries, according to their view, not to strain them with too much paperwork. In addition, the head master brings the important issues to the teachers to decide, even though she has the formal decision-making power. This, no
doubt, contributes to the overall atmosphere of the school community, makes it open, as it encourages the teachers to bring up their concerns.

The teachers have a great freedom deciding on their teaching methods, and also on the organisation of their work according to their own interests and strengths in co-operation with their colleagues. They can also decide whether to engage in co-operation or not, according to their own preference. As they find their work not much monitored and controlled, they emphasise the importance of a strong working morale. The control of their work is, according to their views, more indirect, coming from through pupils and their parents and through their colleagues, than directly from the head master. In addition, the control can be seen as scattered around the school community, so that everybody monitors each other, as the school community is so open.

The teachers’ working conditions have changed due to the reforms, especially due to one that took place at the beginning of the 1990s. According to Sirkka, crucial change regarding the monitoring of the teachers’ work took place then, as the school inspectorate was abolished. Tuula states economizing and tight resources have prevailed at school since the recession. In addition, the teachers state that there is more cooperation both with the parents and with the colleagues. The teachers’ professional habitus, their differential dispositions, inclinations, interests, preferences and aptitudes, contribute to the ways of responding to the changes. Martti is a teacher who relies on his work on shared norms, rules and principles, in his relation to both the pupils and their parents. He likes also to keep professional distance to the pupils and parents, and limits his co-operation with the parents to the problem situations. The female teachers, Sirkka, Tuula and Niina are more initiative in their cooperation with the parents (and also, supposedly, with colleagues), which concurs with their habitus, their professional style and inclinations, which emphasises relations in emotional terms and consideration towards others. All in all, the teachers have a great degree of freedom to accommodate or resist the changes brought by the restructuring according to their inclinations.

4.2. Professional knowledge

In this chapter the teachers’ responses to their professional knowledge are examined. Professional knowledge is here approached as socially conditioned practice, in which the structural, objectified features of professional knowledge and the teachers’ habitus, embodied dispositions, interests, aptitudes etc. encounter. The teachers’ professional knowledge is institutionally and officially defined and determined in legislation, teacher training and education, curricula, textbooks, teachers’ manuals etc. There the demands and requirements are set, and based on the institutional legitimacy of the state. The teachers’ professional knowledge is also defined and determined unofficially, socially and culturally in shared symbols, ideas and practices.

The teachers’ tasks and duties are various, as are the knowledge and skills needed to carry out them. As noted earlier, the teachers’ core tasks seemed to be teaching, educating and maintaining order in the classroom and in other settings. In addition, to carry out their work in the classroom, a lot of planning, preparations, evaluating and documenting has to be made. Often this is made in close co-operation with the parallel class teachers and other colleagues. Also the co-operation with the pupils’ parents is a part of their duties, increasingly. Participating in decision-making and common planning and also participating in training are their occasional duties.

As we look at the teacher’s knowledge as socially conditioned practice, we are not looking at how they use knowledge and skills or whether they have sufficient knowledge to carry out their tasks, instead we are paying attention to how do they perceive and respond to their knowledge and skills, and what knowledge and which skills they appreciate and consider as essential and focal to the
teacher’s profession. This we are able to discern by looking at their actions and accounts. Their actions, expressions and statements are products of their accumulated and ingrained dispositions, interests, appreciations and preferences that form their habitus. Their habitus are formed by past practices in different settings, especially, in their professional education and training, in their work and career, and also in their personal lives.

Acquiring the essential skills and knowledge

The teachers’ talk about their professional learning in terms of a distinction between theoretical knowledge acquired in teacher education and training, and practical knowledge acquired through practicing teacher’s profession and also in hobbies and activities in their personal lives. They all state that the teacher education offers the foundation for knowledge and skills of the job, but that there are also a lot of things to be learned only through the practice. For instance, Niina states that, well, of course the education, I mean, it offers the basis for the job, but I think it's the practice that teaches a lot more, or at least helps you to apply the learned things. All along the way you notice that there are so many things here, like planning the curriculum for example, one of those main issues, for which you're not given any tools whatsoever in the university, or encountering the parents, so yes, there's a lot this job itself teaches. You learn here by doing.

Tuula tells also that she learned a lot by studying educational sciences, but in addition to that, and perhaps more importantly, she has accumulated plenty of knowledge and skills through the common sense, the every day experience and learning by doing. She thinks that books, lectures and studying were the basis on which the practical proficiency has been build.

The teachers have also acquired knowledge and skills useful to their work in their personal activities and hobbies. Martti states that he has learned in addition to dancing and music skills also computer skills in his free time. He believes also that teacher’s enthusiasm may spread to pupils and “if the teacher isn't interested in anything, that will reflect to the pupils as well, and they won't be interested either.”

The teachers’ emphasise learning by doing, by practicing the profession. This emphasis is also partly due to a real need, because, as Niina states, the university education doesn’t provide sufficient tools for, for instance, encountering the parents, planning the curriculum and other additional tasks, supposedly, decision-making processes and administrative tasks, in which the teachers have to participate. The emphasis is also due to the habitus of the teachers, their dispositions which are related to their positions in the fields they engage in professional struggles.

The core skills and knowledge of the teacher

The teachers bring up various skills and areas of knowledge as important to their work. Martti emphasises the “pedagogical leadership” skills in the class in addition to the “methods of information retrieval” and their passing to children. Furthermore, he considers that the ability to motivate and even coerce pupils to learn is an important skill. Tuula mentions group handling skills and target setting as essential skills, in which she also thinks that she is quite good at. She states that the knowledge of school subjects is unavoidably quite superficial as there are so many of them. Also Martti is concerned about his knowledge of school subjects. He thinks that it is about having motivation to acquire knowledge on them. If you don’t have motivation, you are not able to get pupils interested in the subjects and to learn. Accordingly, he states that

the teacher’s personality and interests are bound to show in teaching, of course, you emphasize
certain things more, things you’re interested in and excited about.

He thinks also that being personally interested in something leads to good results.

These things go hand in hand, what you want to develop in yourself, of course. That’s an area [music] I’ve trained a lot, and I have very good skills to teach it and to get some results as well.

For Niina linguistic skills are most essential because they are connected to all other subjects. According to her view, mathematics is also closely connected with linguistic skills. The subjects she considers as her strong points are crafts and textile work, but also natural sciences. Later she adds that the pupil know-how, problem solving skills and organising skills are important too and that she is quite good in those areas of knowledge and skills. Niina differs from other teachers, as she places emphasis on teaching and knowledge on school subjects first, and only then mentions skills related to maintaining the order.

Niina doesn’t see order-maintenance as such a problem area as the other teacher do. The other teachers, notably, see the maintaining of order as sort of a prerequisite for teaching, and for them knowledge is something one can always acquire when needed, as Martti states:

You can always get knowledge, so if there’s something you don’t know about, say the Environmental Studies or some other subject, you can always find information in the books.

Here Martti conceives knowledge as merely information, material that can be acquired, if needed – not so much as something that requires reflection or theoretical thinking.

However, he states that chopping skills in sufficiently small pieces, and then putting the pieces together into bigger entities, is something essential in teaching. This is what he has noticed, when he has been trained by very good pedagogues, especially the ones teaching dance or music, but the overall strategy is applicable to other subjects too. The teachers has to be also patient and slow enough, as well as organized and clear, so that also the average and the below average pupils can go along.

The mention ‘methods of information retrieval’, knowledge of subjects, group handling skills, target setting, pedagogical leadership, pupil know-how and problem solving skills as essential areas of knowledge. As noted, the pattern of the teachers’ activity with the pupils seems to be one in which the order in the class has to be first established and maintained in order to carry out teaching of the subjects, by using various methods. The teachers emphasised this also in their talk, in which the opposition between maintaining the order and teaching the subjects is manifest. On the one hand, knowledge, skills and tools of teaching are knowledge of subject contents and methods of information retrieval, as Martti puts it. Maintaining the order, on the other hand, bases on group handling skills, pedagogical leadership and pupil know-how.

By looking at the distinction of these two areas as an opposition parallel to the opposition between teaching and educating, we are able to further analyse the implications the teachers’ preference for these skills have to their professional identities and position. We are able to understand their responses by introducing the opposition between teaching and educating as a mental and social organising principle to which they respond. It is a mental opposition as it functions for the teachers as means to make their professional knowledge and skills understandable, and engage in negotiations with their colleagues, other professionals and laymen, especially parents and guardians.

43 During the thematic interview, when this statement was given, she was studying in a special education teacher programme and thus her mind obviously was occupied with the linguistic questions that were current in her studies.
on their professional knowledge and position. The opposition is also a social organising principle as it is connected to division of labour, especially, between teachers and parents or guardians on the domain of educating, bringing children up in a broad sense. For instance, the ongoing discussion about the educational responsibility of the schools, which we won’t discuss further in this report, is connected to this.

Teaching and educating are the activities in which the teachers are engaged in their work with the pupils - namely, they teach and educate the pupils. For theoretical purposes, we define teaching as an activity of transferring information to the pupils, getting them to learn and internalize skills and knowledge. We refer to teaching as activity of information retrieval, as cognitive activity in which through various, different kind of methods, the teacher gets pupils to remember and use the knowledge provided. Educating refers to the activity of moral education, getting pupils to learn moral principles and values, giving them keys to a good life. For instance, maintaining order in the classroom seems to rely on and enhance principles of fairness, equity and justice.

As the opposition between the areas of skills and knowledge is parallel to the opposition between teaching and educating, also opposition between theory and practice, theoretical professional education and learning by doing can be seen as somewhat parallel to it. Here also, the teachers seem to prefer the latter.

The teachers emphasise the importance of personality and interest in work. According to Martti, the teacher’s enthusiasm and interest in the subject motivates also pupils to learn. As the teachers see the personality and motivation as essential to their work, their concern about their abilities is placed on these areas. Martti ponders about how to get motivated. Niina states that she has to deal with her tendency to feel inadequate, as she is constantly striving for perfection. Sirkka emphasises the importance of physical (and mental) fitness as means for keeping herself motivated and able to carry out her job.

The principle opposition of educating and teaching can be seen as manifest also in the opposition between personal abilities connected to personality and mere technical skills and knowledge. As the teachers bring up personality as an essential professional tool, and show extensive concern for the domain of their personal mental and physical abilities, they, also here, give preference to domain of educating. They implicitly and explicitly connect their abilities as teachers to some personal qualities, as they talk about their personal life experiences as means by which they are able to do their work well.

4.3. Social position

In this chapter we will investigate how do the teachers perceive their social position and how do they respond to it. First, the social position will be looked at as perceived by the teachers. We will look at the issues they bring up as relevant contributing to their social position. Then we will look at their social position in terms of their professional habitus, their disposition and preferences, in terms of their position-taking and professional strategies. Their practices are approached encounters between structures, institution that are changing, and their habitus, between objectified and embodied histories.

Social position in terms of historical identification with the upper social strata

Historically, the social position of the teachers has been relatively high in Finland. In the rural
Finland teacher was often one of the most educated persons in the region, and teachers have also often been cultural personas of village communities, whose social status have been high. As the educational level of the population has gradually come up, the teachers’ relative social position has decreased. Urbanisation, migration to urban and suburban areas, has also contributed to this, as in the urban regions the educational level of the population is relatively higher. According to Simola (2005, 459-61), the Finnish teacher tend to identify themselves with upper social strata, more specifically with upper middle class, because of their successful and continuing history of social advancement. Their strong labour union, Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ), have contributed to this by establishing good relationship with the state (ibid. 461).

The teachers mention the overall decrease in their authority in relation to their pupils and the parents of the pupils. To this might contribute both the fact that the parents are more active and aware of, what comes to educational services, and also the prevalent discourse on the teachers’ decreased authority. The change in the authority and respect, especially considering the teachers with less work experience, haven’t supposedly been so dramatic during the last decade. So, it is most probably due to a prevalent way to talk about teachers’ authority and respect s/he enjoys.

The teachers perceive their status in terms of salary. Martti compares his salary to the average salaries of men and considers the adequacy of it.

The salary then, it's a bit, I mean I do think about it sometimes, looking at statistics on the average salaries for men, and seeing that you're below the average. It makes you wonder if the salary is adequate. But on the other hand, it's not that I'm very, I get along with the money I get. And I work a bit on the side of this teacher's job, too, and get some money elsewhere, so I've managed so far. I suppose it would be nice to be able to say that my wages are above average. To have some extra money to waste, if you can say so. If I wanted to buy something, I could just do it. I don't know if that's what brings you happiness, though, I mean, I used to live with a spouse with lots of money, and I noticed that the happiness of life isn't about the money. There are so many other things to it than that.

Also other teachers talk about their salary in rather similar manner, stating that it is enough for them, but it could be higher.

However, it is notable that the teachers do not compare themselves much to other professionals. This is due to the monopoly they hold as providers of education. Their profession fulfils some of the demands of the notion of social closure44, as there are no alternative producers of educational services on the field of comprehensive education.

Social position in terms of what is perceived as the essence of teacher’s profession and professional knowledge

The teachers’ social position can also be considered in terms of their professional knowledge, in terms of the knowledge domains they consider as essential for their profession – in terms of their professional self-understanding. The teachers can be considered having a specific position in division of labour of reproductive work of bringing up the children. We mean, by this reproductive work, the work of making children competent citizens of the state and members of society. This is first of all the work of the families and guardians of the children. The institutions of the welfare state, as the comprehensive education, play both a supportive and functional role in institutional terms, according to the legislation (The Basic Education Act 1998/628): they support the guardians in their educational labour and also fulfil a functional task of supporting “pupils’ growth into

44 See Larsson (1977) and Murphy (1988).
humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society” and providing them “with knowledge and skills needed in life” (Moore et al. 2005, 173). The teachers among other actors, such as kindergarten and pre-school teachers, child welfare clinic, and later, upper level comprehensive school teachers share the workload of educating the children to competent members of the society with the parents and guardians.

Here, we will look at teachers’ work in relation the work of parents, and also other actors, as educators. This division of labour can be approach by looking at the reproductive work of the teachers in terms of the opposition between teaching and educating. This opposition can be used in making visible the limits of the teacher’s expertise. Teaching is the teacher’s task by definition, and the almost self-evident core of their expertise, as it is legitimated by their educational qualifications acquired through professional education. The general impression that is coming through the interviews is that the teachers do not see teaching as a very problematic area. What they bring up more, are the problems of maintaining the order, pedagogical leadership, giving keys to good life etc. namely thing belonging to the domain of educating.

As the teacher emphasise the problems of educating, one can think that this area is essential in their professional struggles. It is a domain they have to constantly reflect on and engage in negotiations on. They engage in negotiations with others, especially parents and some other professional groups, playing parts on the domain or field of educating. The structural changes have altered the relation between teachers and parent, between school and homes. These alterations also alter the conditions in which the negotiations on educating take place. For instance, as teachers and schools are in the new framework curriculum obliged to be active in engaging in co-operation with pupils’ parents, the new forms of co-operation, such as fifty-minute discussions with parents etc., concretely engage teachers to closer negotiation with parents on, for instance, how to educate and bring up children.

The teachers seem to be relatively autonomous in deciding how and to what extent they co-operate with parents. They meet the challenge of structural change that stresses the increase of co-operation, with different kind of professional strategies. There are those who accommodate to the changes, such as Niina who has engaged in close co-operation with the parents, and Tuula who describes her co-operation with parents in emotional terms, as being warm and compassionate. There are also those who resist the changes, such as Martti, who has been reducing his co-operation with parents, and now seems to engage in it only when problems occur. The teachers’ great autonomy is predominant also in their co-operation with their colleagues. They seem to be able to choose whether to engage in co-operation or not, despite of the pressures of the new rationales emphasising co-operation and teamwork.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter, we will draw conclusions on the issues presented and discuss how restructuring contributes to the lives of teachers – that is, what are the significant changes for them. In addition, we will take a look at teachers as representatives of their generations and their professional strategies of accommodation and change.

**The significant changes for the teachers**

The most significant changes that the teachers brought up are (1) the changes concerning resources,
(2) increase in paperwork and additional tasks, (3) increase in the number of pupils with special needs and (4) increase in cooperation with, especially, parents, but also colleagues and others. The teachers with a long work experience had also witnessed (5) the change in the system of monitoring and supervision.

As Tuula states, the resources have been scarce and budgets tight in municipalities since the economic recession of the 1990s. This has meant the recycling of the old schoolbooks and cautiousness in purchases. The teachers agree, for instance, on school computers being out-dated. However, for instance, Niina is very satisfied with the schools facilities and equipment, at least when she compares it to the situation in some other schools. In addition, the equipment seems to fulfil the requirements of the everyday work. Here, one has to consider the discursive effect of the recession on the teachers’ talk. It might be that the discourse of scarcity and tight resources is still remaining, especially, in the talk of those who have experienced the recession, for instance, in the talk of Tuula, who was also the only one to mention the recession.

The increase in paperwork and additional tasks seems to be a topical change for the teachers. The curriculum work was introduced due to the framework curriculum in the beginning of the 1990s. The tasks of planning, documenting, evaluating and working with strategies are brought by the tendencies to increase accountability and efficiency, and by decentralisation of administration and financing during the last two decades. The teachers find these additional duties as useless. Instead of appreciating them, they doubt that they would do any good. The teachers’ relationship to these tasks is quite extrinsic. They are glad that their headmaster does not strain them with too much paperwork, but instead enables them to concentrate on their work.

In addition, the change in the beginning of the 1990s meant the change of the control mechanisms of teachers’ work. Former school inspector visits were replaced by internalised sense of responsibility and by strong working morale, as Sirkka states. All the teachers note that their work is very loosely monitored and controlled. The control and accountability comes indirectly through the possible complaints of the customers, pupils and their parents.

There has been a notable increase in co-operation with the parents. This is due to the educational policies that try to activate homes and schools to engage in closer co-operation with each other. In the National Core Curriculum, in 2004, the schools and teachers are obliged to be initiative in their cooperation with the pupils’ parents or guardians. The teachers seem to differ in their ways of engaging in cooperation with the parents. The male teachers, Martti seems to resist this demand for cooperation, as he has rather decreased his co-operation with the parents, now restricting it only to the obligatory parents’ nights and conflict situation that need his attention. Sirkka, Tuula and, especially, Niina are, on the other hand, very initiative in their cooperation with the parents. Niina meets the parents on a regular basis. To conclude, the teachers’ quite broad professional autonomy contributes to the fact that they are able to either engage in co-operation or not.

The cooperation with colleagues has increased significantly in the beginning of the 1990s, alongside other changes that took place then, according to the most experienced teacher, Sirkka. The female teachers, Sirkka, Tuula and Niina, are engaged in close cooperation with their parallel class teachers. Martti has not managed to fulfil his wishes for such cooperation because his parallels do not want to cooperate. This is a notable thing, as the teachers are very autonomous and independent in this sense, as well, to either accommodate or resist the demand for cooperation. The teachers also take increasingly part to common meetings and decision-making processes.

The teachers note that there has been increase in children with special needs. However, they also suspect that the increase may be not actual increase, but due to more close attention paid on the
issue and more precise diagnoses made. The teachers state that there is a need for additional training in order to work with these pupils. In addition, they state that the school nurse, school welfare officer, and others working with the special-needs pupils lack sufficient time resources. Also, as Martti notes, the social services don’t meet the needs because of their high threshold of intervention. Tuula brings up immigrant pupils as another group of pupils that is demanding.

**The teachers as representatives of their generations and periodisation of the restructuring**

On the basis of the interviews of the three teachers and fieldwork data, it is possible to draw only a few issues in which the teachers’ generational position can be considered as influential. All the teachers were educated in the university level. The teacher education and training surely has changed, but on the basis of the data it is impossible to draw any conclusions. The experienced teachers, Sirkka and Tuula, have witnessed the changes in the 1990s, the enactment of the framework curriculum and consequent start of the curriculum work, and the change in the control and supervision. Sirkka talks about change in supervision of teacher’s work: the former school inspector visits were abolished and replaced by more indirect means of control. In addition, they have lived through the economic recession and the years of scarce resources, which, Tuula states, are still affecting, in a form of persistent tendency to economize.

Considering periodisation, the changes in the beginning of the 90s seem to, in the teachers’ experiences, be a significant threshold. Regarding this, it is possible to distinguish periods in terms of both the structural changes and the teachers’ experiences. The various experiences and accounts of the teachers, considering the change, have been are mentioned above.

**The teachers’ professional strategies of accommodation and resistance**

The teachers’ professional strategies of accommodation and resistance have taken different forms according to each teacher’s habitus, their dispositions, styles, preferences etc. We introduced the principle opposition of teaching and educating in order to approach the teachers’ professional strategies in terms of professional knowledge and division of labour. The teachers tend to engage actively in negotiation on the domain of educating. This is due to the significance of this domain in their professional struggles, in their attempts to hold positions as superior educators of children. Their social and professional position is at stake, especially, on this domain where pupil’s parents and guardians are also significant actors, as they have the primary liability on the moral education of their children. Their position as merely teachers, transferors of information on the domain of teaching, is self-evident in this sense, demanding less attention than educating. The data, however, gives little insight about what this means for the relationship of the teacher and the parents or guardians. The teachers only note that the cooperation have increased. And as noted, some of them seem to accommodate to demands for more active cooperation and some resist these demands. Their responses also seem in this respect relatively concur with their perceptible professional styles and habitus.
Chapter 6

Spanish primary teachers' work and life under restructuring: Professional experience, knowledge and expertise in changing contexts

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1. Introduction

The carrying out of the Spanish case studies followed the objectives set out by the Technical Annex, the guidelines provided by the Finnish partners and the agreements reached at project meetings. The overall aim consisted in getting a better understanding of the intricate relationships between structural changes on the level of the welfare state (restructuring) and its repercussions in teachers’ life, working conditions, professional knowledge and professionalization. More specifically, the objective of WP4 read:

- To get a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well as over time.
- To compare work life experiences and notions of expertise between generations of schoolteachers in European contexts.
- To present ethnographic descriptions and analyses of primary school work and life in different European contexts in order to understand practical professional knowledge at work.
- To contextualise school teachers’ life stories relative to histories of the profession, restructuring of schooling, and social changes in Europe in order to achieve life histories of schoolteachers in Europe.

The school where fieldwork was conducted was chosen on grounds of personal, long standing contact with its current principal. It fulfilled the project requirements of being a primary school with three teachers of different age’s groups willing to collaborate in our research. After a primary visit from our part in order to present the project to a wider group of interested teachers in the beginning of November 2005, finally a music teacher with 5 years of experience, an infant school teacher with 15 years of experience, and the school principal (who also teaches in the school to 6th grade pupils) with more than 30 years of experience agreed to participate. A formal contract – ethical agreement – was signed between the University of Barcelona –CECACE- and each teacher, documenting the mutual responsibilities during the research. Fieldwork started at the end of November 2005 with the first round of interviews and finished in March 2006 with the second wave of interviews. During this 5 month period, three days of observations in the field were held. Although the whole amount of work could have been implemented in less time, extending the research over 5 months proofed to be rewarding: since we stayed in contact with the teachers we were able to follow the developments in the school over a longer period of time further witnessing (although not by first hand observations) the very dynamic nature of the school.

The first wave of interviews was held in a semi-structured manner following the thematic guidelines distributed in the Consortium by the Finnish colleagues. From the guidelines it is apparent that the interview would have its focus on the current work situation of the teachers and only very little on their private - personal, family life and childhood. This “neglect” when conducting the interviews explains in fact the relative lack of data in these areas when compared to the analytical guidelines specified in a later document. Our clear emphasis during fieldwork, analysis and report was on working conditions, social relations at work, and knowledge/professionalization.

As mentioned, actual fieldwork started in early November 2005. The first round of interviews was held by two researchers. Jörg Müller was present in all first interviews with a second researcher who would then do the ethnographic observations and the second round of interviews. The interviews were transcribed and edited in Spanish by the researchers and mutually proof-read. They
were then returned to the teachers for their consent and feedback. As agreed by the Consortium, the first interviews were also translated into English, all being roughly between 90 and 120 minutes in duration. All six interviews transcriptions occupy a total of 82 pages.

After the completion of the first draft of this report, a focus group to discuss the preliminary findings was held. The themes that emerged during the discussion have complemented the material gathered during the fieldwork in the school and the interviews with the teachers. The session of one and a half hour was recorded and transcribed in a summary fashion. The focus group was held during September 2006 and involved two primary teachers with 30 years of experience and one teacher that works since three years as psicopedagogy. The two older teachers had a background in the Inquiry project approach (IPA) (See Hernández, 2002, 2004) as a common approach to teaching and learning in class. This approach offers a necessary alternative to the current fragmented and disciplinary oriented curriculum (Hernández, 1997; Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1998; Beane, 2005). One of them has been working with IPA for almost 20 years in a public school with a high percentage of immigrants, middle and lower class. The other has adopted the IPA approach almost 10 years ago and works in a middle class school. And last, the youngest teacher just started to work as a substitute in a new middle class school at the beginning of this term.

From our own experiences and the material gathered during WP1 and WP2 several basic circumstances of the Spanish educational system and its teachers constituted our contextual background.

- First, the view of an overly academic initial education for teachers that poorly equipped them to cope with the monumental changes schools and society have undergone in the last years would most likely surface in the interviews.

- Second, the lack of adequate human, material resources and administrators and family’s support to be able to develop an alternative educational project to meet the needs of a rather at social risk school population characterized by its cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity.

- Third, although the school is making a considerable effort to work in a more collaborative manner, at classroom level still persist an individualistic approach to teaching, as a person-centered, discipline oriented undertaking.

- Fourth, in spite of the current working conditions, there is a willingness of the school principal and most of the teachers of developing their professional performance under the model of the teacher as reflective practitioner.

- Fifth, a certain preoccupation of teachers with emergent problems of discipline and control of pupils in primary schools.

In part these previous notions have been confirmed by the field work and in part have become more complex and detailed.

Apart from these basic notions and settings of the Spanish situation, which notion of restructuring informed our perspective on the school and the teachers? As already outlined in the first chapter of WP1, “restructuring” as a concept is hard to pin down. Unquestionably, “restructuring” used synonymously to “globalization” forms part of our understanding. As such it refers to the transnational flows of information, services and good driven by Neo-liberal discourse of the IMF and World Bank besides trans-national companies and Information Technology. 45 However, in the

same way that these global processes happen on a macro-level where actors are hard to pin down, restructuring understood as a global phenomena was too abstract in order to enter in a more concrete form in our work. It certainly was present in our understanding but failed to materialize in the research practice with the school and the teachers. To be more precise: it specifically failed in terms to be a meaningful player in our investigation; this is not to say that teachers may not experience the impact of certain global trends like immigration. Indeed this is a decisive factor of the contemporary school situation in Spain. However, the meaning and interpretation of those facts by teachers is largely disconnected from the theoretical causes and explanations some theorists of the field may put forward. In other words: what makes globalization important for teachers are not the dynamics that may produce it but rather how it affects their daily life in the school.

The most palpable notion of restructuring therefore was connected to the national level policy changes in the Spanish Welfare State. Already on that level it gets apparent to which degree it becomes hard to talk about global or even EU level trends. The development of the Spanish welfare state happen relatively late in comparison to the northern and continental welfare states. The historic developments in the 1970s that then are usually considered as having ignited processes of restructuring (oil crisis, IT developments, etc.) are countered in the Spanish case with the start of the construction of the welfare state! Confronted with these hardly overlapping historical developments within Europe lead us to limit further the notion of restructuring to the very policy changes within education. The structuring and re-structuring of the Spanish educational system, its decentralization between the 17 autonomous regions, provided the most concrete notion of restructuring. As a consequence, we have to look on the one hand at the regional policies and how they affect teachers lives. Throughout the interviews and the observations it was apparent that what happens in Madrid, on the level of the central governmental reforms did not translate much into the concerns of the teachers in the school. Local reforms may be much more pressing. On the other hand, the decisive central reform that did affect and still affects to a large degree the teachers in Spain is the LOGSE (1990) which confronted mainly secondary teachers with a whole new student population.

Restructuring, then, was primarily understood on the national and local policy level in relation to education. Although restructuring occurs in the economic field (at least a neo-liberal discourse forms part of the conservative party and the Spanish economy despite its strong growth underwent periods of recession in the past), the commercialization, privatization, or marketization of education in primary and secondary schools or in teacher's professional training is a rather underdeveloped issue. Taking furthermore into account that educational matters on the EU level is still within the authority of the different national governments one is lead again back to an understanding of restructuring that operates on the national/local level its corresponding educational policies.

Notion of knowledge

Which notions of knowledge (both theoretical and practical) are used by the teachers who participate in this research? Which competencies and skills they use in their daily work? How is elaborated and under which strategies circulate and it is transmitted or hidden what teachers know?

46 According to a UN estimate, the number of international migrants increased from roughly 770,000 people in 1990 to 4,800,000 in 2005 in Spain, with Barcelona being one of the three major destinations for these populations. See: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision http://esa.un.org/migration, Retrieved: October 2006.

47 Esping-Andersen may be the most representative for this notion of restructuring, maintaining that the welfare states had limited intervention and only made marginal adjustments. Esping-Andersen, G. (1996). Welfare states in transition: National adaptations in global economies, London: Sage.
In other words, what do we talk about when we explore the possible meanings of professional knowledge?

The first connotation that emerges from our inquiry is the diverse spectrum that defines teachers’ professional knowledge. Teachers’ professional knowledge could be considered as a compendium of curriculum subject knowledge, teaching skills, working experience, social relations in and outside school, intuition, life experience, affective relations, ethical values, and so on. These ‘components’ have circulated through interviews and field work showing us a complex and heterogeneous set of knowledge. In front of this plurality of knowledge sources, how do these teachers cope with what they think they already know and how do they think they should know? Which tensions, hierarchies and contradictions take place among these different sources of knowledge?

The most relevant and useful knowledge is this coming from daily practice. Teachers have mentioned as the most meaningful knowledge this they called as ‘experiential knowledge.’

When they used this term they are talking about the diverse knowledge learned and actualized along their professional and biographical trajectories. This experiential knowledge is connected with a universe of relations: with pupils, colleagues, with the school community and the district social forces. Salgueiro explains that teaching practice is not produced in a vacuum, but in a concrete time and space, by means of specific material and institutional conditions. In the case of these teachers, who work in a school context considered as difficult and problematic, their necessary knowledge is concerned with the creation of control and mediation strategies between or among pupils.

As consequence of the fieldwork our position has been reinforced: teachers are subjects of knowledge, who produce, transform and mobilize different kinds of knowledge. This knowledge is not merely cognitive or instrumental, but includes affective, cultural and social dimensions as a way of structuring the professional and biographical subjects’ experiences.

2. National and Local Context

Political Context

The fieldwork was conducted in a school in Catalonia, one of the 17 Autonomous Communities in Spain. As already described in WP1/2 Catalonia achieved relatively early after the end of Franco’s dictatorship its status as Autonomous Region in an effort to dismantle the previous heavily centralized state structure. Due to its strong cultural identity (including distinct language), Catalonia achieved a quite high autonomy in such key areas as education since 1983. In the year 2001 the complete transfer of competencies from the central state to the local government in terms of education was finalized, with Catalan authorities now administering 90% of the educational budget. However, core competencies such as curriculum are still regulated by the state -55% of the core Catalan Curriculum is decided by the Spanish Government and is common to all Autonomous Communities educational systems. In the same way as teachers are civil servants underlying state law –although they might receive different salaries –Catalan teachers’ salary can be considered as average.

The fragmentation between autonomous regions and split competencies make it in general very difficult to generalize for the Spanish case (or from the Catalonia case to the national level) how
“restructuring” of the Spanish welfare state affects teachers’ lives. One probably has to speak of several processes of restructuring instead of a single central one propelled by national agencies. The literature emphasizes this point, characterizing the Spanish welfare state as “weak.” It has fragmented administrative structure operating over a clearly north-south divided territory and confronts historically grown clientelistic complicities which diminish its role in functioning as mediator of social disparities and exclusions.\(^\text{50}\) One only needs to illustrate this point with the situation in education. Although Catalonia counts as one of the economically strong regions in Spain together with Madrid, Valencia, and the Bask Country, it comes in last in terms of educational spending. In the year 2000 Catalonia investment in education was 2.7% of the PIB, when the mean in Spain was 4.3% and in the European Union, 5.4%.\(^\text{51}\) This low investment gets in part compensated by higher household spending. Only in Madrid and the Bask country families spend a higher percentage of their annual budget for the education of their children than in Catalonia (1.4% versus the 1.13% national average).\(^\text{52}\) Another example of this situation is the investment per student. The Catalan Government expended in this same year 2.993€ per student in primary education and 3.452€ in secondary education. These quantities are the lowest in Spain where the average is 3.180 per student in primary education and 4.272 in Secondary; and far away from the European Union of 15 members, where the average is 3.923€ per student in primary education and 5.660€ in secondary\(^\text{53}\) This low educational expenditure gets then reflected in low educational achievements (although the position of Catalan Students in PISA2003, in reading, was two points above the Spanish mean (483/481), but below Castilla y Leon (499) and Bask Country (497)\(^\text{54}\). The local authorities started to display some political will to change the situation with the recently announced plan to catch up within 5 years to EU level of educational spending.\(^\text{55}\) Despite the intention of the research project to establish the direct links between national processes of restructuring and effects on teacher's lives, it is rather difficult to detect them. They are dispersed throughout various institutional levels and shifting competencies that make it difficult to isolate a clear argument.

The School and its socio-economic environment

Within the Catalonian context research was undertaken in a school belonging to the category of CAEPs (Centres d’Atenció Educativa Preferent- Urban Socially Vulnerable Schools). These are schools which according to the official law approved in 1996 in Catalonia, attend students who cannot reach the objectives of basic education because of their economic, social and cultural conditions. Included are mainly students of ethnic minorities and immigrants. The CAEPs therefore responded to the obligation of the governing bodies to guarantee the right and equality of education established in the Spanish Constitution in 1978. CAEPs count (theoretically) with stronger human and financial resources to be able to provide a more personalized and individual attention to the students with educational difficulties. However, since the approval of Constitution up to the present,

\(^\text{50}\) Ferrera 1996; Rhodes 1997, p.8, 15. Similar the ESWIN report: “As a result, the current situation is one of great diversity, with different actions being taken by different administrative bodies having different structures. In many cases there are insufficient links between them and, together with the flexibility of the system itself, this has led to a situation in which it is difficult to identify and visualize the social services system” (The Spanish ESWIN Social Welfare Summary Fact Sheet, 2000)


\(^\text{52}\) “Cataluña se sitúa a la cola de Europa en cuanto a gasto público en educación”, EL PAIS 27-05-2006


\(^\text{55}\) “Educación dará 894 millones en 2006 a los centros concertados, el 8,5% más” El PAIS 29-11-2005

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only two decrees (the first dating back to 1982) regulate the status of the CAEPs specifically. Since 1998 the numbers of assigned CAEPs have remained stable in Catalonia, being a sign of the lack of attention of the local government. Since the year 2000 the teachers of several CAEP have started to articulate their dissatisfaction with official politics where outdated support measures appear to fail the realities found in those schools.56 Their most important demands include more material and human resources, less bureaucratization, coordination with other social services, and achieving a greater stability in maintaining their staff. As a consequence of this last point they also demand more autonomy when selecting the teachers that come to work to their school. The last political mobilization in Catalonia related to the CAEPs took place in the context of the protest against the educational law propagated by the Spanish conservative party in 2002. With the change of government in the year 2004 the conservative educational project was suspended and in Catalonia no further protest in relation to the CAEPs is known (in contrast for example to Asturias in the North part of Spain).

In our case, the school is situated in a disadvantaged area of Barcelona. The majority of students are Gypsies (50%), together with a high percentage of immigrant students from Morocco, China, and Latin America (30%). Altogether the school has 165 students and 16 teachers. The school counts as “problematic,” first and foremost from the perspective of teachers. The “difficult” status of the school is a constant point of reference that runs throughout the conversations with teachers and the ethnographic material. Questions of control of students, basic rules of interaction and communication between students but also students and teachers are not self-evident Academic teaching and learning, the execution of planned activities often breaks down. One teacher compared the school with an emergency unit; anything can happen at any time that will interrupt class and school routine. The youngest teacher captures the atmosphere:

“Yes I think this is a difficult school. Day to day work is hard. Many conflicts. Quite a bit of violence, many reactions. It’s a school where the objective is not into curriculum. There is part dedicated to the curriculum, but it’s agreed that we do it to the degree that we manage. And the other part is more social. With the environment, trying to modify a little. The neighbourhood, the families. Put emphasis on dialogue, on values. Everybody tries to do more a work of values than specific curricular content.”

At the same time, from the observational notes taken during the first contacts with the school it is clear that how teachers see and position themselves is directly related to how they see their school. It is a school where difficult situations are frequent, an “emergency school” where nothing can be planned in advance. This contextualization of their school conditioned then the first observations by the investigators while in the field.

I went to the school 4 times (the first meeting and the three interviews). Because the teachers frequently refered to the conflicts that happen in the school I started my observations slightly "anxious". What I want to say is, that this preoccupation on my side definitely was a filter on how I interpreted the things that happened. It was difficult to observe the kids without this bias. I realized that when I came back to my home with my own children: they do the same, and usually I see it as something normal at home but I started to see it as quite agressive like in the school. But I also have the impression that the violence or the image that this school has of itself as conflictive, articulates the fundamental aspect of what counts as a good professional.

The activities of teachers are bound many times to the present day/moment. It usually is a reaction

56 http://www.conc.es/enenyament/cd/html/docs/CAEPs.htm
to the necessities and requirements of the concrete situation which has been characterized as highly instable. Long term planning or strategic plans are usually inefficient and void.

As already mentioned, the school is situated in a marginalized area. The neighborhood receives support from social workers; parents that cannot read or write are not uncommon; the family context of the majority of children can be described as instable. Some have family members in prison or just released; we also got to know the case of a mother and daughter who had to hide during several months from their own family; frequently children come late to school (especially after the weekend) because they sleep in. Gypsy culture with its strong male chauvinism and the disesteem of women stands in for the often shown disrespect towards the majority of female teachers. In addition, Gypsies look down on non-gypsies as inferior to their culture, rendering it basically unproblematic to show disrespect or seek openly a confrontation with a (non-gypsy) teacher. Furthermore, as one teacher commented, there is in general a very low esteem of educational goals among Gypsies that furthermore contributes to the sensation among teachers to work under more difficult conditions.

Although verbal and physical violence between students is common in the same way that violence from parents towards their kids is not the exception but rather the rule, teachers usually don't have the sensation of being threatened. On the contrary, the relation with the students is very affective. Hugs and other gestures of care are frequent; bodily contact is a normal element of the interaction and communication between the children and their teachers.\footnote{However, with the help of external counselling by a psychologist, teachers have come to see a relation between the non-existence of physical limits of the body (in the positive as in the negative) and the learning difficulties of the children, that is, their apparent difficulties for symbolic communication.} In other words, although the school has the image of being a conflictive and violent one, teachers usually feel safe.\footnote{Despite the fact that one teacher had to leave the school due to personal threats form the Gypsy community.} The problems are therefore rather situated on the level of lack of discipline in class, conflicts between (often Gypsies and non-gypsy) students, and confronting the instability of the family relations.

Our research fell into a period of fundamental change in the school, principally associated with the change of the head of the school. The new principal has managed over the last two years to cover some ground in disarming the emergency situation of the school. The relations between students but also between students and teachers seem to be more relaxed, less conflictive. Students are less stressed. It is a more stable environment where teachers are not required to constantly act as buffer-zone between students and settle disputes. Although school life has been normalized to some degree, the general situation can nevertheless be characterized as highly dynamic not only on a daily basis with the kids but also between teachers themselves.

Why we decided to choose teachers from this kind of school that can be seen as a non-mainstream one? Our decision was mediated by two facts. The first one has a practical flavor, as mentioned above we have been working with the school principal for almost 10 years. We have followed the school process in the last 4 years, and we have an easy access to the school. However, as previously pointed out, the process of negotiation was conducted with the whole school staff. The second relates to the aims of our research: in this kind of schools we were able to identify, in an extreme form, many of the main changes of teachers’ working conditions in the last few years.

3. Each collaborators life course in a nutshell

In order to write the text more fluently and hence to ease its reading, we gave each teacher a pseudonymous:
• Sophia is the pseudonym for the teacher with 5 years of experience

• Rosa for the one with 15 years of experience

• Maria for the one with more than 30 years of experience.

3.1. Sophia: 5 years of experience: Experiment and transgress

Sophia is 25 years old and a music teacher. Since she was a child she had a strong inclination to music and it was just this interest that made her choose a university career (magisterio). She used to say that she “always” has studied music. Already as a child she had classes in piano, singing of scales and she participated in chores. When she decided to enter university, her intention was to join forces and to combine her vocation for music with the possibility to get to know “other things.” Consequently, after finishing the COU,59 she decided to study music education.

Sofia started working as teacher right after she had finished university. She accomplished her practical training during the last year of her studies in a catholic school in Barcelona and then worked in other cities in Catalonia. When talking about those first years of working she pointed out the different ways in which her work had been appreciated. Whereas she was working in the beginning in a school where artistic education was a fundamental cornerstone of the educational project – and therefore received many resources – she also got to know other schools where music classes were merely recreational and considered as “free time.” For Sophia, however, music always constitutes a rich form of communication. And it was this conviction among other things that brought her into contact with music-therapy.

After having accomplished a postgraduate course in body-rhythm where she got into contact with “expression through the body” and “art-therapy”, Sofia decided to study music-therapy. This experience, besides opening new professional perspectives, made her rethink the aims and scope of her work as teacher. She discovered, for example, the importance to establish the times and spaces that would allow for constructing a “quality relationship” with the students: have time and space to listen, to feel, to touch, and play with the senses.

In contrast to many other teachers who see their profession in terms of a very consolidated choice they have made, Sophia maintains a rather paradoxical relationship. Working as a teacher in music education not necessarily implies for her to “be” a teacher. In fact, when talking with her about a professional career as providing a stable identity, it becomes clear that she is much more occupied with finding new ways. To experiment and transgress are for Sophia ways to make sense of what she is doing. And it was this main concern that also stimulated her to choose the school where is is currently working and which allowed her also to incorporate a social dimension into her work as teacher.

Currently and in addition to her work as teacher, Sofia is studying; she is taking piano, singing and flamenco classes. This is an apprenticeship, that although being parallel to her professional activities, marks her own way of articulating her work and her personal life. In this sense, her notion of knowledge is profoundly related to the knowledge that she constructs in her everyday life, with the kids in the school but also outside of it: “being with many different people”, being in the “street”, traveling, “getting to know other cultures”, “enter a group and see what happens.”

59 COU – Orientation Course for University entry. Corresponds to the last year of secondary education and aims at preparing the students to choose their studies for university entry.
3.2 Rosa, 15 years of experience: Strive for Harmony

Rosa is the child of a numerous family. Since she was a child, Rosa wanted to be a hairdresser but as she grew up she started to give classes in individual households in music. Already very young she started to participate in an Esplai and as adolescent with 16 years of age she started to work as assistant in them. She liked mathematics a lot and considered herself as a good student in this subject matter. She decided to convert mathematics into a university career but she wasn't very comfortable with it and abandoned it. This is when she decided to become a teacher. After she had completed her university degree the entry into the profession was hard. The restructuring of the Spanish educational system with the LOGSE made it impossible for her to work in the specialties (mathematics and natural sciences) and age groups she had been trained for at the university. Instead of working with kids between 11 and 13 years of age she decided to “downgrade” and work in primary education and infant education where she is working now (P3, P4, P5). In addition she accomplished a certificate in Catalan language education which helped her to enter into the profession in the beginnings of the 1990s. Because the Catalan government pushed for the normalization of Catalan in schools during the beginning of the 1990s there were more possibilities to enter teaching Catalan than mathematics.

The mayor part of her professional career Rosa spend in CAEPs which attends primarily the Gypsy population and which currently receives many immigrants from Latinamerica, China and Eastern Europe. But what makes the case of Rosa interesting is not so much her trajectory through those centers but rather how she reads and positions herself in relation to it. Rosa interprets her professional practice and her role as teacher in those CAEPs in relation to the other members of the school community (families, colleagues, superiors, students). In relation to the students, the social and affective relations between them is really at the center of education and not so much the academic content. For Rosa, her work is primarily social in that she teaches strategies of “living together” and norms that allow to work in relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. She defines her professional identity in relation to the others, that is, as a member of the collective school project as well as a caring mothers for her children. For Rosa it is very important to be a mother who has time for her children. She prefers to take care of the education of her children personally and to avoid babysitters or leave the children with the grandparents. She likes to follow how her children grow up. Because of that, she appreciates the compatibility between her work and her families schedule (she leaves work when her children leave school).

As hobbies she likes to visit courses that deal with alternative forms of body care be it reiki, herbal medicine, or others. This is related to her necessity to find a equilibrium, a harmony which run through her different personalities, her different ways of acting and thinking: as a teacher, a mother, a woman and wife. Because of this, some of the knowledge that she acquires in those courses are applied to her pedagogical practice. For example, she makes little massages to her students during the noon break (which are complemented with new age music) and by taking personally a few minutes of relaxation for herself before beginning the afternoon work. For Rosa, this way of feeling ones body is a fundamental aspect of her practice as teacher. Asked for which guiding thread she could identify in her professional practice she responded with “to feel and to surprise”, to awake a little the “senses and the emotions” for example by getting into contact with nature or by stimulating the fantasy with some stories.

3.3. Maria: 30 years of experience: the desire to know

What makes the case of Maria interesting is her apparent ability to make a difference in her current

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“Esplai” is Catalan and refers to a sort of extra-scholar, recreational setting for young kids.

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school where she is working and the central role she attributes to her insatiable curiosity and desire for knowledge that runs throughout her life. When asked for a recurrent theme or guiding thread that runs through the events of her life Maria states quite explicitly a quest for knowledge.

Knowledge is what was intimately tied to her departure from the rather restrictive right-wing family context. Not in the sense that specific facts or information would have helped to overcome the ideological confinements of the family but rather that her curiosity and predisposition to expand one's horizon led to the discovery of a much richer world, not only outside of her family but also located on an altogether different level of society. Carmina's father formed part of the military during Franco's regime, her mother also clearly inclined to the right-wing whereas Carmina identified more with the resistance and the solidarity that bound together the left-wing movement against Franco. She is the fifth child of ten and due to family circumstances she had to take care of her siblings during quite some time.

Already as an adolescent Maria had the idea that working with kids suited her which lead her to open a kindergarten at the age of 18 with her then boyfriend. During two years she was working in this kindergarten without having completed any formal education. When the kindergarten was closed after two years due to personal issues, she started to work in different schools without any certification which was possible because the legislation of the time (1970s) did not require it. Nevertheless, this situation did not prevent her from participating a pedagogical courses of Rosa Sensat, which were one of the most modern pedagogic organizations at that time. With 21 years of age, Maria then had acquired a certain level of professional education which allowed her to work in a private school in Barcelona where she stayed during 4 years as a primary teacher. At the age of 25 she entered university in order to study for primary teacher (magisterio). After she received her diploma after three years she originally planned to stay in the university and continue studying for a licenciatura (5 year degree) but this turned out to be too tiring to study and work at the same time.

While she was studying for the magisterio she also was working in a private (concertada) school at the same time. The school followed the pedagogy of Piaget which translated into a practice centered around projects. She stayed in this school four years during which she completed her studies. Afterwards she applied for the state approval of her teaching position. Once she had approved the opociciones and given that the private school she had been working was about to close she opted for the public schools. She came then to work during 8 years in a school in the outskirts of Barcelona where she was teaching kids age 11-13 and where she was also in charge as headmaster during six years. Through the continuing education of the teachers she discovered another school in St. Coloma de Cervelló where she then worked during two years as primary teacher. During that time she applied again for another school and by mistake selected the school where she is working now. She could have avoided to work in this CAEP due to her contacts but because she also had the intention to get involved in a more social project and because she personally felt very strong at this time, she decided to enter this school project. After four years and given her “ability” to get involved in the school she became the school director.

Considering her personal life, Maria stated that she has entered a more “spiritual and philosophical” period. She is reading and investigating about topics related to psychology, philosophy and astrology. She writes poetry and has taken courses on writing novels but in contrast to poetry, writing novels did not convince her. She would like to write about her experiences in the school and maintain a sort of field dairy of what is going on in the school.

Because of her family situation (no kids and a partner who is not living in the same city) she can dedicate most of her time to the school. Overall she is very satisfied with the work she is doing in the school.
4. Thematic Analysis

Previously we have established the singularity of the Catalonian context within the Spanish state, followed by the specificity of “our” school and a brief synthesis of the three teachers’ lives. Now we are going to describe the themes that emerged during the interviews and that reflect the individual life stories of the participating teachers. Operating thus in a very specific context with the life stories should caution us not to mistake the found evidence for general structural changes in Spain (although this will most probably be the case when comparison between the Consortium partners sets in). First and foremost the material tells us how the three teachers perceive their profession and their work on a daily, personal basis rather then embedded in large socio-political contexts. Although they clearly see what could improve their working conditions and situations, concrete laws or political projects are rather remote today – even though they may have played a greater role in the past.

It should be repeated that the fieldwork material and the interviews were complemented and contrasted with the themes discussed during the focus group held in September 2007.

4.1. Working Conditions

4.1.1. Management of work

Since the school in question is a CAEP it “enjoys” more favorable conditions as normal primary schools. Officially this entails smaller groups of student per teacher and more material resources. In reality, however, as described by the teachers, the situation is far from ideal. As mentioned the school had 165 students in 2005/2006 distributed into 9 groups (3 classrooms for infant education and 6 for primary) and staffed by 14 female teachers and two male teachers. There are around 20 students per group. Teachers in the school have 25 hours in class, but there is some margin: Maria states that within a year they want to reduce it to 24 and within two to 23. The type of contracts for teachers and access conditions to the profession have been described in D02. Teachers are normally civil servants after having passed the entry exam (concurso-oposición). Teachers that have completed their education usually work as substitutes on temporary contracts.

Class size has a mayor impact on the working conditions of teachers. Although officially lower than the average in “normal” Catalan schools, Sophia experiences class size as having a major negative effect on her work. She echoes here an issue also voiced by a protest movement among the teachers of various CAEP’s in 2002 who claimed the reduction of class size to the numbers officially guaranteed by the educational authorities on paper. Smaller groups would clearly improve working conditions in the sense that they constitute a fundamental precondition to engage on a long term project with students.

Sophia,(5): “I believe that to make this work we must have fewer students. It is something super-ba-
sic. With a group of twenty-five, what can I do? Imagine! I have twenty-five three year old children, for instance. Or twenty-four four year olds. And it's like that. Like everything's super-slow... with so many children. I think that if we were fifteen per group, if we were twelve, there would be another way to talk to them, to listen, to be able to share. ”

61 Which runs counter official policies which just agreed to introduce an additional hour.
62 D02, p.99ff.
Confronted with this adversity, finding strategies that allow to relate to and work with large groups of often conflictive students marked a primary concern of all teachers but especially of Sophia. The observational notes from Sophia's class provide evidence of the dynamics and “tactical agreements” which very often prefigure the relation between the students and their teacher.

Being “nervous” or “distracted” seems to be a frequent mental state of Sophia and her students in order to justify their “bad behavior.” Being nervous or being bored – or the two together – is one of the principal complaints of the kids when they don't want to participate in one of the activities proposed by Sophia.

A strategy that Sophia usually uses (mainly with the smallest children) is to have them line up according to their “good behavior.” Usually the kids get into a discussion on who is going to be the first because the position in the line up is usually used as a reward or punishment. The same occurs in activities where the students get to participate individually like for example when playing an instrument. The pupils that are too distracted are usually the ones who will remain seated in order to calm themselves before partaking in the activity or leaving class.

4.1.2 External support

A further negative influence on the working conditions, or rather a missing factor that could substantially improve the working conditions is external support. Sophia claims that what she misses is some external help to understand the autistic or violent behavior of some students and to develop strategies for dealing with them.

Sophia,(5): “For instance, there is one class where we have a psychotic child. I still haven’t found a way to make him participate. It’s super-complicated to be with twenty people, one psychotic, one that beats others because he feels like it, three coming from special education... I don’t know how to do something that’s useful for everybody; and where they can all participate. And it would be good for me that someone would come to observe and say “Well, try this way, or you can get this one in this way…” I mean, it’s fine because I don’t want the kids to... This one, for instance, sits down. He doesn’t annoy me, but he does nothing. He's like watching. And there are moments when I can’t be at his side as much. I go to get him, I tell him something, but I have twenty that may be killing each other when I turn my back to them. I miss this. You feel that it’s not evenly distributed. That it doesn’t work.”

Equally, Maria stresses the great step forward the school took by having an external psychologist visiting the school for sessions once every two weeks. In her opinion, schools like her own should have at their disposition such a professional every day of the week. Needless to say that they don’t have and that the current support only happened after some ingenious moves from her side to adapt “their” needs to the official offer.

Maria also acknowledges the great help the school currently receives by the simple fact of having two interns (social workers) at their disposition who can help out in the class rooms.

Maria,(30): “Now, for example, we are lucky in that we have two students doing work experience in social integration who come two or two and a half days a week and they are the whole time in the classroom. This is a fantastic support of course. We can also see that this is very positive because the group is not broken up, which is what the schools usually do, separating and working in small groups [...] We are seriously thinking about it for next year, and if we can continue having these people on work experience that would be ideal and, if not, well we will look at the way of how these very complicated groups can have two people from our own team in the classroom for the maximum
number of hours.” (Maria)

Rosa and Sophia also criticized the lack of material resources for extra curricular projects. The school has a very limited budget (7000 € per school year) for buying material or organizing events, etc. An economic contribution from the parents is practically non-existent because the school is located in a very deprived area.

4.1.3 Social relations and co-operation with colleagues

Related to the type of school in question is the high instability among the teaching staff. Often people only stay a short period of time and change to other schools or take a sick-leave. What makes the situation more difficult for establishing a stable team of motivated teachers is the impossibility of the school board to select their staff. Teachers are usually assigned by the educational authorities. During our stay in the school 2 teachers were substitute teachers. Maria, after our official research period was finished also took a sick-leave. Related to the dynamic situation between teachers Sophia commented that she misses opportunities to talk with her colleagues on a professional but personal level.

Sophia,(5): “We don’t have much time to do round tables either. I miss that here. Last year we proposed to do like therapy sessions between teachers. Each one to explain a little what happens to her, or shed some light on the problems she has, or what’s happening to her. But we do it every once in a long time, and I think that instead of so many meetings, of beating the rhythm, projects, we should do more with that, as people, simply share a little. Or looking at where we are going. Because we rarely sit down, one in front of the other, and start telling. But I also guess this is something you don’t build [overnight]. That each one has… I, for instance, have here some teachers who are friends, and others who are colleagues. And you do look for it. But you look for them in the cafeteria, having a coffee. Or you look for them at the corridors. But it doesn’t exist in our timetable something like “well, let’s sit down and…”

J: And why doesn’t it exist?

Sophia,(5): Because it is difficult; because we don’t have the time either. The time doesn’t exist. We should stay five to seven. But nobody wants to stay five to seven.” (Sophia)

Although there is a certain lack of occasions to get together, there are the semi-official places such as coffee and lunch breaks, or the shared way to/from work on the subway where those pedagogical and disciplinary concerns pop up and the actual situation in the school is discussed. The recent restructuration of class hours in Catalan schools has been questioned on those premises, as precisely further fragmenting the time and space in primary schools. During March 2006 the National Agreement on Education Alliance decided that one additional hour should be destined to develop basic skills (like reading, oral communication, math and arts). This additional hours are currently run by part-time teachers. The implementation in Catalonian public schools will happen gradually and be completed in 2008 thereby guaranteeing that the public schools offer the same amount of class hours as the private and private schools with public funding (concertada). Most schools have opted to extend classes half an hour at noon, reducing the time of lunch break and extend the afternoon classes as well by half an hour. In the perspective of the Catalan government this measure would only affect the students but not the teachers. Since the additional hour is covered by new staff, the gained “free hour” for the previous teachers should be dedicated to work in the school. But as it emerged form the focus group discussion, this is not the case but rather the contrary actually happens. On the one hand it has become more difficult to establish relations with students because less time is shared with one and the same teacher during class. On the other hand, teachers now
have less time during their lunch break to come together and discuss issues related to their work. Therefore, the difficulties to work in a team are increasing and the risk of finding oneself in the same problematic situation of being an archipelago institution as secondary schools is evident. The teacher with 30 years of experience expressed it the following way:

“...It is a big step backwards in terms of finding spaces for us to get together; not so much for doing reunions of the teachers body or reunions of courses, but for talking to each other and for making our things in a more settled way. I think we made a big backward movement.

In the past during the lunch break everybody was in the school [...] and although there were meetings of the teachers body there was always room. But now, since you have to adapt to the new schedule which is one hour more for the kids, you stay three times at noon but there are two more days where there is no reason to stay. And then happens what always happens. There are people who dedicated always not just the hours officially required but the hours they think are necessary. But of course, once there is no official duty there are people who leave. The two days which it is not obligatory to stay in the school they go home. And although you may want to share [things in relation to the school] you don't find anybody”.

This leads to another central aspect of the social relations among teachers: the importance of teamwork. Again it needs to be emphasized that the following characterization cannot be separated from the current transformations happening in the school, as described under the second point of this report. What runs through all three interviews is the ideal of a collaborating teacher that works as part of a larger team where all members take advantage of the opportunity to learn from each other. In contrast to this ideal, especially Rosa and Maria identify the isolated, individualist teacher model as predominant in reality. The lack of formal opportunities to exchange experiences among teachers that go beyond “sharing a coffee” (Sophia) is considered as a mayor obstacle for educational change. For Rosa, it is fundamental that all teachers in a school function as a team; its more basic than if the school has a “difficult” image or not:

Rosa, (15): “It’s very hard, but, you know what? There was a team that worked very well. The team is essential. It is basic, since if there’s a good team of teachers, when new people arrive they discover the structure and say “look, this works like this”, you adapt to it and everything flows, because everything is coherent and everything is structured. [...]You, as an individual, have ideas, but if you try to apply them individually, I believe they apply poorly. They can be great, you can be an enlightened person and have a lot of ideas, but I believe it is basic to have one or two people at your side that say “listen, but if we apply this you said the other way, or on reverse, or we intensify it with don’t-know-what”, the efforts are multiplied and the result is fantastic. I learned that they don’t add up but are multiplied. Getting together, to work in the same project, means much more than adding two.”

During the observational period with Rosa we could observe how the co-presence of two teachers in Rosa's classes allowed for situations where they function as a catalysis for each other, enriching as a result the overall learning experience. This is what Rosa calls “multiplication of forces.”

“Rosa draw a rectangle, a line and a circle on the board. The boys and girls had to erase the figure she would tell them. One of them had to erase the circle. When he went up front, the boy said 'a circle just like my head'. Carla [the psicopedagoga who accompanied some days Rosa in her classes] heard that and once he had erased the circle, asked

'what did you erase?'
A circle

and what did you say, what is round of your body?'

'my head' he said. Then, Rosa looked at Carla and taking up what she had said improvised a song where you had to move your finger around the head describing a circle.

Apart from those strategies in the class room, Maria sees teamwork on a more global, school level. She wants to get teachers out of their isolated practice in their class rooms and bind them into a common school project. The strategy applied towards this change consists in horizontalizing the relations in the school, which can be illustrated by the role the elaboration of the school project has acquired. “Every teacher should be able to tell what’s written in this plan” she comments. Consequently, the schools project is alive in the sense that it is the result of a collective effort. It circulates in the daily work and has lost its quality as “dead” piece of documentation for an external authority; rather it is used to bind together the teachers in a collective reflexive effort. And, during our observations we attended to a session with the teachers where the subject of teacher’s dairy was discussed. It was an effort initiated by the directors team to get each teacher to “report” on their activities in class, their difficulties, and the students performances. However, from the discussion and the conversation with other teachers it got apparent that this initiative was met with considerable skepticism and resistance.

4.1.4 The relation with the administration

The relation with the administration (particularly school inspectors) is another important and influential aspect of the working conditions especially for Maria as the head of the school. Especially in recent times there is a constant flow of ever new administrative requirements to which especially Maria has to respond; she feels like an administrative staff with having to control and report the cleaning service and maintenance service for example. Although Maria manages to deal with the school administration, it is consuming a lot of energy and often runs on the cost of her private or other school time. For example, although it is not her responsibility, she fills out the documentation for the students’ canteen subsidies. Normally, each family would have to fill out the required forms for their children. However, since many parents are illiterate, Maria together with the school board takes on the responsibility to fill out 165 forms, one for each student they have. In fact, during an intense day doing administrative and organizational work where one of the investigators was present as observer, the secretary called Maria “Mother Teresa” in order to describe this multi-functional and charity role that the headmaster fulfills.

Apart from this administrative requirements, the relation with the administration is rather a relation of “control” than of “help” and “support.” As Maria but also Sophia states, to get the necessities of the school and the requirements of the educational authorities under one hat is very difficult.

Sophia,(5): “There are like things you have to show to the Departament d’Ensenyament, which are as they should be, and then you have the indoors reality, that is always different. There is a long distance between the one working with children and the one in an office, receiving things from... The step is very big. And I don’t know. We are here like... The principal has been trying to move one of our kids to special education for a year. It’s been two weeks since he left. It’s been like... letters, medical reports, psychologists, psychiatrists... It’s all like this, like super-slow. Sending a report to the Secretary of Education. They don’t accept it. You have to write it all over again. You have to go”.

But not only asking for help but also the inspection that comes to the school is not necessarily what
would help the school as becomes apparent from Maria description.

Maria, (30): “For example, what happened to us here? The inspector came last year –this might interest you because of what you are researching, about external help– the inspector comes... to ask for timetables, timetables, timetables. That day I must have been nervous and I don’t know what happened... he was in a big hurry: “so many hours of special education, so many hours of whatever, so many hours...” and then he asked me for several things also in a great hurry, and we were in the first term of the new management team, which was very, very complicated. The previous head had been there for many years, and all the administrative work was not very well organised and it was really difficult for us sorting it out. Well, I don’t know what happened to me on that day but I burst into tears. [...] He then forgot all about everything he had come to ask for, I think at that moment he really responded and we arranged to meet another day only to talk about the things that were bothering us there.” (Maria)

For their part, the teachers participating in the panel agreed that the bureaucratic requirements have increased after the implementation of the LOGSE. They have to confront an absurd and useless paper war which just consumes time. But because they see this need for documentation as an absurd and imposed requirement of the State in the name of the restructuration of the educational system, they convert it into an “empty” procedure by just photocopying the same document over and over again.

“There is a lot of absurd paper work, useless which takes up a lot of time [...] you just photocopy and that's it. Who is going to look at all this? This is just impossible. Where does this go to? What is it good for?”

On the other hand, those teachers participating in the focus group acknowledged the changes in their working conditions during their working life especially in relation to the new population of students. Nevertheless, those changes affect one more than the other.

“[For example] the factor of the immigrant pupils. There are people who consider the immigrant pupils as obstacle, but the people who consider immigrant pupils as obstacle are the very same people that considered previously those students that didn't keep up with the class rhythm an obstacle.”

For those teachers, the changes of restructuration affect them because they are inconvenient but they should not affect their professional practice.

“Your attitude will be the same despite all the pressures and demands that are out there [...] in the end they do not influence you.”

4.1.5. Organization of work

Maria. The concrete day-to-day work for Maria are difficult to establish. Since she is the head of the school there she has less repetitive tasks in comparison to other teachers. She is present wherever she is needed, be it as a substitute in a class, as a second support in another class, or in organizing a certain school activity, etc. Her main tasks though have to do with the administrative running of the school, the elaboration of the school project and to articulate a common “educational theme” in the school. As already described in the previous section, a good deal of her energy goes into purely administrative tasks (filling out forms, etc)

In her lecture free hours she therefore has no fixed working place as she moves between different activities in the secretary room where she has her desk, meetings with colleagues or parents, classes,
or the school playground. The more or less fixed points/times during a day is the school entry in the morning where she receives students and parents as they come to the school; then the coffee break in the morning around ten o'clock where she meets with other colleagues in a bar outside the school, the lunch break where she eats with teachers inside the same school, and then the hour when school finishes where she also attends parents as they come to pick up their kids.

Despite those functions as a school master, she also gives classes in ICT. Depending on the age level she picks the class up in their class room or they come by themselves to the informatics room. Often students have a computer on their own and Maria starts to indicate them activities and interactive applications that have been prepared by the local educational authorities. Often, “normal” informatics class is difficult because Maria receives at the same time students that have been expelled from their class by other teachers and that somehow “stroll” around the building or inside her class. In-between dealing with the students working at the computers she tries to “control” and to talk with the expelled students. Seldom, she is not multi-functional no matter which activity she is involved in.

Rosa. In the case of Rosa, her work involves a series of routines around which she organizes her teaching and learning activities. Every morning Rosa receives the boys and girls at the door of the classroom which leads directly to the school's playground. More or less the first ten minutes are dedicated to talk with the parents about things related to their kids (about nutrition, (mis-)behaviors, certain specific request concerning medication, etc.)

The start of the class activities is marked every day by a series of indispensable routine activities that more or less take up the first hour. The routines help to resolve one fundamental preoccupation: the control of the class and its discipline. Basically, they include the following: singing of the “good morning” song in which everybody greets everybody else; determine the day of the week and the weather; count between all of them the days that have already passed of the week; count the kids that stay for lunch. After the morning ceremony has been completed the actual and varying class activities begin. They change in function of the weekly plan. Essentially, Rosa combines the cognitive activities of reading-writing with the knowledge of numbers and the oral practice of Catalan. The routine sequences as well as the activities themselves form part of a fixed time schedule, including the help from other teachers at determined moments and times during the week.

During the morning break in class, Rosa also takes advantage to practice certain aspects of literacy and numeracy, or for learning certain rules related to hygiene before eating. When the kids are out in the playground during breaks, Rosa takes turns with three other teachers in order to oversee the kids. Her task is basically to mediate in conflicts or fights that can happen. The return from the playground also is tied to a routine that Rosa controls. Take off the dressing gown, fetch the school bag, drink water and go to the bathroom. Later, Rosa takes advantage of the time before lunch to make short activities such as reading a story. Before her lunch, Rosa has about one hour and half to go to teachers meetings or to do other preparatory work for her classes or to meet with parents.

After lunch, the kids return to her class in order to take the mid-day nap. Everyday before going to lunch, Rosa leaves everything prepared in the class (lowering the shades and covering the doors with a dark blanket, CD with music New Age for the midday tutor to play). The activities during lunch break are held rather simple: kinetic skills, personal concentration or familiarization with concepts and symbols.

Sofía: The case of Sofía is, in many ways, very particular. She is a specialist professor, which means that she does not have her own group of students, but ministers her classes in a rotating schedule to all the children of the school. Because of that, her daily work is organized in an
atmosphere of constant mobility. At nine in the morning Sofía accompanies the children from the patio to the classroom. She dedicates this first hour to a reinforcement of Catalan language, and shares the rest of her day between the different groups of students who attend the music classes. Thus, every hour or hour and a half Sofia begins a new class. Usually she dedicates the first 10 or 15 minutes with each group to different instances of “negotiation” with the children: she organizes the space of the classroom, proposes tasks, takes part in discussions that might happen between students. The same dynamics are usually repeated at the end of each class, when Sofía must organize the “exit” of the children. In this case, a strategy that she normally uses (mainly with the smaller kids) is to make them form a line in order of good behavior. Often the mere effort to communicate and to establish an atmosphere of tranquility forces her to abandon some of the programmed activities. For that reason, Sofía’s daily routine counts with a good dose of improvisation. She herself admits that it is not easy to follow a predetermined class program. Rather, the activities that she usually proposes - to sing a song, to create a choreography, to play an instrument, etc. – take into consideration many emotional aspects: her own mood and that of the children, the time of day, if the children are tired, nervous, calm, etc. During intervals, Sofía, along with the other teachers, passes her time eating or drinking coffee near the school, with the exception of the days in which she has to accompany the children in the patio – a shared duty performed alternatively by all the teachers. The intervals, at morning and at noon, are also a time that Sofía can use to plan her classes and to do some tasks of administrative order that the school asks of her - for example, to prepare the basic program and chronograph of her classes. She affirms, nevertheless, that these administrative requirements do not bother her. Rather, she recognizes that she works with great freedom, and very often she prefers not to follow the guidelines determined by the administration - for instance, regarding the contents of her discipline. This freedom is something that she considers fundamental, since it allows her to create very diverse activities, trying to conciliate the demands and necessities of the different groups that share the class.

4.2. Professional Knowledge and Social Relations at Work

Although it may seem arbitrary to group the topic of professional knowledge with the clearly separate category (in our analytical guide) of social relations at work, the material gathered suggests that the essential professional skills for the teachers are of social nature. Their key skills deal less with traditional aspects of teachers as experts of certain academic areas but are concerned with questions of group formation or the psychology dimension of interpersonal relations. In other words, professional knowledge overlaps to a large degree with the problems and nature of the social relations at work.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the teachers participating in the Focus group considered that their professional knowledge is basically an individual act which involves an open attitude towards the school, being flexible for change and above all respectful towards pupils. This respect opens a space in which the teachers can become a mediator for their students and extend and amplify the knowledge they have. In this way, the three teachers coincide that the changes that occurred in the area of professional knowledge, if they are not individual changes are not changes at all. This does not mean that they don't give importance to the dialog with their colleagues but rather that as long as this dialog is not appropriate in an auto-critical, constructive manner by the teacher it will be useless.

Recapitulating what was said by the three teachers interviewed, in a broad sense, the essential skills for them comprise engagement and implication across all registers of interpersonal relations that happen under very restrictive time conditions and in contradiction to their “traditional” professional role as knowledge experts. The social relations and more specifically the problems they pose in this particular school frame thus the definition, production, and value of knowledge. The knowledge
they perceive as missing does not concern alternative pedagogical models, let alone keeping
updated on disciplinary subject matters but more fundamentally how to guide or re-conduct social
dynamics and social cohesion. Describing the social dynamics more specifically between teachers
and students, but also between teachers themselves, and teachers/parents respectively weaves a
further layer in our understanding of knowledge at work.

When comparing the material gathered for the three teachers one can extract clear commonalities in
what they describe as their real and desired professional skills and knowledge. All three agree that
their initial teacher’s education did not prepare them for their actual work. The youngest teacher
made this point when qualifying her initial education as “boring” especially when it came to the
didactic units.

Sophia,(5): “I believe very little; very little. The other day they called me from the university. That I
saw a super-strange number... “Listen, we’re doing a survey. Do you have five minutes?” “I do, go
ahead.” And the guy asking me “well, from one to ten, with which number would you mark the edu-
cation you’ve received?” And he started asking questions like that. Regarding that subject... And I
realized I was marking with 3, 4... It was like... The guy like this: “Bloody hell! You didn’t like it
much, did you?” And I, “you can be sure that if I decide to start studying again I won’t go back to
your university, that’s for sure.” Because I got out there like... Super-boring... Only the classes with
musicians where fun. Because at least as a person you could make use of some things, or they
transmitted you things. But when we were doing didactics of everything, and they where like super-
boring didactics. So bad. We didn’t do practical classes until the last year. I mean, very badly or-
organised.”

Initial education appears as too far off from the real practical requirements in class and too heavily
occupied with academic content not addressing the real needs and skills when having to deal with
students. Therefore, as Rosa describes, the first year of work is especially hard:

Rosa,(15): “You learn the hard way because the kids... they also need limits and that wasn’t under-
lined enough at the university. Somehow, it’s not clear. And I had discipline problems and I said
“no, help! What is this? Why are they reacting this way?”

Maria, in that she had an atypical career received most of her education in “informal” courses that
were not part of a university career. There she learned a lot; she also stressed that the changes
associated with the LOGSE made her discover many new theoretical ideas in her profession. Rosa
in turn emphasized that the knowledge they need at work is very broad. The initial education was
insufficient because it neglected for example issues in psychology that would allow her to
understand the situation in the classroom and the relation with the children in a more holistic
fashion. As she states, a teacher has to have a broad knowledge spectrum:

Rosa, (15): “Very broad, I think very broad. I think a teacher has to know a bit of everything. Of
psychology a lot, a lot more than you learn in your university career. Pedagogy and then specific
knowledge of all kinds. I say of all kinds because you cannot center yourself, that is, education and
learning have to be understood very broadly. It cannot be a closed, one way thing. And because it
has to be very open and experimental, you have to have many resources in order to use them in de-
termined moments.”

The impression that there exists a hiatus between the official professional education in the
universities and the actually required knowledge when working was confirmed by the focus group.
Especially relevant were the comments of the youngest teacher:
"The first year I had the sensation of coming to the school and they [her colleagues] were talking about things I did not know: planification of things, schedules. And now, after three years everything is more familiar [...] and you realize that you plan coming from the theory when you go into practice and start working with the pupils you realize that everything is much slower, there is another rhythm, things emerge in the everyday routine that you did not think about, the question of the emotions and the affective, all this starts to show up and of course, all that in theory is a bit far off.”

This teacher stressed the need of a university education that takes into account the affective work and the relations with the pupils from a practical perspective. She claimed practical, down-to-earth strategies and guidelines that would allow to negotiate with the pupils the emotional dynamics in class. In the same sense, she stressed the importance of having had a teacher which gave her advice during the first period in the school. It was a practical support, concrete, and a fundamental help to avoid frustrations and “killed dreams.”

4.2.1. Learning

Because they need to know a lot and because initial education is not sufficient, Rosa and Sophia stressed that the principle place to learn is “at work.” Rosa emphasized again and again that she learns when working, especially when working in a team with other professionals.

Rosa, (15): “You learn when you work. It's odd, but you learn when you work. You learn when working as a team above all. You learn a lot working as a team. Working as a team and you also learn being together with other people. For instance, when you work as an assistant or when you become involved... because you see and everyone has a lot of good things going for them and it's fantastic to observe and share. You discover somehow. You discover them. You also learn in the courses, but you learn more by working in a team, working together and seeing it first-hand.”

What do they learn at work? Depending on their years of experience, the teachers have different necessities. Whereas Maria with the longest trajectory locates essential (social) skills on a very abstract level, Sophia who just started her working career has more practical, immanent concerns. She stressed that the essential skills for her involve the possibility to control students and to adapt to the dynamic situation with the students. A very similar necessity expressed by the youngest teacher participating in the panel.

Sophia, (5): “When I began teaching classes, it’s just I didn’t know anything. It was like “now I have twenty kids here. What am I going to do?” I was a little shocked. I have to have them here for one hour doing music and I don’t know where to start. [...] And well, you first learn how to organize time, to work off the resources you seem to have. I really believe this is something that’s inside of you, that you take advantage of it with a lot of improvising. In the end everything is much improvised. Being with children you can do a lot of plans but, from what you thought you would do to what you end up doing, it’s very different lots of days. Take advantage of that a little, the moment.”

Sophia qualified her work in this sense as “intuitive”, “instinctive”, “improvisational” in order to characterize her personal take at the changing situations within one group but also between different groups. Equally, our observations confirmed what she already told us during the interviews. A lot of class time she has to dedicate to try to communicate with the children and to establish a minimal order. To implement a planned activity is not self-evident. Many times she dedicates time to talk with students and to try to make them reflect on their attitudes than to implement a concrete task. An example from the observational notes of Sofía makes the point, when she states that the correct usage of the Catalan does not really preoccupy her:
“That they use the Catalan correct doesn't seem to be the most urgent preoccupation for Sofia. Often, the difficulties to just communicate with the kids without shouting or discussing requires an effort that obliges to leave other tasks in the background. This reminds me of a comment Sofia made during our first meeting, where she referred to the difficulty to establish in her class the grounds for doing an educational project when even the basic norms of communication are not respected. To listen, to let speak, etc.”.

For the oldest teacher, those skills are not an issue anymore; she clearly states that she has many resources of connecting and working with students. The case of Rosa in contrast is interesting in this context. Clearly the initial concerns of a teacher that recently has started to work have disappeared. As she stated above, the first year was the hardest. Now her concerns revolve around what she calls the “lost five minutes,” that is, to take advantage of small time intervals at the end or between activities in order to practice basic things like memory or perception or how to use pen and paper.

Teachers dominantly learn at work. Although Rosa or Maria also stated the importance of theoretical knowledge and ideas, the emphasis is on the knowledge generated at work. As just described this involves very practical things like controlling and engaging students. For example, the relation that Rosa establishes between the control of students and the fostering of the students' commitment to the class activities gets explicit in the following observational notes:

“Another activity with a lot of movement […] to make a train, go around the whole class, sit in a circle like Indians and read a story. In order to form the train, Rosa said that she only would take those who are ‘prepared’. Being prepared means being silent with the arms crossed, sitting well. There was an absolute silence in the room of 22 kids all of them anticipating to be chosen for the train. Rosa asked each of the children she chose for the train to put their chair back under the table making the least noise as possible. Herself and the others in class evaluated if this task was accomplished or not.”

However, there runs a line between the instrumental knowledge necessary at work and more implicit skills. This distinction is not just due to a lack or bad initial education; what you need as a teacher in the classroom is fundamentally different from what one can learn in books because teaching involves primarily a social and emotional investment.64 It is about getting involved in human relations (between students, students-teachers, teacher-teachers, teachers-parents) in all its emotional, (some times) irrational, corporeal and complex aspects.

The case of Maria may be understood as a case in point. The knowledge she is generating primarily comes from the actual situation in the school. This is a lived situation, an ongoing interaction with all members of the community that involves herself as a whole person. It is not any theoretical knowledge that just would have to be appropriated. What more, it is precisely the very limits of her corporeality that become the principle site of learning.65 Backed-up by the external counseling of a psychologist from the EAP (Psycho-Pedagogic Team), she describes the ability to draw and maintain limits in the relations with students (but also with teachers – see below) as an essential skill. Gypsy culture has been described by teachers as very affective. Between teachers and students there is a lot of bodily contact, of caress and hugs. Average or rather north-European standards of

65 In this sense, her learning may be understood as “performative” in the way such authors as Groz or Patel Stevens argue that our experiences are constructed as social, cultural, and historical subjects, and this knowing occurs through our bodies. See Groz, E. (1994). Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism. Sydney: Allen & Unwin; Patel Stevens, L. (2005) ReNaming “Adolescence”: Subjectivities in Complex Settings. In J.A. Vadeboncoeur & Lisa Patel Stevens (eds) Re/Constructing ‘the Adolescent’”. (pp.271-282). New York: Peter Lang.
the private space surrounding the body are non-existent in the school. More seriously speaking, physical violence between students is also more common; similarly violence from parents towards their kids is not the exception but rather the rule. As a result, the limit of the body is not very well defined. Others (parents, other students) “claim” your body in the positive as in the negative sense. In relation with the contributions by the psychologist, teachers, but especially Maria, have come to see a connection between the dominance of the body as means of communication and the students’ difficulties to learn. Reaching a more stable and “normal” atmosphere in the school is now linked for Maria to the essential skill of taking interpersonal communication away from the “pulsational” to a more symbolic and verbal level. Maria as well as Sophia and Rosa see here the special value of external counseling. The sessions of the help them to understand “what’s actually happening” on the social and human level among students, parents and teachers.

Maria, (30): “Yesterday we had a meeting with the psychologist from the EAP (Psycho-pedagogic Team) who opened up our eyes to things that we had never thought about before. These children really do have a problem in entering the symbolic world. Yesterday I discovered something that was glaringly obvious, something that I really should have known as a teacher. The fact is you don’t realise what is really happening to them. So, when you have to enter into abstract ideas, it is absolutely impossible for them. Of course, this means that if you are aware of this, the type of work you propose or the type of activities you are going to do will have to be aimed at helping in this aspect. Because they don’t have this resource... they don’t bring it with them from home.”

However, is has to be stressed that this learning and the importance that Maria grants to the “limits” between the students and the teachers is not shared unanimously by all her colleagues. Others see it as something quite natural and have integrated the physical contact with their students into their daily practice, as the following observational notes make clear:

"At 13:00 the counseling of the psychologist starts [...] the topic of the session is the verbal and physical limits of the kids in their relation to the teachers. The psychologist explains them a little the development of a "normal" kid, the separation from its mother and how they start to develop the notion of an individual self, etc. and how this is tied to the relation of the child with its own body [...] During the meeting it gets apparent that there is a lot of physical contact between students and their teachers. 'When you come first to this school you have to get used to it. But then its ok.' two teachers said. Most teachers agree that it is necessary to be affective with their students and that they did not mind. But Maria insists that this affection is tied to aggression and that they have to work the limits in both senses, the good and the bad."

What makes the theme of “limits” so important for Maria is not just its apparent impact with the kids and the diverging perspectives within the teachers body. At the same time, she has “discovered” this as a very personal theme when she says that she always had problems to put limits in relation to others. To exercise authority in her function as headmaster and set limits for others produces a conflict for her because it runs counter to the very strong personal ties she has with some of them (see below). Learning happens for her at the interface between the personal and the professional where the problematics of the workspace give rise to personal reflections that then feedback into the work environment.

4.2.2. Skills

When asked about what they learn at work or what they need to know, what they consider as their essential skills, all three provided variations on this basic theme of “relating to others.” For Sophia, this need to conduct social dynamics is still very much tied to her practical needs to engage and control students. But when considering the statements of Rosa and Maria it becomes clear that
beyond this instrumental knowledge there exists what they identify as personal attitude and predisposition to get involved. For example, Rosa stressed that what counts in her relation with the children is above all the attitude she enacts in class. This is something this is not written down, cannot be formalized in the official curriculum (but is learned by working in a team basically).

Rosa, (15) “How to explain? When we’re working on a subject, some given concept, some activity, the message that the kids receive is very different if you’re saying something and thinking “what a lousy day, it’s raining and they are very annoying and... today there’s no way to make them move forward and they don’t listen, and what a drag! I’d be better if I never started this kind of work!” than if you use the same words enthusiastically and enjoying it... I believe they reach in a different way. Do you understand it a bit?”

Reading this quote in conjunction with her statement that “teachers are not robots” but can have “a bad day” shows that the human, personal aspect of her relations with children is a very strong aspect in her work. How she feels and how the others feel is a basic dimension of their social relation in class.

An example of how Rosa is preoccupied of how the others “feel” are the massage sessions she gives during the lunch break. From the field notes:

“(…) once everybody is sitting comfortable in their chairs, they do the exercise of inflating the tummy and letting out the air again. Afterwards Rosa switches off the light (the music continues), the boys and girls cross their arms on the table and put down their heads in order to sleep and to relax. Then, Rosa starts to give every kid a massages in their back, the neck, the head. This they really like and even if there are a little distracted when Rosa comes to their table, quickly they put themselves into position in order to receive the massage.”

Related to the social relations with children, Maria was more explicitly. Being a good professional implies for her to “implicate yourself in your work,” and get involved which principally consists in becoming a member of the class group:

Maria, (30): “Involvement means in my opinion that you have to be another member of the group. You are a… let’s say you are a tutor. Being a tutor means you are a person that is accompanying others to learn, to grow, with all that that involves. So you are a companion and if you want you are also a discoverer for them. You can make them discover things, discover themselves, you can help them love knowledge, although that is very difficult here, or also to discover what they know. When it comes down to it, that’s what I think is basic. And if you don’t get involved, then you don’t achieve this.”

To involve ‘yourself’ as a teacher means to become implicated in the social dynamic of the group, its ups and downs, and to guide- and help to constitute it as a group in the first place. That this goes deeper than simply delivering a speech in front of class is evident; it involves the teacher as person with his/her character and personality.

Maria was quick to point out that the possibilities of skills and life-long learning easily hit an upper boundary when learning involves in this sense questioning and critical reflections about one's personality. On can learn this involvement to the degree that one does not understand that the main part of working in a public school as teacher is actually not academic transfer of knowledge but a social work. According to her, many teachers are not aware of this fact:

Maria, (30): “Of course, the public school is created to take in a wide variety of people in a society
and to offer everybody the possibility to get to a certain level and integrate themselves into society. This is, let’s say a social work. But this aspect of social work in our profession is something that not may people realize, I think.”

Once a teacher has realized it, however, the relations with others that are implied in social work is determined by one’s attitude. It involves the teacher as a whole person and cannot be reduced to its more academic role. But learning on the level of personal attitudes is difficult. Only few teachers are willing to enter into questioning their role as one essential half of the social relation with students.

Maria, (30): “I find this particularly interesting, but here you can see the resistance of the teaching staff. And this is a personal matter. There are people who resist entering into this kind of reflection. Because you dig things up about yourself, too, of course. You are also speaking about the relationship you have with this child, which means you enter into personal matters.”

And not only with students; the relation among teachers is equally important and framed by personal attitudes. As a consequence, for Maria the essential skill as professional teacher consisted in engaging in a self-analytical reflection on one's own role in relation to the other members of the school community including parents and teachers besides the students. Her expectation for collaborating in our research underlines this aspect since she stated repeatedly the reflective benefit gained through talking about the interviews and the observations of her work.

The two older teachers participating in the focus group discussion agreed with Maria that the capacity of self-reflection and analysis constitutes a basic professional skill for teachers. However, they bind this skill more to the educational practice than to inter-personal relations. Reflecting about oneself can lead to a new innovative educational practice which then involves the confrontation with more traditionally oriented and conservative colleagues. Nevertheless, the short-term success of an innovative approach can be “cashed out” in an improve relation with the kids which compensates pretty much for the conflicts within the educational center. For these teachers of the focus group, “implication” means primarily to question the dominant educational models that then allow to establish a new relation with the students. Contrary to Maria, to imply oneself doesn't mean to extend this project to the whole educational community.

4.2.3. Professional Ethics

The special status of the school as conflictive or violent leaves equally its fingerprint on the ideas tied to professional identity of teachers. What runs as a general theme through the six interviews with the three teachers is the ability to enjoy their work. A good professional is able to enjoy her work and carries the responsibility to create the necessary conditions or take the necessary actions in order to make it enjoyable.

There are some slight variations as to consider “enjoyment” the means or the ends of a teachers work. For Rosa, you have to enjoy your work in order to create the right attitude towards the kids and atmosphere in the class for eventually a learning experience to happen. If you as teacher fail to enjoy what you are doing, then the precondition for being together with the kids is not given. It is the quality of the human relation, the ability to treat the other (the child) as a whole person with all its affects, emotions, aggressions, that counts. In this respect, what distinguishes a good professional from a bad one, are non-explicit, “unwritten” rules that cannot be simply learned; it is a teachers’ attitude, his/her personality when interacting with children and her inclination to move them.
Rosa, (15): “Because I like them to feel things. And when I say “feel” I mean feeling with all their senses. And with all their senses refers to that what we already said about the routines and how to work them with songs and I-don’t-know-what else and we can have a good time. That way they can enjoy themselves. This also entails how I feel in the process. And that they surprise themselves, that is to say, everything which surprises them a little. [...] This is the reason why I search for new materials and for different things in order to “aha!”, in order to see something there. In order for them to discover something, to learn to “see” things by feeling them.”

For Maria a professional is someone who knows to implicate herself. Enjoyment of the work will be the result. Failure to implicate yourself will most likely result in suffering your work as a teacher instead of enjoying it.

Maria, (30): “Moreover, the four years that I have been here have been brilliant for me. The groups were difficult to handle. Because the sixth year here is full of complicated youngsters... and I’ve been given very large groups as well. Last year there were 23, which for this school is a lot. The experience, however, is incomparable for me. What I mean by that is that you have to get involved, because if you come to work and just do it, then you suffer, because I believe that here you either get involved or you suffer. And no, I don’t get involved and enjoy it, I experience it and see the evolution and I see the changes and I see the affection around…”

Already in the preceding section it was mentioned what this “implication” entails, first of all, to act and interact with the students as one more member of the group with all its ups and downs. A good professional understands that this is her primary objective, especially in the type of school in question. This notion of professionalism entails that teachers have the sufficient skills to confront and control the kids. Maria described a bad professional as “observing” in contrast to a good professional as “taking the initiative.”

As a consequence of this “involvement” students will be able to “learn” and make discoveries, to even discover a “love” for knowledge. That's the main satisfaction for all three teachers: To actually have succeeded in widening a little bit the horizon of the students, to see that they have been able to discover something new.

Maria, (30): Or to open their minds to search, how to search information, and to deepen what they like, and then of course you have to provoke is this recognition of what you like. This is not so easy. ‘What are my interests?’ ‘What do I like?’ as a student. And to provoke this, for me, this is un-payable. That is, you discover that you have provoke in someone this connection with him/herself, this is incredible... [...] For me, in my work, that’s what I enjoy most.”

Sophia on these lines underscores the social orientation of the school. She feels comfortable at the school because she can help students who come from a very deprived background to discover new things.

Sophia, (5): “I’m happy here, trying to... It’s hard, but when something good happens, it’s really important. Because you are doing something that they haven’t had the opportunity to feel or to know. And in that sense, it’s very good.”

A precondition not mentioned so far for enjoying your work and consequently for being a good professional is the disposition of a teacher to investigate and learn. Especially the two older interviewees agree that if a teacher is not flexible in her arrangements, in her way of teaching, in
approaching a student group or in adapting the curriculum then it is most likely that one will not enjoy the work. Maria clearly stated that her own love for knowledge is what she wants to awake in her students; and since she always is investigating and exploring new ideas, her very attitude to knowledge provides the common base to affront problems in her work (e.g. dealing with the difficult situation of the school as such) and when working with students in particular.

Maria, (30): “But to generate this in the other, that’s what I said to you before, that’s what most interests me. In a way, you made me realize, I never said this like that, but I realized now talking to you, that what I appreciate of myself is what I want to stimulate in the other. Of course! Something as simple as that.”

In fact, for the youngest teacher it is the reason why she doesn't consider herself a teacher by profession. On the one hand she notes that the level of personal implication is too strong. And at the same time, what Maria describes for us as her strategy appears as not really a solution for Sophia. Describing what it means to be a teacher she says:

Sophia, (5): “I think it entails a brutal level of involvement. As a person… it’s a very mental work. I finish always exhausted. Right now I’m tired. This week I’m already, well... And this is not something physically, I’m not about to fall asleep, no. It is tiring this type of work. It is very difficult to carry it out. You always have to be very strong, psychologically in order to support it. And from what I see, the older people working in this are bad. [...] And well, I think as long as you are young, that’s ok. Because you have energy. But it’s not going to be a work for forever. I see the people who have been working 30 years or 40 ... they know everything back to forth. It’s like... the kids don’t make you laugh any more, you know it all.”

For Sophia it seems too hard and difficult to maintain this curiosity and urge for knowledge throughout your career as teacher. The level of implication that would be required to enjoy your work despite very slow processes of change or the very hard and persistent problems related to interpersonal relations make it for her highly probable to end up being burned out. Interestingly, for Sophia as the youngest teacher, an experimental attitude forms also part of her professional practice: to intuitively try out new things, trail out different paths with students. However, real change is another thing and not necessarily related to your own efforts or research. As she said, you quickly realize your own possibilities of what you dreamed to change and what you actually can achieve. Why she nevertheless does the job for the moment is her affinity to “social work.”

For Rosa, the teacher with 15 years of experience, the situation is similar: she explicitly states that change happens very, very slowly and is limited by many external factors. Nevertheless, one ideal as professional is to learn from other teachers, get new inspirations, and keep moving in order to transform aspects of teaching life. But in contrast to her younger colleague she openly acknowledges that between your intentions and the actual outcomes exists a huge gap which she as professional has learned to acknowledge. Changes happen at a very, very slow pace and despite your intentions and knowledge, often, as teacher you cannot achieve the impact you desire. She defines a professional in this sense as someone who knows how to draw the line, recognize one’s limits without getting burned:

Rosa, (15): “For me to be a good professional implies to love your work. Because if it is what you really like to do than you enjoy your work. There will be difficult moments, like always, but you will overcome them and pass them on. [...] Hence, if you like your work, if you enjoy it, if you want to, if that’s your objective, if you want to, including in this type of school, well, in this school its not the same, but love everything what this school implies. That is to say, the difficult part sometimes is not to get annoyed or not to get burned by the environment, the reactions you receive from the environ-
ment, ok? [...] And try to turn it around, to look at it from another point of view and to resituate your objectives which are evident in another place, easy to achieve, here they involve a long term commitment.”

A good professional is able to enjoy work in the school. This emphasis tends to construct the reality in schools as the other side of the enjoyable. It is the distinctive trait of the professional to overcome the often difficult circumstances of working in a school and enjoy this work. What holds the profession together in this sense for Maria or Sophia is not a corpus of academic knowledge but a social project. The social dimension of their work already has been mentioned several times. Sophia states:

Sophia, (5): “I feel good with this team; because I believe a lot in the school board’s philosophy. They are people I see are very involved, that care a lot about the kids, they love them a lot, they get really involved. I like this school project. I’m also interested in the social part. The music therapy I have done has gone along these lines, the social branch.”

In the same vein, Maria stresses the vocational aspect of her work which came into full view with her decision to join the teachers at her current school. By an administrative error she got assigned to this school. Knowing the difficult type of work lying ahead she first considered to reject it but later combined it with her inclination to get engaged in social work (which is actually a “project” that runs through her life since her childhood where she wanted to become a missionary).

Maria, (30): “So I am really dedicated to the school. Although, I should say, I also make these personal philosophical escapades about what I have come to do in this world. I am really connecting – I don’t know whether this is of interest or not– but I am connecting a little bit. Although it seems absurd after so many years, I am realising that this job I am doing really satisfies me and I think that if someone asked me, what I had come here to do, I think I would say that I have come to help change things through this job. So yes, I believe that I have been able to unite that personal thing you have of saying, ‘What do you do in this world?’, with the job I am doing, so that I feel very satisfied in this sense, because I think that I am doing something that goes beyond others and that is very nice. I feel happy, despite the fact that I find it hard on some days. This is something I am discovering now, this year, last year, not that long ago. Because this profession really takes it out of you, but nevertheless I always look at it with optimism, because I think the work we do is important. We are helping others grow. And I think that is very nice. Well, I don’t know.”

This ethical core of her professional identity rapidly extends beyond the immediate school context. The families of the students become part of it. The situation inside the school merely reflects the situation on the exterior, where the latter is usually considered as main cause of the former. Parents consult her on certain “academic” matters, if something they wrote has correct spelling and similar. She also tries to inform or guide parents in pedagogical matters; for her it doesn't make sense to preach non-violence in school while at home lashing is the norm. To summarize the professional image, one could say that it is the anti-thesis of someone just doing his/her job.

Probably it would be too much to understand those personal reinscriptions of the professional role as the defining core of the profession. Although Maria states that she had similar ideas as a child, only recently her “charitable ideas” and her professional aspirations have converged. This ethical motivation, however, does not contribute to a further professionalization of the field. Maria was the only one of the interviewed teachers who was concerned in sharing her experience within a formal framework by leading courses of continuing education. Although Sophia for example also stated that she has learned a lot while practising and working in the school, she does not consider that this type of knowledge could be needed or appreciated by others, equally inexperienced colleagues. The
knowledge generated in the school stays in the school and with the teacher.

4.3. Social Position

4.3.1. Symbolic aspects: respect and prestige

The level of respect and prestige that teachers reach in relation to their colleagues and to the families only appears very little in the interviews. In the case of Rosa, achieving a certain status of authority for the families depends upon the level of visibility during many years and the skills for establishing contacts, but also for affronting them. She explained that the families need time in order to get to know the teachers which is often the time when they come to the school to pick up their kids.

Sofia described that the authority in relation to the parents is determined by the hierarchy and responsibilities of each teacher and the personal disposition to get involved. As a temporary teacher for her it is clear that her responsibilities and therefore her authority towards the parents is not the same as of a class teacher:

J: “Your relationship with parents, how are you dealing with it?”

Sofia (5): “I deal with it quite badly because I’m very shy and older people give me the… With children everything is natural. But I, since I’m not a tutor of any grade, don’t have to have a relationship with parents. Because I’m not the one that… I mean, my voice goes with the tutor, to say something to a parent. I like that, because it makes a lot of things easier to me. I see the parents around here are tough people and I don’t know if I would like to have a relationship with them anyway. The little relationship I have with them is like in passing. There are mothers with whom I talk, who greet me. But it’s not like sitting and 'listen, so your child and so on…' No.”

The case of Maria is very different. Her capacity to confront and control students and their family alike grant her a level of authority that affects her daily tasks. For example, she is the one to often resolve conflicts between students or to calm angry parents that come to the school claiming something. For the respect and prestige she has earned, Maria represents an element of restraint to which the others teachers can come back to in case of chaotic situations in their classes. The observational notes of Sofia give an example:

[...] Now each child has to enter into the circle and make a movement with the shawl. The others do the same. Meanwhile there is music everybody dances but when the music stops they get excited, shout and start running around. Sofia gets more nervous. She raises her voice, asking to calm down. She calls a child by his name several times. He doesn't respond, doesn't say anything, doesn't move. Another boy plays the drum. Sofia asks a girl to get and call the headmaster [Maria]. The presence of the school director in class appears to be something very respected and feared by the kids. When she enters, everybody is silent. The boy excuses himself, says he won't do it again. He leaves the class together with Maria.

The respect and prestige that Maria enjoys has to do with several aspects. The first one is related to the level of identification the other teachers may have with the social project Maria promotes in the school. Many teachers identify with her socially oriented work and the form of professionalism she promotes by herself but also through the directors team.

Rosa (15): “I see myself quite close to the core [of the directors team] [...] I like the work and the
orientation of the team and therefore I try to pull with them on the same string, that is, to help and to collaborate. [...] there is a team of teachers that supports in one or the other way the directors team and we also try to take into account the inertia of the system. In addition, on a personal level we have very good relations."

Secondly, Maria's authority has to do with the prestige she gained by being able to change the school's situation towards the positive. Most teachers we talked to, acknowledge these changes brought about by Maria. Rosa for example describe Maria as a “fantastic engine” to drive the school forward.

At this point it may be worth to point out the differences as they emerged in the focus group discussion. First, it was clear to the participating teachers that the families have changed. Independent of their economic status they are better informed, they know and they want to know more about the development processes, about the learning processes, and about the ways their children get socialized. This then affects the relation that gets established with the teachers. It ceases to be un-questionable, teachers need to argument for their decisions and enter into contact with the families from a less authoritative position. For one of the teachers, this change could be experience in terms of an aggression, like missing respect and loss of prestige which implies last but not least a de-professionalization. The problem for many teachers is the fact that they wish they could maintain the previous higher levels of prestige and distance, but this is not possible anymore because everything has changed. Respect and authority has to be earned in new ways and is not a natural, self-evident fact tied to the profession. In the words of one teacher from the focus group:

“[...] it may be that you experience this as a questioning, but I enjoy this new relation with parents because I think it opens new paths, paths that often you will open, you open up to the outside. You help parents to understand their kids because they also want to understand them”

Nevertheless, another teacher also expressed the negative side to this. The families, despite their higher educational levels, exhibit the tendency to resign from the education of their kids. In their views, the school is in charge of this. They therefore often claim a role of the teachers they actually do not have:

At parent’s meetings have had different ridiculous matters. When we explain what we are planning to do during the year, our objectives and so on, a group of parent have boycotted the meeting by saying that we are not teaching their children to eat with good manners or whether we teach them to tie up their shoes.

Another factor which skews the relation between educators and families is related to the public image of teachers in mass media. For the participating teachers in the focus group, the representation of teachers in the news is negative and the educational problems that the news treat are superficial and discrediting. An example is how news coverage of violence and aggressive behavior in schools (bullying) constructs public schools as marginal, insecure, deficient, and low educational quality in contrast to private and private/public schools (concertada) that appear as protected and secure places for kids. The youngest teachers gave an example of what her school is doing in order to safe the little prestige that is left for the public school:

The whole question about concertada and private schools causes a lot of damage to our school because since it is public the people in the neighborhood don't want to come to it. And the 25 teachers who are there, we give everything and more for whatever is needed, even painting the walls [...] its like constantly proofing that we work well and not because you would pay for education it automatically means it is better education..
4.3.2. Material aspects: earnings

Because they are civil servants, the earning of Maria and Rosa are subject to the official law. The earnings are classified into “basic” earnings and “complements.” The basic earnings are equal throughout all Autonomous Communities and includes the salary, three-year period supplements, and extraordinary pays. The “complementary” earnings include the complementary amount related to the exercising profession (maestra), if s/he has a headmaster function, the different types of school centers, and the continuing professional development courses. These complementary earnings vary across the different Autonomous Regions.

The following table describes in very general terms the earnings that Maria and Rosa receive as teachers. What is not includes are particular earnings depending on the type of educational institution they are working (CAEP) and not the complementary earning for being the school director (Maria).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base salary</th>
<th>Work complement</th>
<th>Specific complement</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cataluña (*)</td>
<td>890,00</td>
<td>449,91</td>
<td>503,99</td>
<td>1.843,90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Informe sobre el estado y la situación del sistema educativo.66

The topic of the salaries which is an important theme for restructuring of the profession was scarcely mentioned by the teachers participating in the panel. Only the youngest teacher with fewest years of experience expressed her satisfaction for having a place as a substitute in a public school after having been working during several years in private schools. Independently of the insecurity of this temporary position in the public school, this teacher was happy to receive now twice as much salary as in a private institution.

4.4. Work-Life Balance

A recurrent theme that runs through all three interviews is the ability to clearly separate work from home. In contrast to many authors67 who describe the increasing convergence of the private and the public, the blurring of the boundary between work time and leisure time, all three teachers insisted on the vital importance to clearly separate between their work and their private sphere. Both Sophia and Maria describe it as an essential skill that has to be learned – probably across all professions. However, where in other professions this might be related to more technical skills, for the interviewed teachers it essentially involves a human dimension. Conflicts between teachers for example also have to be left in school and have to be solved there.

Maria, (30): “And if this happens here every other day, when I went home I took the whole package with me, now not anymore, now I’m able to leave and on my way home I leave also the problems. And then, the next day I try to return the most renovated possible, because otherwise you can’t cope.”

This human dimension seems linked with the teachers’ capacity called by authors such as Denzin68

and Hargreaves⁶⁹ as ‘emotional understanding’. As Rosa explained, one has to learn to disconnect from emotionally very difficult situations (parents beating up their children or uncontrollability of violent behavior among students).

Rosa, (15) “We are here the whole day and you become involved. It’s just that you can’t keep away from becoming involved. Another story is when you are in a very special school and you decide on how deep you get involved and how far I let it move me. Because I have to sleep at night.”

Recalling that an essential skill of teachers consisted in practicing a high level of implication, the somehow ‘schizotimic’ (a new pathological behavior that takes place when people have to display different and some times contradictory roles in everyday life situations) reality of engaging a 100% in the social and affective dynamics in school and the need to disconnect from this social microcosm the moment one leaves the school building becomes apparent.

Besides this more emotional and affective separation between home and work, there nevertheless exists a certain continuity in intellectual terms as the two participating teachers in the focus group stressed. An attitude of permanent innovation and of self-analysis of one’s professional practice also helps to look with fresh eyes onto one’s private life. one of them stated it the following way:

“All this capacity of analysis, of working on the relationships in the school helped me to get a fresh perspective on life outside of school. It's been always the other way round [...] it has been always the school that helped me because it has enlarged my horizon a lot.”

The importance to draw the line between the personal and the public is also visible on another level of the social relations among teachers. The public and private distinction becomes an internal part of school relations themselves. It is therefore not just a separation between the location (home, work) but within the social relations at school as well: your role and function in the school vs. personal affinities and interests.

Teachers despite working mostly alone in their classroom nevertheless come to form friendships in the school. All the more in this type of school where its very conflictive state urges the teachers to work as a team in order to coherently promote a strategy of change. On the one hand, among the three interviewed teachers but also with other teachers there exist strong affinities on the professional level. The teachers share a commitment with the school community and the social nature of their work which becomes a marker of professional and group identity. Especially since the principal–Maria–actively promotes this type of commitment it is established as a reference point for the relations among the teachers: those who subscribe to a similar perspective like Sophia and Rosa and those who rather see their work in a more “traditional” light of knowledge provider. The proximity in terms of professional ideas sometimes gets reinforced by personal affinities. There is therefore, a second level of more private character that reinforces especially for Maria her relations to the other members of the principal’s team. All three share an interest in questions of spirituality which goes well beyond occasional chats on the topic but involves for example common visits to philosophically oriented seminars. Especially for Maria, what became decisive during our research was the ability to separate and coordinate those two levels of relationships, the personal interests vs. the public role she has as principal and the other teachers have as members of her team. In the same sense as Maria described that some teachers lack the consciousness of what it means to teach in the public school, she insists that there is a range of responsibilities that are tied to her role as head teacher that transcend the preferences on the personal for certain colleagues. An essential skill consisted for Maria to learn how to operate on those two levels of relationship at the same time and

clearly separate between a public, authoritative discourse as principal and a more personal, intimate exchange between friends.

Maria, (15): “Now I realize that for my way of being I find it very difficult to set limits in anything. In relations, in my work, in everything. This is to say, I give that much and nothing further.... Now more than ever I find myself in this situation because this school requires a very precise definition of the limits: where are you and where is the other and what are we going to share.... and I set limits now. Now I find myself in reunions or in situations where I say 'No, no, in this moment I speak now as director and as director I decide this, this, and that.”

In the same way as it was essential to separate between home and work, now it is essential to draw the line between the private and the public aspects of the social relations at work. Not necessarily the two other interviewed teachers or Maria's colleagues on the school board share this point of view.

5. Concluding Remarks

This final section will contextualize our findings within the wider structural frameworks and problematics established during WP1/2. There are some clear affirmations of already identified themes on the one hand while on the other hand the found material also suggests the need for some alternative interpretations not mentioned during WP1 and 2.

5.1. The profession in relation to WP1/2: higher education, vocationalism, etc.

A key line of argument taking up considerable space in WP2 concerns the relation between the profession and higher education. The general conclusion was that the relation between the university and the profession has been called into question since the university and formal training is unable to provide professional and social status to teachers. For all three teachers it is safe to say that initial education at the university did not establish their professional identity. The most telling example in this sense may be the case of Maria who initially perceived a university degree as desirable but later on came to see it as making no big difference in terms of her professional knowledge. This has to be seen in relation to her biography were she started to work without any official qualification. The other, younger teachers for whom the formal initial qualification was a normal step to take in order to start working see it as rather contra-productive to their actual needs. Initial education seems not provide the base of the profession since it is too distanced from the real, practical necessities as described by teachers. What is most likely to become their professional marker are the skills and experiences generated during work which are not based on the knowledge acquired during the initial years of their education at the university.

This re-inscribes the fundamental distinction between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Many trends described in WP2 deal with the packaging and delivering of knowledge, which is the conversion of tacit into explicit forms of knowledge and the potential profit to be gained. It appears for example in the form of “certification” of tacit knowledge as described in the UK where certain “validation centers” outside the university convert “practical competences” acquired at work place into university credits. Or it concerns the extension of formal education into adulthood under the concept of life-long learning that establish the necessity of “consuming” courses and knowledge packs to get a job or to just stay in the job. In this sense, Rosa and Maria subscribe to the rising importance of knowledge and its importance for their profession. Both agree with the model where the teachers are autonomous, bound into a process of continuous reflection over their practice and
alternatives: as part of her practice they continuously generate new professional knowledge. However, despite this strong rhetoric for the importance of knowledge, it is far from clear how it is inserted into economic circuits of production or commercialization. Although Sophia described that she generated a lot of knowledge since she started working, this knowledge does not circulate in any formal setting. It is rather a private “profit.” It seems that only Maria carries her knowledge into other contexts. But her encouragements to the teachers to visit for example other schools and to exchange experiences have had no success. This is to say, that although the school and the teachers currently live through a period of transition that involves the production of knowledge, this knowledge remains isolated from professional agendas or other forms of “exploitation”. A concrete form of gaining profit from packaging/delivering explicit knowledge or by converting tacit into explicit forms of knowledge therefore appears to be missing in our case. WP2 described along these lines also the struggle around the knowledge factor (p.255): the question is who has the authority over the produced knowledge where practical-professional, socially shared application of knowledge collides with its technical, economic exchange value. Whereas it is in the interest of the professions to use the “their” knowledge for the public good, the same knowledge can be exploited for simple “profit” by external agencies. However, none of those struggles were apparent during our research with teachers (in contrast to nurses!).

As a result, it maybe only consequent that at the core of the profession reigns a certain angelic (self-)image. A central idea for all three teachers was the social nature of their work – being engaged in a social project. This makes it in turn necessary to engage with the argument on vocationalism and altruism set out in WP2 (p.275). First, one should not forget that this observation may be due to the type of school in question. The CAEP as being situated in a marginalized neighborhood frames the school not within academic issues but rather within a wider project of social integration and cohesion. A certain social affinity therefore is context of the work at the school.

Although altruistic ideas play a role in each of the interviews, the question as outlined in WP2 is, if it can provide the cement for a whole profession. Here the limits of vocationalism as described in WP2 become visible: Sophia for example clearly states that she doesn't consider herself as a teacher because she will not be able to do this very “hard” job for a long time. She sees no reason why to endure such “low quality work conditions” throughout her working career. Another crucial point mentioned in WP2 was that the altruistic ambition in the profession was constantly contradicted by the imposed working conditions and managerialism. Professionals in this sense “are constantly called upon to decide less what care is needed and how it should be given, than how to 'effectivise' care/education under circumstances they have little control over” (p.276). Especially the case of Maria can confirm this point, where the requirements to be met by the educational administrators stand in contrast to the real necessities in the school (and increasingly so, as she confirmed in May 2006). Although our material therefore clearly confirms the presented analysis in WP2 on vocationalism in all its facets, what seems rather questionable at the same time is the very goal of the analysis set out: to identify a global glue that holds the profession together. Does vocationalism or altruism really have to operate on the level of the profession to become effective? Or, would it not already be sufficient as long as it works on the level of individual identity, formulated as a personal, biographic project?

The wider question this leads to concerns the degree to which capitalism or what has been described as restructuring really needs for its operations clearly articulated institutionalized forms. Our research focus during WP1/2 sets its spotlight on the profession and scans for its “cement.” This implies that cohesion becomes visible in organizational infrastructure and the like: examples would include provision of certification, organization in trade unions, visible protest movements, etc. The same level of analysis is manifest when describing the relation between the profession and the
university, or the privatization and commercialization of knowledge that seems to take place across all countries and especially the UK. Its focus is primarily organizational, that is, on the already institutionalized forms of (public or private) knowledge production and consumption. However, one may ask if this macro-perspective on the profession as a global entity and its relation to other key institutions like Universities or the State is really the most adequate form for capturing how teachers are immersed in a knowledge economy. Does it really make sense to ask for the “unity” or “gravitational center” of the profession in a highly flexible, networked society? Or, are there not more dynamic, ephemeral relations that work more on the personal level but which are equally confining and limiting in that they produce and reproduce certain teachers’ identities?

5.2. Restructuring and Professional Strategies

To be a primary school teacher in the current working conditions demands much more than being competent in the development of literacy skills. Today the first challenge of schools teachers is to know how to cope with the cultural diversity of pupils and their families. Cultural diversity means, for example, different ways of interpreting and transferring school knowledge. Or how understand and act in front of questions such as social expectations of learners, family values, and influence of religious beliefs. This diversity asks a professional strategy to situate the social, cultural and personal context of each learner. This could be a complex and difficult task when a teacher has to work isolated with a large number of pupils in an institution with a poor level of collegiality.

5.3. Restructuring and Generations, Restructuring and Periodisation

When we talk about restructuring and generations the objective is to clarify how different generations of teachers have experienced the changes and modifications of the educational system. The periodization then refers to the historical succession of those changes as they happened in Spain. In what follows, each life course of the participating teachers will be contextualized in the changes on the macro-level of the educational system in Spain. Due to their age differences, of course the experience of structural changes is very different. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities that will be presented in the end.

Although the structural changes of the educational system have been described in detail in WP1 and WP2, here is a short summary: The most decisive legislative change reported by the more experienced teachers with 15 and 30 years in service was the Organic Act on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE -Ley Órganica General del Sistema Educativo). Approved in 1990 it regulates the Spanish education system replacing the General Law of Education (LGE –Ley General de Educación) passed in 1970. Its objectives consisted in i) extend compulsory education to the age of 16 years, ii) change the structure of the educational system now consisting of 6 years of compulsory primary education, 4 years of compulsory secondary comprehensive education, and a choice of either two years of bachelor’s degree (baccalaureate) or vocational training, iii) an in-depth reform of the vocational training in general, iv) define the factors for quality improvement of education, v) adapt the curriculum adopting a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, and vi) establish measures of equity. The approval of the law in 1990 was the outcome of an intensive debate and experimentation towards the educational reform that had been initiated by the PSOE in 1983 and that lasted until 1986. It involved the active participation of schools and teachers following a bottom-up strategy and granting the educational community a decisive role in shaping the planned reform, strengthening thereby the overall democratization processes of the country. As several authors have indicated this experimental phase

from 1983-86 was characterized by high aspirations to turn into reality a change towards a progressive educational system.\footnote{Martínez Bonafé, 1998; Murillo 2000} However, to the degree that those educational “grass-roots” experiences entered into legislation, the plurality, openness, and autonomy would be replaced by a more centralized, administrative and technocratic approach causing major disillusion and frustration among many of the more progressive educational protagonists in Spain.\footnote{See Sancho, J. M. (1998) 1998: El ilusionismo legislativo: un acercamiento a la reforma del sistema educativo español. \textit{Paideia. Revista de la Universidad de Concepción} (Chile), 25, pp. 31-51. Carbonell, J. (2005) Un largo camino. Treinta años de historia. \textit{Cuadernos de Pedagogía}, 342, 48-53.} And although the application of the LOGSE was planned between 1990 and the year 2000 with its institutionalization to be finished by the year 2004, the change in power in 1996 with the Spanish conservative party of José Maria Aznar winning the elections seriously affected this schedule. First, by freezing educational spending, and second by promoting modifications to the law itself under the conservative lemma of the quality of education and individual responsibilities (students’ effort). However, just when the new conservative educational law – the Organic Act on the Quality of Education (LOCE –\textit{Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación}) – was about to be implemented, it was stopped by another change in government. The socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero insists now again on the integrative function of education. It stresses its importance for the social cohesion putting forward a new educational law (LOE) that it was passed this year 2006, that will in turn adapt the LOGSE to the current educational circumstances.

The frequent changes of educational intentions on the political scene but also the general frustration of teachers once the LOGSE was approved accounts for the weak connections between teachers’ statements of structural changes and their professional practice. Even when drawing explicitly the attention to changes in the legislation from our side, this was not perceived as influencing day to day business, either because changes are too cosmetic or lacking the necessary time to become applied practice. The educational projects associated with the different political parties were met with a dismissive shrug, unable to affect their working conditions towards the better. What happens on the level of politics and in the public is perceived as having little or nothing to do with the real necessities in the school.

Sophia, (5): No. Because they have to change the laws, for this to happen. And for them to change the laws… Everybody on the street, in Madrid, demonstrations… Because now they want to get rid of religion hours. And people don’t realise that perhaps it’s more important to have fewer students in a class than religion. So we can work more. And that anyone that wants to have religious values, he will have them in the end, because his family has them. All the education debate is very badly conducted. Things which are necessary in a school, like having resources, having more staff, or having more classrooms… And they don’t… Until they change the laws we are not gong to have more people, and neither are we...

I: How do you think this debate is going? Because it’s not the first debate on education either...

Sophia, (5): It’s not going well, not going well, not going well. Politically I think it’s doing very badly. [...] I don’t care about a lot of political things. But on your daily life… That’s also why I believe a little less each day in political things. I mean, the little I know, they disappoint me so much that beyond my daily life, why should I care about politics?”

This makes it quite difficult to establish clear-cut relations between official documents/legislation and the concrete problems experienced and reported by teachers in the school. However, as the following paragraphs will show that there have been quite direct links in the past between
educational changes and teachers’ professional careers.

In this sense, the case of Rosa (15) is interesting since her career was most directly affected by the restructuration carried out by the LOGSE. Rosa initiated her professional career just when the LOGSE had been approved in 1990. This meant that her initial training still followed the old educational system where she was meant to teach children between 11 and 14 years of age. But because the LOGSE redistributed the age groups according to infant level (0-6 years), primary education (6-12) and secondary compulsory education (13-16), Rosa, as many other teachers, had to decide to either professionally adapt to the higher age group (13-16 years of age) or to “downgrade” and teach in primary education. Where formerly primary teachers served the whole of compulsory education up to the age of 14, now a basic reorganization took place: primary teachers could work with children from 3-12 years, whereas secondary teachers came to teach the remaining three years of compulsory education from 13 to 16 and the optional two extra years of Baccalaureate. This meant that the curriculum specialties and age group of Rosa’s academic training did not exist in that form anymore when she started to work. Unable to fulfill the conditions for ascending into the status of secondary teachers, she opted for descending to the primary level until reaching finally infant education. The restructuration carried out by the LOGSE also coincided with very low birth rates and therefore a substantial reduction of the student population on the entry levels of schooling. The difficulty to pass entry requirements to teach on secondary level combined with a lack of students was responsible for the scarcity of work among primary teachers. For Rosa this meant an instable work situation. Although she passed the state entry exam to her profession which usually guarantees a secure job, half of her professional career, as it was the case of many other teachers, was marked by this instability of changing between schools and/or educational level.

From this initial restructuration as a political “fact” different interpretations in terms of effects on individual teachers lives emerged. In the same way that many teachers of her generation perceived this change in the educational system as affecting their professional identity provoking discontent and personal crisis feelings, Rosa quite on the contrary took it as a positive opportunity.

Rosa,(15): “And instead of doing the leap to the first years of the ESO, I kept going down and now, see, I’m in P3. I don’t know if some day I will end up with the babies in the nursery but... I don’t worry. I was a lot of years working in primary education, first and second grade, where you get all the reading and writing process. And I enjoyed it a lot and I found myself very comfortable working there. In the school I was working, in primary education they worked together with the kindergarden. To tell the truth, I was delighted with the dynamic, and the kids enjoyed it too, because the children haven’t lost their innocence.”

The changes between different schools and the need to adapt to changing social contexts, school projects, and teams is claimed as essential part of her being or learning to become a professional. Since in some of the schools she also was in the school governing body this experience of changing contexts becomes a marker of her professional identity. It underlines the knowledge that currently informs her teaching practice such as working in team, what it means to commit yourself to others, or the low esteem she shows towards political reform. Especially the later deserves some further attention, since the main reason why she demonstrates such a low esteem of political agendas is the different timings involved in really implementing a legislative change. Informed by her work experience, the time necessary to take a new law into classroom practice is in no relation to the rapid modifications on the political level. Change in schools – be it in relation to legislation or other – happens very, very slow causing the disconnecting between official policies and actual school practice. In her eyes, it is not that the actual laws don't function but rather that they are missing the

necessary resources to be actually implemented, a fact which actually corresponds to the implementation of the LOGSE under the PP from 1996 onwards (see above).

Although Maria witnessed the restructuration process of the LOGSE, her professional career does not follow the same logic but rather revolves around a different set of questions, clearly predating the events from 1983 onwards. Since no formal qualification for infant education was required at the beginning of the 1970s when she started to work at the age of 18, her professional career was marked from the start by seeking alternative sources of pedagogical formation. She continuously participated in private curses of progressive pedagogical movements that compensated her lack of official education. However, with the introduction of the LGE in 1970, initial teacher training for infant and primary education became integrated into the University. The law stipulated that the Profesores de Educación General Básica (basic education teachers) should at least have a three year qualified university certificate called Diplomado corresponding to the level of degree of Technical Engineer or Technical Architect. As a consequence, maestras like Maria who previously had been working without official certification had to catch up with the requirements as the LGE entered into full vigor or change their profession. Nevertheless, the title of profesora de EGB obtained in between 1977 and 1982 was not really satisfactory for her. Maria does not consider the university certificate obtained at Teacher’s College as a “real” university education and has always had the feeling that something fundamental is missing in her professional background: Maria,(30): “I have always had the complex that I had to have studied a degree. I have always had this complex. So I have always had this feeling that something was missing in terms of what I was working in, in my professional career. ... But I have this thing inside that tells me my early career was not “normal”, so to speak. I have always missed having a university degree. It’s as if going to university would give you a different status compared to what you get from Teacher’s Training College.”

Because her three years degree (diploma) was not equivalent to a five years degree (licenciatura), as required for example for secondary teachers, Maria, as many primary school teachers experienced the diploma degree as lacking status. However, her official certification did not really change the continuity of her “private,” parallel investigations and permanent desire to learn. Although it is true that not having a five years degree appears to amplify Maria's very personal quest for knowledge, in the end the university title is not so important for her. Regardless of the certification, an insatiable curiosity, the desire to expand her horizon continues to articulate in the background the underlying theme of her professional career. Now, in evaluating her atypical trajectory she actually comes to the conclusion that this lack of certification was a positive factor. Ideally every teacher should constantly be investigating and looking beyond what she or he already knows; for her it is the touchstone that enables teachers to enjoy their work.

Because Maria always had been working across all age groups of infant and basic education she was not affected in the same way as Rosa by the LOGSE. Around 1990 when the LOGSE entered in vigor, she was working in the public school. In 1987 she passed the state entry exam for becoming a teacher. While she had been working mainly in private institutions from 1970s up to 1987 with a two year period of unemployment she finally entered into the public school system where she has been working up to the present occupying quite often leadership positions. The

74 For those who wanted to enrol two more years at university, the diploma could be obtained. However, having a full university degree does not mean for primary school teachers a direct increase in their salary or a promotion, as the short career ladder of the Spanish educational system is not based on teachers qualifications but in performing coordinating or managerial positions. What they can do is to apply for a secondary school job which has more academic status, bit better salary and less teaching hours.
change from private institutions to the public one was related to the fact that the school she was working in had to close. It would not find sufficient official support in order to survive as a *Concertada* (State sponsored schools) which “forced” Maria to enter into the public system. Despite the difference to the LOGSE compared to Rosa's experience, Maria nevertheless recognizes the educational reform of 1990 as an important event in her professional career as opening new perspectives on the curriculum and teaching and learning theories.

What runs as a common thread through the different professional careers is a rather high instability during the first years of work life. The change between schools or one's curriculum specialty, the impossibility to engage in a long term project, or instable contracts have been a reality for the interviewed teachers no matter when they started to work. Although the reasons that cause these dynamic setting are very different between the cases, what remains quite similar is the positive interpretation of this flexibility. Both Rosa and Maria come to the conclusion that they were enriching experiences constituting an essential part of their formative years. From this initial experiences and the knowledge it generated emerges also the high esteem of continuing education for teachers as an indispensable part of the professional career. Both Rosa and Maria agree that teachers always should be investigating and extending themselves to new ideas and thoughts. However, it is worth emphasizing the generational differences. Whereas for Maria parallel professional development courses were the means to become a professional teacher (in the sense of professionalism), for Sophia, the youngest teacher, a post-graduate course opens up other professional options (switching from teaching to music therapy). Visiting further courses appears in one case as the consolidation of a professional practice whereas for Sophia it signifies the flexibility between professions. This in turn draws our attention to the decreasing importance of a certain corpus of knowledge for the teaching profession. What counts for Sophia as the youngest teacher is not the profession (its corpus of knowledge) itself; they are exchangeable as knowledge is exchangeable. What comes in its place is rather a personal – ethical – project. On the grounds of qualifying their work as “socially oriented” both generations (Maria and Sophia) can meet again. They describe their work as essentially related to a service for the other.
Chapter 7

Primary Teachers’ Lives under Restructuring: The Portuguese Case

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Introduction

For many decades, primary teaching (currently called the First Cycle of Basic Education) has been “the poor parent” of education in Portugal. During the dictatorial regime that ruled the country from 1926 to 1974, it received considerable political attention and even some financial investment, but this was intended to use it as a strategic means of lowering the social expectations of the Portuguese population and of indoctrinating it in the dominant ideology of the ruling regime. Consequently, primary teacher training was downgraded and schoolteachers were closely watched by the Government’s political police and other powerful repression bodies.

In 1974, the democratic revolution of the 25th of April brought a massive number of pupils into the school system, which grew exponentially, especially in the middle and secondary levels, thus forcing governments to invest primarily in these latter sectors. The years went by and primary schools remained as if frozen in time. Still today, most of primary education is given in the same buildings and under very similar working conditions to those which prevailed during the fascist regime. Teacher training, however, went through considerable changes, as did the organizational context of teachers’ work and the primary education curriculum.

The 1980s and 1990s were a time of strong public investment in formal teacher in-service training, mostly in the form of short-term sessions offered on a traditional format. Since the mid-1980s, the formal training required to teach in a primary school was upgraded from a three-year “bacharelato” to a four-year “licenciatura”. In 1989, the teaching career was “unified” so that, from then on, every teacher was hired and paid according to his or her qualifications, regardless of the sector where he or she worked (primary, middle, or secondary schooling). The publication of a new teacher statute in 1989 also tied career progression to the accumulation of credits in in-service training, which also provoked a strong search for this type of training.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the Government sponsored a massive national training program (the so-called “Complementary Training” courses) to update the training of those teachers in the system that lacked a “licenciatura” degree. In a short-period of time (five to six years) primary teachers (and also kindergarten educators) enrolled in higher education institutions by the thousands, attending two-year full-time complementary training courses that entitled them to the “licenciatura” and its subsequent career progression and salary benefits. These training experiences had important implications for teachers’ professional knowledge.

The organizational conditions under which primary teachers work also changed considerably, especially since the late 1990s. From the beginning of the 2000s, in particular, some local governments implemented a nationally-mandated policy that gradually incorporated every primary school in each district under the jurisdiction of a “school grouping”, often, a Basic Integrated School (that is, a group of former schools headed by a middle school – 5th to 9th grades – located in its geographical area). In this new format, primary schools are now called “nucleus” and operate as components of these larger entities, rather than as independent organizations, as was usual before this organizational reform. Basic Integrated Schools thus represent a new model of school organization that brings together several levels of education, organizationally, under the same institution, the same management team and the same educational project. The official aim is to provide pupils with continuity and coherence in their experience of schooling, from kindergarten until the end of compulsory education (9th grade), but the huge economies obtained with the closing of thousands of small schools whose pupils are integrated into these new entities should not be overlooked.
Another apparently minor organizational reform, but which had significant consequences for teachers’ work, was the implementation of inclusion policies since the first half of the 1990s, whereby students with disabilities ceased to be enrolled in independent special education schools and were brought into regular classrooms in ordinary schools.

Finally, the primary school curriculum was also subjected to profound changes. State control is still exercised through a national curriculum whose application is compulsory for both public and private schools. However, since 1974, the primary school curriculum gradually moved away from an exclusive focus on “basic skills” (“reading, writing, and counting”, which was the official motto of Salazar’s educational policy) towards a progressive integration of other content areas, particularly, the so-called “artistic expressions” (plastic arts, drama and music). In the beginning of the 1990s, a further major transformation was the creation of a new curriculum space, the so-called “school area”, which was to be devoted to the cross-integration of curriculum subjects and to serve as a bridge between students’ school and overall life experiences. One of the major aims of this area was to have pupils work and learn by themes, through interdisciplinary and contextualised teamwork, in order to break the segmented discipline-based character of the school curriculum. Another aim of the area was to strengthen schools’ links with their communities, through the exploration of themes of broad significance to the several social groups involved in education. In the school area, pupil initiative, creativity and autonomy were given prime importance.

2001, in particular, was a year of profound change in the primary school curriculum. Government legislation (Legal decree nº 6/2001) introduced several innovations, namely: the official declaration of the “flexible management of the curriculum” as the aim of the government’s policy in this domain; the creation of “school curricular projects” that aim at contextualising the national curriculum in each institution; the creation of “class curriculum projects” that are to adapt the school curriculum project to the characteristics of each class; and the introduction of three new “non-disciplinary curriculum areas”: the “project area” (an interdisciplinary area where the students can develop integrated projects, according to their interests and needs), “accompanied study” (an area devoted to learning competences, namely, study skills and work methods), and “civic education” (a curriculum space devoted to education for citizenship). In short, especially since the 1990s, some government initiatives – such as the creation of “project areas” in the curriculum, and the creation of “alternative curricula” (programs of studies that are tailored to the specific needs of groups of at-risk students that attend a school) – potentially create space for the promotion of primary teachers’ professional autonomy.

Research problem

The key research problem that this research addressed was: how do primary teachers’ perceptions of change relate to the objective restructuring that has occurred in their profession and in their work as a result of state policy-making?

Change in society and in education occurs at several levels, some of which are national, even global, while others have a more regional or local origin. Depending on their life trajectories, their personal characteristics and the work culture that prevails in their workplaces, among many other factors, different teachers perceive and experience these changes in distinct ways. Furthermore, due to a variety of reasons, changes that are mandated at a super-structural level penetrate teachers’ actual work experiences and contexts in often partial and diverse degrees. Therefore, teachers’ experiences of change must be regarded as unique combinations of policy-level initiatives, regional and local school contexts, individual histories and idiosyncratic acts of interpretation and meaning-making. The implication is that no teacher’s life story can be extrapolated to interpret how an entire generation of professionals has experienced restructuring. Each story is unique, although each also
sheds light on a broader pattern that may be characteristic of a given cohort of teachers and distinct from other cohorts located differently in historic time.

**Research questions**

The research study sought to clarify three main research questions:

- How have teachers experienced the changes that have occurred in society, in state policymaking and in their profession, throughout time?
- How has their relation to professional knowledge and to their work changed?
- How are these changes associated with their broader life circumstances?

**Overall research context**

The present paper reports on the work and life experiences of a group of teachers throughout a complex period of change (mainly, from 1973 to the middle of 2006). The results presented are the outcome of a research study conducted by the PROFKNOW Portuguese research team, under the support of the European Union. The primary research strategy was the life history method, which was combined with a broad ethnographic observation (through a “shadowing” process) of the sites where the participants worked, and a thematic focus group interview with five additional primary teachers.

The main participants in the study were three teachers. All worked in the same institution, Bela Vista School. Each gave two long interviews on their life history. Interviews lasted between 90 to 120 minutes. All interviews were conducted between March and July, 2006, in a small office located in the school site. Each participant was also shadowed throughout her working day during three full days. The focus group interview lasted for two hours and a half. The focus-group participants were teachers with diverse levels of experience. All were intentionally invited to participate because they had just completed, (or were in the process of completing) additional formal training courses (namely, a Complementary Training course, and Master’s in Education course). This choice of participants was based on the assumption that these participants would be in particularly relevant conditions for reflecting on and discussing their relations to professional knowledge.

The research data were content-analysed, using a thematic strategy. In all, 236 one-spaced pages of interview transcripts and 39 pages of field notes were analysed.

**Conceptual position on professional knowledge**

The present research relies on a theoretical perspective on professional knowledge that is based on three key principles: 1) a conception of the subject as an active agent in his or her relation to knowledge; 2) an understanding of knowledge that includes its formal, official dimension, but extends widely beyond it, and 3) an approach to knowledge that is not based on a previously established theoretical position, but rather that seeks to understand it as a phenomenon that may only be grasped through the analysis of emergent and transpositive processes that unfold in the field of practice. Drawing on this set of principles, our work is based on the following definition of professional knowledge at work: a set of explicit and implicit ways and objects of knowing which is mobilized and constructed by the acting subject, both in the development of his or her practice and in his or her reflection upon it, generated and nurtured by the confluence of his or her biographic
trajectory, professional culture (models, conceptions and legitimate patterns of behaviour and of performance instituted by the profession), and the organizational structure of the field where he or she performs his or her work.

National, regional and local context

In the 2005-2006 school year (the year of the empirical study), in the Portuguese mainland, there were 6,088 public primary schools in Portugal, enrolling 289,319 pupils and employing 21,791 teachers. The average of students per institution was 47.5, and the pupil/teacher ratio was 13.3.<sup>iii</sup>

Bela Vista School is located in Terra Azul, a middle-sized Portuguese town with about 65,000 inhabitants. There are 40 schools in the urban area and its surrounding villages: 32 primary schools, aggregated into five Basic Integrated Schools (each headed by a middle school) and a “school area” (a “horizontal grouping” of primary schools); and three large secondary schools, each employing from 120 to nearly 200 teachers. The 32 primary schools in the district where Bela Vista is located enrolled around 4000 students, with an average of approximately 125 pupils per institution. Locally and nationally, Bela Vista can thus be considered above average, in terms of institutional size, which is understandable, given its location in the heart of the Terra Azul urban area.

In the abovementioned school year, Bela Vista employed 15 teaching staff working at the primary level: 13 were regular classroom teachers, one was support teacher and an additional colleague had a mixed schedule, doing support or substitute teaching, and special education work. As is usual with virtually every primary school in the broader region, the building also housed a kindergarten (with three classes and their respective educators). Bela Vista was integrated into its “mother” organization (a Basic Integrated School) in 2001, together with two additional primary institutions. Subsequently, more schools joined the group.

There were 325 pupils studying in primary education at Bela Vista, with an average class size of approximately 20 (class size ranged from 18 to 21). Half of the pupils in the school were entitled to social support for acquiring materials and for school meals, although the percentage that received the highest rate of support represented only half of this latter group (i.e., about 25% of the total pupil body)<sup>iv</sup>. In the end of the 1980s, the school was officially designated as a “priority intervention” institution, which means that it was the object of a public positive discrimination policy in terms of additional support for its poorer students. The poverty situation has improved since the late 1990s and the school is no longer integrated into that category. Still, poverty is a characteristic of some of its classes, affecting at least 25 percent of its pupils.

The school site is a two-floor building with a large playground surrounded by a high fence. The classrooms are large and well-illuminated. However, the available work materials are poor. Computers are also rare and those that exist don’t seem to be given much use. There are also no Internet connections in the school. Outside spaces are large. There is even a new vegetable garden that the school is developing as part of its participation in an internationally-sponsored environmental education program. There are also some fairly reasonable outdoor sports facilities, although the indoor gym is relatively small and poorly equipped, and is frequently used as a passageway between different parts of the building, even during physical education classes. Entry and leaving the school is strictly controlled by the ancillary staff at the main gate, which is locked during the school day.
Participants

Three teachers participated in the case study: Maria, Victoria and Carlos. All worked in Bela Vista.

Maria had been teaching for 32 years and was in her last year of service. She was the eldest of seven children raised by a family of poor villagers. Her mother was a housewife. Her father was a low rank military employee, the son of a fisherman. Maria had to leave home for a distant geographical area at an early age to further her school studies. She finished her training to become a teacher in 1971. At the time, teacher training courses for the primary level were two years long. She then applied to work in a school and was appointed to a very poor, small village. On almost a yearly basis, she moved from school to school, and gradually approached the city schools, where she stayed until today. She has been school director several times. Maria is married to a computer technician, and has three children, ages 17, 19 and 21.

Victoria was in the middle of her career; she had been teaching for 18 years. Like Maria, she was born in a poor family and had to travel away to be able to study. She was the eldest of five children in the family. She finished her three-year teacher training course in the late 1980s. Also like Maria, she moved from one school to another during the first 10 to 12 years of her career. In the beginning of the 2000s, she attended a two-year university complementary training course to upgrade her qualifications. Recently, she was elected school coordinator (the top leadership position in her institution). Maria is married to a shop floor assistant and has two children, aged 7 and 9.

Carlos is single. When he was interviewed, he was in his second year of service. He also came from a very modest social background. Both of his parents were poor farm workers. He had two brothers. Carlos did his training (a four-year course) in a teacher training college. For him, teaching in the primary sector was a second choice; he would have preferred to work with older children, but job prospects seemed to be better in primary schools. After he finished his college course, it was very difficult for him to find a job. Initially, he did part-time jobs in the business sector. Like most teachers of his generation, he then had to travel all over the country to work on short-term provisional contracts, usually substituting for other teachers who were ill or absent. Unemployment was a real threat for him; finding a job, whichever and wherever, was his main concern.

Themes

1. Structural changes of the welfare state

The teachers’ life stories are testimony of important structural changes that have had significant consequences for their work experiences. The following presentation focuses on participants’ experience of these structural changes, thus exclusively highlighting the changes that teachers recognise as important in their work, or which are regarded as significant by the researcher, as a result of his analysis of teachers’ accounts and of their actual work contexts and practices. In this respect, the research data point to significant social-political and policy changes that affected teachers’ experiences. From a social-political point of view, one moment of change stands out: the Revolution of the 25th of April, 1974, and its implications for school life in the mid 1970s. Understandably, this change is referred to only by the most experienced teacher, Maria. As to the policy level, three types of issues are highlighted by the participants: curriculum reforms, pupil inclusion policies, and organizational changes in the educational system.
1.1 Social-political change

When the democratic Revolution of the 25th of April 1974 broke out, Maria was in her first year of service. One day that she went to work, people had demolished the walls that separated the masculine section from the feminine section of the school. As she describes it, “when I arrived at the school, the wall stones were still lying in the ground and that’s when mixed classes began” (T1,1, pp. 4-5).

The Revolution provoked a sort of ideological cleansing movement regarding everything in education that was (apparently, or not) connected to the previous regime’s. For example, textbooks were burned, as were other publications promoted by the dictatorship. As Maria states:

“with the 25th of April, everything had to be replaced, everything was politically revised, even those who belonged to [the regime’s official indoctrination movements, like the Mocidade Portuguesa – the Portuguese Youth]... we almost belonged to all of that, we were forced to. I didn’t have many problems, but there were colleagues who... because of that, people thought that everything was connected to salazarism... Even the 1st grade textbook... it was one of those that had the flags... it was really the Mocidade Portuguesa, the children of the Mocidade Portuguesa were on the cover of the 1st grade textbook... the children with the flag, all of that went away... Even the Fagulha, which was a periodical publication that existed in the schools, we had to burn everything [laughter]... I burned them, but I kept the stories that were inside them, which didn’t seem to have anything wrong with them, so I could tell them to the class, because at that time there wasn’t such a thing as a school library”. (T1,1, pp. 4-5)

The 25th of April also brought with it a new curriculum which gave some emphasis to artistic education, with the introduction of the so-called Expressive Areas (Plastic Arts, Music, and Drama). In the school year following the Revolution, she still had to prepare her pupils for the 4th grade exams, which took place for the last time, in the building of the local municipality. Subsequently, these exams were abolished.

Another important change related to primary teachers’ working conditions: before 1974, they worked on Saturday mornings. These mornings were often devoted to developing activities that were often directly organised or inspired by the regime’s indoctrination movements, such as the Portuguese Youth (Mocidade Portuguesa). After the 25th of April, unions were formed which claimed for better working conditions, namely, a reduction of teachers’ workload. Therefore, work on Saturdays was abolished.

1.2 Policy changes

1.2.1 Curriculum change

As mentioned above, on of the first targets that the 1974 revolutionaries aimed at was the primary school curriculum. The old regime’s textbooks and support materials were abolished and burned, and fascist-like movements and practices rejected. Many people connected to these movements and practices were persecuted and fired.

In 1980, there was a new change in the curriculum. For Maria, the most relevant aspect about this new program of studies was that the Expressions received much more explicit emphasis on it, “although they were still not put in the foreground like they would be later”: according to her, “they were already there with their objectives; everything was much more specified than it had been previously”. Before, “[the Expression areas] were there [in the curriculum], but what we were
supposed to do, it wasn’t very well defined, it was somewhat diluted” (T1,1, p. 9).

The second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s were times of state-mandated deep experimenting with the curriculum. Although the curriculum was (and still is) national and mandatory for every school, small portions of it became the subject of curriculum flexibility experiments and attempts at promoting interdisciplinary practices in schools. However modest, this new philosophy originated problems and difficulties for teachers:

we had to follow the guidelines that came from the philosophy of that school [the Teacher Training School], the guideline that its director defined for that year. (…) she came from [a different geographical area] and she brought many [new] ideas with her, like: we shouldn’t be too concerned to follow the program, from the first objective in Mother Language, or Social Studies or anything else, what we did was to turn it all around and start ... for example, to study our environment and our [locality] and, from that basis, to pick everything that was in Social Studies that we could connect to the [fit]... and this was to be done in every grade. Everything that we could ... we should start with the environment that the students knew and we had to do all the planning, to write down everything...

Q: Was that a new way of working?

T: Yes... and to realize that things... (…) that nothing is compartmentalised, things have to be open. We also worked hard on that ... the “centre of interest” ... (…) and it is still a bit like that today ... it is a bit of interdisciplinarity that the pupils have to develop today, which is to connect the classes to one another, but at that time, we talked... it was the “centre of interest”. So, we started with a theme, which could be a theme from Social Studies, and then from that we connected to Mathematics, to Mother Language, to everything that we could teach in relation to that. (T1,1, pp. 9-10)

In 1989, a new primary education program of studies was launched, first as an experiment in some schools, and later disseminated to the whole system, in 1990-91. As Maria sees it, “it was then that the Expressive areas … (…) were heavily valued”. And she exemplifies: “Like us being able to begin [a lesson] with a plastic activity, like we do sometimes, in which the pupils can do a drawing or something, or work in groups, and from that, to go on and write a text about the drawing. So, the expressive areas were strongly valued. Any area: plastic, drama, music, physical ... (…). That really left a stamp on me” (T1,1, pp. 10-11).

The constant changes in the curriculum often leave teachers confused and uncertain about the appropriate way of working. For example, one of the focus-group participants described that once she had a class with two distinct levels, so that she had to use the old curriculum for one part of the class and the new one (which had just been introduced to the other). The changes of terminology that are often associated with new programs created many confusing situations and misunderstanding, even among colleagues (FG-TA, pp. 38-39). Another teacher complained about the lack of coherence across the distinct curriculum changes: for example, a competency-based curriculum framework was legislated in 2001, but the program of studies is still the same as before.

These constant legislative changes seem to make teachers’ impervious to educational reform. For example, commenting on the 2001 curriculum reform, an interview stated that “its just words”, adding that it did not have any implications for her practice, because she already worked like that for many, many years (T1,2, pp. 35-36). As she states: “it didn’t change my way of working, because the transversal areas and all of that, we already did that, even in the time that we were trained to become teachers” and the competencies “are what we used to call objectives and goals” (T1,2, pp. 35-36). Therefore, the Competencies document is not perceived as relevant and it has
involved no relevant changes in teachers’ ways of working.

However, some interviewees are not totally opposed to the overall curriculum flexibility initiatives that have been implemented. One of them, in particular, states that the creation of alternative curricula in the late 1990s has totally changed his way of working and that the 2001 legislation has meant a much more active recognition of schools’ autonomy. Therefore, he gives the benefit of doubt to these policies (FG-TD, p. 42).

1.2.2 Inclusion policies

Inclusion policies have had a tremendous impact on teachers’ work. The integration of disabled pupils full-time in regular classrooms confronted teachers with huge challenges: of preparedness to deal with this type of children (without any specialised training in the area), of curriculum and pedagogical diversification, and ultimately of being able to cope with the significantly increased workload. One interviewee describes vividly her first experience of this kind:

“[In my] first grade class, I experienced the integration of two pupils [in the class], both with deep disabilities: one had a mental disability, she didn’t talk .... at that time, she could barely talk. It was the sort of situation in which she would be in the classroom and she would urinate... she wasn’t able to speak... It was very good for her, because when she left, many years later, she could express herself well, she could name many things, she learned the names of animals, so she had... it was very good and... but it was a very big struggle, because the acceptance... that [change] was very sudden and, at that time, those pupils weren’t well-accepted. I don’t mean to say that we were against them, we were against the way they were integrated ... because the children showed up in the school and there were no teachers to support them and no one knew how that was going to be done. (...) it was a bit new to me, all of that, I had to learn many things at the same time... (...) And with those children, with a first grade class and with a hyperactive pupil ... it was a child that I had to carry by the hand, because otherwise she would break everything, the pencils, she broke everything, hers’ and the others’ ... and until it was possible to get a teacher to support her and to bring an inspector to see that the children needed to have time outside the class, because otherwise the others wouldn’t be able to learn... that was a big struggle among the parents and [as director of the school] I was in the middle of all of that. So I went through situations in which I became nervous, I thought that I was going to give up, that I was going to resign, which was a thing that I didn’t want to... to do, because I thought that I should be able to reach my goals and it was a very big struggle, those were two years that I don’t miss.” (T1,1, pp. 11-12)

After a few years, a sort of balance seems to have been reached in this respect. According to the abovementioned teacher’s testimony, “in the beginning, it was awful (...) it was insane, because they [the pupils] were supposed to be integrated full-time, as if they were exactly the same as the other pupils, it was... it almost drove us crazy” (T1,2, pp. 36-37). Now, according to her, there is a balance because schools have been given some specialised support staff in the area, the children with special educational needs only remain in the classroom part of the school day, and teachers are also more accepting of this kind of children.

1.2.3 Organizational change

Organizationally, 1998 was a key year for schools. This was the year when the current organizational framework for the local management of schools was legislated. For primary schools, this had important consequences, which were experienced, especially, by the teachers with some sort of administrative responsibility in their buildings, particularly, school directors. Specifically with respect to primary schools, due to their integration in larger “groupings” of institutions (either
horizontal or vertical ones), they ceased to have a director, who was replaced a coordinator. Most of the administrative work that was done by the director was transferred to the main institution of the grouping (T1,1, p. 14).

Besides leadership configurations, organizational formats and administrative responsibilities, the integration of primary schools into school groupings (such as Basic Integrated Schools, which is the case of Bela Vista) had important implications for other areas of teachers’ lives. Some interviewees even regarded this integration as the crucial change in their working conditions. They illustrate this with the issue of work materials.

The transition originated difficulties, especially for school leaders:

*that first year as coordinator a was a year of transition, we [the school] moved from the B School Board to a Basic Integrated School and it was very tiring, because I had to learn to... I had begun relating to a superior entity [the School Board] that then ceased to exist and I had to learn how to relate to a new entity [Basic Integrated School], with another type of functioning and, many times ... the information is passed on differently, the receptiveness is different, the way of relating is also different. It was a year... it was difficult, my first year as coordinator. (T2,1, pp. 28-29)*

Teachers felt lost and anxious about what they perceived as a lack of official guidance in this new phase. They complained, in particular, about the lack of training to prepare the documents (school development projects, curriculum projects, internal regulations) that were officially demanded for the new institutional format into which they were being integrated.

However, while in the beginning the transition into the BIS provoked considerable anxiety among teachers, it ended as not being perceived as a major change for several of them.

2. Work conditions, organization, tasks, and management

2.1. Work conditions

2.1.1. Job stability

Every teacher’s testimony in the interviews is the story of a constant traveller. Indeed, one of the main features of teachers’ work experience is the constant move from one institution to another on an almost yearly basis, until finally they are able to get tenure and stabilize in a specific institution. In relation to the groups that were interviewed, even teachers with nearly twenty years of service have been on a different school, on average, every two years (in the beginning stages – the first 6 to 10 years -, every year). Taking the example of the focus group interview participants:

- Teacher A: 18 years of service, 9 schools
- Teacher B: 2 years of service, 2 schools
- Teacher C: 18 years of service, 8 schools
- Teacher D: 18 years of service, 10 schools
- Teacher E: 14 years of service, 6 schools
Teachers’ tales of their professional life story are thus full of accounts of efforts to come closer to their family residence (sometimes, the husband working in a relatively distant location, and couples living apart for many years). Due to a lack of teaching posts in their place of residence, they needed to move to distant places, usually to go and work in schools located in very small and poor villages, rural institutions with one or two teaching places. In the past, they often got classes with nearly 30 students, with two or even more levels in the same room, given to an inexperienced teacher (T1, p. 4). It is usual to have to travel long distances to go and work in these schools, which that change their staff almost entirely every year bad roads. In the past, especially, travelling conditions were very difficult (in the 1970s, some schools didn’t even have a road to access them).

With the passing of time, while these conditions improved slightly for the more experienced teachers, work prospects worsened for the younger generation. Unlike the previous generations, not even travelling makes it easy for these young teachers to find a job in primary teaching. For example, none of the two young teachers in the research study was able to work as a teacher in the year immediately following the completion of their teacher training course. It was only in the second year that they were able to find a teaching job, working on contract, usually starting as support teachers, or substituting for absent teachers (e.g., women on maternity leave, sick people on temporary absence, etc.), sometimes for very short periods of time. Due to a combination of factors – namely, demographic trends that substantially diminish the number of pupils that enrol every year in primary education in Portugal; government policies that close down small schools and integrate their children into larger institutions or “school groupings”, and drastic cuts in public expenditure that lead to less staff contracting –, these teachers’ main goal, contrary to their older colleagues, is not to be able to work in this or that specific institution, but rather to simply be able to get a job.

The constant need to apply for a different school every year has deep implications for schools as well, especially for the smaller ones, which see its staff change almost entirely year after year. The interviewees stressed the importance of staff stability for a school in terms of developing a school culture and a pedagogical project for its students, advantages that are unavailable for the more unstable institutions.

2.1.2. Work spaces

With minor exceptions, the interviewee testimonies point to serious insufficiencies in terms of work spaces in the primary schools where they work or have worked. Most buildings referred by the interviewees don’t have a staffroom, or enough offices for support staff to work with children individually or in small groups, or even a room to welcome and meet the parents. None has a school library. Teachers are particularly critical of these unsatisfactory working conditions.

In Bela Vista, Victoria, the nucleus coordinator leads whole staff meetings in her own classroom (T2,2, pp. 36-37). A tiny tea room in the building is used as staffroom (T3,2, pp. 23-24). No more than four or five people fit in it, simultaneously.

Physically speaking, classrooms are an exception to this overall trend: in Bela Vista, they are spacious, well-illuminated and airy.

Many primary school buildings are Centenary Plan constructions that were built in the 1940s and 1950s, during Salazar’s regime, and haven’t been the object of significant repair work since then”. Most do not have a covered space for Physical Education practice or for any other kind of open air activity; when it rains, the pupils are unable to do Physical Education, they don’t even enjoy recess time, and have to stay in the classroom (FG-TE, p. 15; FG-TC, p. 24).
In some institutions, the lack of sufficient rooms for classes implies the need to operate on a double-
schedule basis.

2.1.3. Material resources

With respect to material resources, two distinctions are called for: first, between the past and the
present; second, between different institutions, presently.

During many years, even after 1974, while primary schooling is legally mandatory and free, material resources for classroom work were bought mostly with money given by the parents. Schools didn’t have budgets; they were given specific amounts of money to acquire goods, but the quantities were totally insufficient, they were hardly enough to buy milk for the pupils. Thus emerged the practice of organizing the “school box”, a small fund raised and managed by each teacher that collected money from every parent of the pupils in her class (with the exception of those who, because of poverty, were unable to contribute). This fund was used, mostly, to purchase exercise books, pencils, rubbers, pens and rulers for the pupils.

For example, when Maria was director of a small rural school (with two teaching places) in the late 1970s, she used to go to town herself to buy materials for the school’s pupils (T1,2, p. 4). In the early days (1970s), several pupils’ families also contributed to the school cantina in goods (eggs, beans, cabbage, potatoes, etc.). Later, in the 1980s, the school box practice was abolished, but schools are still allowed to accept donations from parents, which are registered as such (T1,2, p. 4).

However, there were clear signs of improvement in this respect in the interviews, by comparison with the situation 20 years ago. In spite of this, while material conditions have improved, they are still not satisfactory. Currently, most interviewees state that their working materials are still insufficient.

But the situation varies among schools. According to one teacher, materials exist, but they are badly distributed; currently, the problem is not unavailability of resources, but rather knowing how to use them.

It is also common, for example, that the lack of materials makes teachers buy things with their own money.

In an information society and a knowledge-based economy, the issue of computer availability and utilisation, and of internet resources, assumes particular relevance in school education. In this respect, the situation identified in the research study is telling: primary schools are still light years away from the information age. For example, Bela Vista used to be linked to the Internet, but the connection failed three years ago and it was never re-established (T2,2, p. 35). Teachers in the school were even uncertain about the existence of the connection: some said it still existed, others stated it did not. Anyhow, the previous connection was established with only a single computer, locator in the nucleus coordinator’s office, that is, inaccessible to most teachers and, especially, to all pupils. A few classrooms had one computer each, but only one teacher seemed to use his, although intermittently (the other teachers didn’t use theirs because, some interviewees said, they didn’t now how to), and he complained about the old-fashioned software, it’s being in English and the equipment being already out of date.

Several interviewees from other schools also reported similar situations. In only one case was the Internet widely available to both teachers and pupils.

In the classrooms were it occurred, computer use was devoted mainly to the learning of Portuguese
skills (word processing, writing texts) and to some didactical games.

With integration of primary schools into Basic Integrated Schools, some institutions other than Bela Vista were able to improve their situation in this respect. For example, two focus-group interviewees who worked in the same BIS reported on the wide availability of computers in their institution, but complained about technical assistance problems. In their case, there was only computer technician for 7 buildings, and there were many logistical problems regarding computer functioning and maintenance.

According to one interviewee, some schools are better-off in terms of computers resources because they have taken their own initiatives. In his view, teachers cannot just complain for not having equipment; they must take action to overcome the situation (applying for funds, establishing partnerships with private entities, and so on).

2.1.4. Human resources

Teachers in Bela Vista are unanimous in their judgement that there is scarcity of human resources to support pupils in need. Drastic cuts in public expenditure have generally reduced the contracting of staff, and this is felt, not only in the difficulty of finding a job, but also in what interviewees regard as a radical decrease in the number of support teachers that are hired to work in schools:

One problem reported by the interviewees is that, besides being scarce, support teachers rarely ensure their support function, because they are very often appointed to substitute for regular classroom teachers who are absent (T2,2, p. 30). For example, in Bela Vista, when two teachers are absent (a situation that is quite frequent), both support teachers cease their support function and go teach in the regular classroom.

Sometimes this situation gives way to discussions among teachers about the need to attend classes and to fight teacher absenteeism. In this respect, Maria stated that the younger teachers are the ones who are absent from work more frequently.

2.2. Work tasks

Primary teachers’ work tasks are diverse, and are accepted or rejected by them as part of their professional roles in varying degrees. Some teachers hold restricted conceptions of this professional role; others embrace broader ones. The research data point to a multiplicity of roles performed by teachers: classroom and support teaching, relations with pupils, relations with parents and communities, leadership responsibilities, cooperating teacher functions, administrative tasks, and relations with other entities, although some assume much more prominence than others in their work lives.

2.2.1. Conceptions of the teacher role

Most interviewees’ conceptions of the teacher role are restricted mostly to classroom matters, namely, dealing with student learning and behaviour. One of the interviewees even feels that certain parts of the primary school curriculum should be taught by specialised staff. She gives the example of Physical and Musical Education.

Attention to pupils’ well-being is also paramount in teachers’ testimonies and seems to be assuming growing importance in their work experiences. Because of this, some interviewees mention that future teacher candidates must be alerted to the multiplicity of roles that they will have to play in schools, even within the classroom, roles that go well beyond the teaching of basic skills.
following account is particularly revealing of these broader conceptions of the nature of teachers’ work.

2.2.2. Teaching and relations with pupils

Teaching the curriculum is regarded by the teachers’ as their main professional task, although discipline problems occupy a very substantial proportion of their actual time in the classroom, as was visible in the research observations that were conducted at Bela Vista. Indeed, the observed dominant pattern of classroom work in this institution was a constant intertwining of very short cycles of content teaching and disciplinary interventions (telling pupils to be quiet, reprimanding them for leaving their seats, and the like, and going back to the content matter, over and over).

Relations with pupils are the strongest link in these teachers’ work life. It is particularly interesting to note that participants’ main conception of being a teacher is equated with having a class of one’s “own” and working with one’s “own” pupils. This is most salient in how teachers react when they don’t have a class to teach, namely, when they perform support roles, or strictly non-contact functions. There was only one exception to this main conception of the teacher’s role:

I have never felt that I was only the teacher of my pupils; I’ve always felt that I was teacher of all pupils in the school. (T1,1, p. 15)

All of the more experienced participants agree that pupil’s profile has changed throughout time. In this respect, participants do not refer to changes in terms of learning difficulties, but rather in terms of commitment to school work, and of behaviour in the school and in the classroom.

The class was very difficult. I remember that one time I was called [because a pupil was misbehaving in the playground] and I didn’t know what to do. I asked Mrs. PL for help and she said: “Go call the school director immediately, she must come”. I called the director, and then I wrote a report to the pupil’s parents, his mother came [to the school] and it never happened again. Those were pupils who confronted the teacher, like they were saying: “Don’t bother me too much”. They weren’t respectful. There was a mother who said, “His father is going to spank him”, and so on. And I said: “Look, the purpose is not to spank anybody, it’s really to talk and to understand that this is not a place to do those kinds of things ... to behave like that ... not in the school, not anywhere else”. Because the kid was young, he seemed to be more grown-up, but he was young. (…) Then, the pupil would display that kind of provocative posture, but I didn’t ... since I had already talked to the mother, I felt safer to do that kind of game that they sometimes liked to play. (T2,1, pp. 17-18)

Because of these changes in pupils’ behavioural profile, several interviewees emphasise the need to dedicate more time and effort to the development of social and moral values among them, even at the cost of lecturing less than usual in the conventional areas of the curriculum.

Several of the more experienced teachers don’t mention any major behaviour problems in rural schools during their work experiences in the 1970s and early 1980s. Pupils in these schools are described by them as docile, although difficult to teach because of learning difficulties:

It wasn’t very easy [to work with the children]. The children were sweet, they were docile, there were no behaviour problems, but they ... at that time, there was no kindergarten, they entered school at the age of six, with their little hands hardened by the cold, they had never picked a pencil, they had never sketched a line, they had never used a scissor to cut paper, because perhaps there wasn’t any paper in their homes. During the time that I was there, the only books that existed must
have been their school books. Newspapers and magazines ... if we needed something, it was very
difficult to get, because there weren’t any. So, we had to do the pre-primary [education] and the
children... when we got to the first grade, at the end of the school year, it wasn’t like in this school
[the interviewee’s current school, in B city], where they are already able to read; at that time, they
weren’t. The most that we were able to do was... we taught the alphabet ... therefore, learning the
words connected to phonemes, nothing more, little more than that. We started [to work with them
on the first grade program], but we stopped there ... in the first orthographical difficulties, precisely
because of that... Later, with the kindergartens, that must have changed... I was six years in E and
when I left it already had a kindergarten ... I’m not sure... it had existed for a short time. When I
left... the children were in the first grade... I left in 1983. (T1,1, p. 7)

However, coming to teach in urban periphery schools or in institutions located in particularly
deprived areas has represented a significant challenge in this respect:

[Referring to an urban school where she taught in the early 1990s] It’s a school with a somewhat
complicated climate, with extreme situations: very deprived children, economically and affectively ...
and children who had everything, for whom school ... who needed a centre of interest and
stronger motivating factors. That was when ... it was the first school where I really felt that I had a
heterogeneous group [of pupils].

Q: Do you mean, socially?

T: Socially and culturally, very heterogeneous ... It was a bit difficult for me to adapt to the city en-
vironment. I had to ... it was hard to plan my work and to be in the classroom with so much hetro-
genatity (T2,1, pp. 12-13)

Difficult pupil behaviour sometimes makes teachers plan their work differently. For example, most
plan artistic work activities for the afternoons and on Fridays.

Besides pupil discipline problems in some institutions, the main professional difficulty reported by
most participants in their classroom was dealing with heterogeneous classes. Rather than being
connected to cultural or ethnic minority differences, this heterogeneity was illustrated the diversity
of distinct learning levels within the same class, and, sometimes, with the integration of pupils with
disabilities in it. In fact, it was due to the experience of difficulties in dealing with these differences
that most interviewees called for the appointment of additional teaching staff to work in their
school.

Besides the challenges of the work itself, another reason why teachers prefer homogeneous classes
seems to be related to informal comparisons that are made between colleagues in term of successful
professional performance, which points to the importance of image and reputation among
colleagues in teachers’ work culture:

I had around 18 or 19 pupils in my 1st grade class and I saw my colleague, the more experienced
one; her pupils advanced, I felt the urge to make mine advance as well ... because, its like this: I
began to realize that ... the lower the number of distinct levels that you have in your class, the
greater the productivity ... and it really started to concern me. At that time, in that year, I think it
was the first year that we had to develop school failure prevention plans. Therefore, we started to
write notes to send home to the parents, so that they would be informed that the children were start-
ing to stay behind, and because the less you had ... the idea that floated around was that a teacher
who does many pupil recovery plans, who has many pupils to recover, is a teacher who doesn’t
work hard enough, that it’s a teacher who doesn’t know ... and that is my anguish, I think it affected
me too strongly. Thereafter, I slowed down, and when I got to the end of the year, I think that there were only 3 or 4 who really remained at a very, very low level and I felt frustrated for it. (T2,1, p. 14)

In the 1970s and 1980s, sometimes class heterogeneity gave way to team teaching experiences (T2,1, p. 4; T2,2, pp. 7-8), but this was not identified in current classes.

2.2.3. Relations with parents and communities

The quality of teachers’ relations with parents and communities is very diverse. In some institutions, teacher-parent links are easy and productive:

That year with the 1st grade, it was a year in which I remember having a very good relationship with the parents. (...) I had a group of young parents, the kids were their first children, they were very involved, and they collaborated a lot with the school. In Christmas, in the Carnival, everything was done because it was made possible with the help of the parents. (T2,1, p. 18)

The third year of service, 1989-90, I went ... I was appointed to Y [another village] ... a very organized school, with very experienced teachers...

Q: A larger school?

T: Larger ... more demanding, but in an environment that was much easier to deal with, although at the time ... and even today, I think that it’s still like that, there are many mothers [of pupils] who are still housewives, who follow the school very closely, but they are easy to relate to, they show concern for the education of their children, they are totally available to help (T2,1, p. 6)

In other cases, relationships with parents and communities are strained and extremely stressful for teachers:

T: And the parents... parents who were very knowledgeable and powerful... in the middle of all of that, who bothered us. I don’t mean to say that it wasn’t for the ... they had to bother us, because they were defending their children, but maybe they didn’t want to understand the teacher’s side, too... and there were very, very negative situations. It even came to the point where the father of a girl, who happened to be ... he was the president of the parents’ association ... he entered the school building and left without saying a word, he would leave these leaflets to distribute and... so, he ...

Q: What kind of leaflets?

T: For example, to appoint meetings, he appointed a meeting, he arrived here and he gave orders to distribute the paper sheets without telling me anything. At that time... things didn’t work like that. So, he thought that he was very powerful and we really ran into a...

Q: A collision course?

P: He thought that I didn’t want his daughter to be integrated into the school, that’s what he attacked me for. There were even meetings where he told the parents to sign blank sheets of paper... I was lucky, because two parents ... the parents of two of my pupils didn’t sign it... and they told me what was going on. Therefore, there were situations that really disturbed me, emotionally. (T1,1, p. 12)

I really disliked [name of school], in terms work climate. There were mothers who waited at the
school gate and who argued, that kind of mothers who go to school to upset the teacher, to pick on the teacher and ... I didn’t like it, I didn’t like the climate at the BJ School. (T2,1, p. 15)

Some teachers who worked previously in rural areas (especially, in small villages) mention the positive quality of the connection they had with their communities, links that they feel have been lost in urban areas.

A major issue that directly affects teachers’ work with both the pupils and their families and communities is the prevalence of poverty in the community. The interview accounts provide vivid and extensive illustrations of this phenomenon.

In poor communities, teachers complain often about family disengagement from school:

There was a situation in which ... a situation that was new to me, a different environment, different people, children who didn’t come to school and who justified their absence by saying that ... that they didn’t have shoes, that their school bag was wet, children from JL [a strongly socially deprived area of the city of B], mothers who looked very, very fragile, very tired of life. I remember one that was the mother of a boy called CL who came to school with this posture that conveyed the message that school isn’t worth anything and that she brought her boy, but she didn’t care if he learned or not, that it didn’t matter to her. (T2,1, pp. 12-13)

For professionally committed teachers, dealing with difficult pupils in socially deprived neighbourhoods and with colleagues’ low expectations towards these pupils and their families has been particularly difficult:

[In a deeply deprived school, in the late 1990s] the class was awful; I never had anything like that in my whole life. 12 year-old pupils, taller than me, strong, with their hands full of calluses ...

Q: In what grade?
T: In the 3rd grade ... pupils ...

Q: Already with retentions?
T: With many retentions. It was a very difficult class, all of them had many retentions, many school failure prevention plans, many needs ... they were 16 pupils, but there were days when I had six in the classroom.

Q: Did they miss classes a lot?
T: They missed school a lot. In the first week that I worked there, I arrived home ... my husband came home to lunch, when I arrived he was still waiting for me to lunch, I put the food in the oven and heated it, I set the table, he waited for me to eat, but I didn’t. When I arrived home, I was feeling so bad that...

Q: Did you lose your appetite?
T: I did! I sat down and the tears fell on my plate. There was one day when I was home alone, my husband had already left for work and I was crying, I think I was washing the dishes and the door bell rang and I opened it and it was the husband of a colleague of mine, he had come to deliver some materials and ... he saw me in such a state that he said: “I’m frightened, what happened to you? Did someone die?” I was in such a state that ... I did a tremendous effort to stay in that
Q: In your case, how was the physical aggressiveness expressed?

T: They turned around tables. It was like this: we [the teachers] prepared the [learning] materials, very elementary things, puzzles, and so on ... there were many materials, we did a lot of manual work with them, with sack-cloth, with raffia, gluing things, many diversified things, and they constantly refused to work. They grabbed the table, they turned it around, and they said: ”The school doesn’t give us bread!” They turned everything upside down and they threw it to the floor and they didn’t want to do it. They were very aggressive kids. It wasn’t just one or two of them. In that class, I had three that were the worst that I have ever seen. They would cease to show up in school for a while and we wrote a report and then they would come again.

Q: What did they do?

T: They went to the seaport to prepare the bait for the fish. While their fathers went to the sea, they went to the port to do the bait. In the very beginning of the school year, a colleague ... one of the colleagues who had been there for a few years, she said: “Oh! This year we have new teachers” (there were three of us who had appointed to the school for the first time) ... and, one day, we went to the neighbourhood, one of those days in the beginning of the school year when you don’t have your pupils yet, and we went through the neighbourhood and I was ... [long pause]

Q: Shocked?

T: Very shocked ... I felt like I was a being from another planet, walking through that space. Those kids who were going to be our pupils, they stood on their bare feet, some only wore a T-shirt, the babies only wore a T-shirt, they had their sucking bags hanging on their dirty T-shirts... there was very loud music, garbage on the ground, lots of garbage that had been there for several days, many clothes hanged drying under the sun ... those women looked very relaxed, as if all of that was normal, and I ... that made a very negative impression on me and I said: “Well, the kids from that place are going to that school” ... and that’s how I began to realize that it was going to be a really difficult year and it really was. It was a year in which I ... because I was working a lot, I lost my energy and there were days when I entered and left the school, and when I analysed the work that I had done, I said: “Today, I did nothing”. Because the very colleagues that worked there ...

Q: Longer than you?

T: ... longer than me ... they even enjoyed being there, because ... there are so many things to do and when there was a teachers’ meeting and I shared my anguish, when I complained that the kids didn’t learn, they told me: “Don’t be silly!” It was exactly like this:” Don’t be silly! Don’t worry, write something in the blackboard that they will copy it, they love to copy things”. And I said: “But are they going to copy things that they don’t know how to read?!”. But it was like this, it was easy to work in that environment and that made me feel anguished, because I got to the end of the year and I felt that I had been ... of course, there was one or another [pupil] who was able to learn something, but it was very little.

Q: And for you, to be a teacher ...

T: That year, I wasn’t a teacher, because ... I was shocked with what my colleagues said: “Don’t be a fool, write on the board, because what they really like to do is to copy things!” (T2,1, pp. 20-22).
With parents of at-risk pupils, teachers’ relations are often more challenging and their professional role expands to new areas. One interviewee described this as a “love and hate relationship”

In any case, the interview and the observation data suggest that teachers’ contacts with parents are minimal, unsystematic and of short duration. Most occur only in the end of each turn, when parents come to school to receive their children’s assessment result reports.

2.2.4. Leadership responsibilities

Virtually all of the more experienced participants in the research study have been or are currently in positions of leadership responsibility in their institutions. None has received specific training for leadership functions; their learning of the role is totally developed on the job. None has also had any release from teaching duties because of these leadership tasks (T1,1, pp. 12-13; T1,2, p. 9), nor seems to regard this as a particularly interesting idea. For example, Victoria would prefer to enjoy more administrative support than to abdicate the contact with “her” own class (T2,2, pp. 25-26)

The nature of primary school leadership changed considerably over time, towards a more bureaucratic and (sometimes) more distributed function. In the early times (especially, in the years immediately following the 25th of April, 1974), school directors had a lot of administrative functions under their responsibility: for example, they had to prepare so-called “maps” with information regarding diverse issues, such as “school box” finances (parent voluntary monetary contributions for school expenses, to buy materials for the pupils) (every month, the director had to write a minute of all money movements). (T1,2, p. 4). Also in these early times, school directors were made responsible for setting up school “cantinas” (which didn’t exist in school until then). They received a specific amount of money had they had to take care of all details themselves (ordering the furniture, buying the oven, contracting work, buying the ingredients for the meals, and so on) (T1,2, pp. 6-8). They didn’t have (and still don’t) any responsibilities regarding classroom observation, or staff contracting and evaluation.

Still today, the nucleus coordinator performs a set of very diverse and complementary functions. Let’s take Victoria’s case as a case in point (T2,2, pp 22-24).

Teachers performing school leadership functions have been the ones who have experienced more deeply the consequences of state educational reforms. Very often, the accumulation of classroom and school leadership responsibilities has faced these teachers with difficult circumstances. One example is the time when disabled students were first integrated into regular classrooms:

in 1990, because that was the year when I was director of this school and... there was also the inclusion of children with disabilities, the smaller ones who were not in the school previously... they had been in the special education school and it was ... a decree was published (...), it came out in August, and in September, when I arrived at the school, the previous head of school didn’t want to go on, she had finished her term as director ... I was elected and I became director a bit against my will, because until that time I hadn’t done anything connected to school leadership. At that time, it was very different from what it is today. Now there is a [school] coordinator; at that time, the school director had a huge responsibility: we did all the administrative work, we had a class to teach and we had to take care of all the other administrative issues, including the cafeteria, the [children’s] milk, it was all our responsibility, even the applications to get a taxi to bring and take the disabled pupils. So, it was a whole kind of administrative work that totally overwhelmed me. At that time, I was already the mother of two children ... no, I already had three, the third one was very small and I had to... it was a very sudden change [for me]. So, it was a whole kind of administrative work that totally overwhelmed me. At that time, I was already the mother of two children ... no, I
already had three, the third one was very small and I had to... it was a very sudden change, both in the family and in the school, because I finished [teaching] at 3:00, and to make things worse, it was a first grade class, I experienced the integration of two pupils [in the class], both with deep disabilities. (T1,1, p. 11)

No participant reports a positive evaluation of their experience as a school leader; most abandon it as soon as they can:

Q: But, as I understand, you were school director for only two years...

T: Two years, and I didn’t ... the mandate was for two years, there was an election every two years and when I finished, I said that I didn’t want to be elected again, that I wouldn’t accept it. I was very tired and deeply burnt out, at that time. Since then, there was a ... one year, the director was a colleague who wasn’t tenured in the school and she also didn’t feel well, she moved to another school immediately the year after and... after that, it was another teacher, who was older and more experienced. (T1,1, p. 14)

Victoria (Bela Vista’s current school coordinator) example is illustrative of the painful way in which the leadership role is perceived by the teachers. Right after completing her complementary training (with all the sacrifice that this involved), she was elected nucleus coordinator by her peers, an event that made her break into tears:

To my surprise, my colleagues kindly [ironically] elected me school coordinator [laughter]. For me, it was a day of tears.

Q: Really?

T: Honestly, because I felt that I needed time to do a series of things that I hadn’t done in those two years in which I had been studying and that I needed ... it wasn’t a need, I deserved [emphasis] a certain... a certain peace of mind for a while, I needed to restructure my house, to somehow compensate my son for the time that I hadn’t been available, my husband, my family, and I was elected coordinator [laughter]. I cried in front of them, and I said: “But that’s not fair, because you know ...” [And they replied:] “Precisely for that reason, you come with all that rhythm, you have the ability to... “and I ...

Q: And were the consequences of the election those that you feared and that made you cry at the time?

T: No. I cried, because I was anticipating, I didn’t know what awaited me... although it isn’t easy being a school coordinator, it’s not easy at all. I was elected school coordinator with the promise that “We’re going to help”. And the previous coordinator who ... she spent a morning with me explaining how things worked and everything... everything that I urgently needed to know at that moment. Although she ceased to be coordinator, she remained here in the school and every time that I had a doubt with respect to something, I looked for her help and that was very good, there was this slow transition from her to me. (T2,1, p. 28)

From Victoria’s point of view, the school leadership role is difficult and needs to be distributed among the school staff. Participants’ interviewee accounts clearly show that the performance of these leadership functions often interferes with leaders’ classroom teaching:

Therefore, there were situations that really disturbed me, emotionally [when I was director and had disabled children integrated into my class]. Sometimes I arrived at school enervated and... when we
are very concerned with something, work in the classroom sometimes doesn’t go as we would like it to. (T1,1, pp. 12-13)

Teachers are much quicker to point negative than positive aspects of performing the leadership function.

2.2.5. Cooperating teacher role

Several of the participants have also performed a cooperating teacher role, which entails receiving teacher education interns in their classroom and guiding them in their learning of teaching practice, under the supervision of university staff. Teachers regard this as a positive experience, albeit a difficult one. They refer to the challenges of becoming exposed to the eyes of others, but also value the additional help that internship intervention in the classroom usually represents.

2.2.6. Administrative tasks

Contrary to what many researchers’ and educationalists suggest, administrative tasks have long been a feature of teachers’ ordinary work duties, sometimes in realms that today’s teachers don’t even imagine, as the following interview extract suggests:

There were many things that were ... different. At that time, we were the ones who ... when July ar- rived (we worked in July then, you know?), we stayed in the school, because we had to do the pupil census, which we don’t today, and we had to go from house to house, to know... the children, their age and everything. We were the ones who did that. At that time, we didn’t [mind] ... we were young, single and all... I mean, for us it was even a party, we gathered together and the people wel- comed us in their homes, we chatted... It was even a way of getting to know the families, we had to collect information about the children and their age, to find out who should be censed... it was us who did that. (T1,1, p. 5)

For example, commenting on teachers’ current complaints about the work overload, Maria described the multiple extra-teaching duties that she had to fulfil as teacher in the mid-1970s.

Still, several participants complained about too much bureaucratic and administrative work in their actual jobs, which, according to their reports, provokes experiences of overload and damages the quality of their work in the classroom.

2.2.7. Relations with other entities

Teachers’ relations with other entities are rare and are established, at most, on an occasional basis. Entities of this sort include, most frequently, the school psychologist (sometimes, a difficult and strained relation, as documented in T2,1, p. 27)). An exception is the case of teachers with leadership responsibilities. Community relations (already discussed in section …), for example, is mostly a responsibility of these leaders. In rural schools, for instance, they often consult with the local priest (T1,2, p. 12; FG-TC, p. 26). There are also occasional contacts with the local health centre, the municipality, and even textbook publishers (T2,2, p. 31). Also, growingly, and especially in urban areas or in urban periphery and problematic neighbourhoods, school leaders contact a multiplicity of social support, health, judicial, police, and other types of entities.

2.3. Work organisation

Issues of work organisation refer to instances in which teachers’ work is planned and scheduled, and tasks allocated. The issues involved can be organised into two categories: formal coordination
mechanisms and processes, and informal relations among co-workers.

2.3.1. Formal coordination mechanisms and processes

This section includes aspects such as meeting formats and schedules, communication channels, class organisation and distribution, staff substitution, pupil support work, and guidance and socialisation of new teachers.

The global coordination of teachers’ work in Bela Vista is ensured by the nucleus coordinator and occurs mostly on “nucleus council meetings”. These are two-hour meetings that take place one afternoon each month, where the whole teaching staff (the “nucleus council”) meets together to discuss work issues and to be updated on current events and relevant information regarding the life of their institutions and, more generally, recent developments in government policy with significant implications for their work. The meetings are usually held on the day immediately following the Basic Integrated School’s Pedagogical Council monthly meeting, where each nucleus coordinators gathers relevant information to transmit to its staff. The nucleus coordinator appoints the nucleus council meeting and prepares the agenda.

Although some interview testimonies suggest that these meetings operate mostly on the basis of a strong democratic ethic (all opinions are voiced and decisions are taken by a majority vote), others indicate that the autocratic imposition of decisions by the top leadership and, ultimately, by outside educational authorities, is not uncommon. No independent data are available to confirm or disconfirm either version.

Another formal coordination mechanism identified in Bela Vista refers to an international environmental education project in which the school participates. This involves organising a “project committee”, with a staff representative for each grade level. The committee is chaired by the nucleus coordinator. All members are elected for their posts. Besides school staff, the committee also includes a person from the local municipality, technicians from the local agrarian services, and representatives, of other relevant entities (T3,2, p. 9). The committee meet three times during the 2005-2006 school year.

Classes are organised and distributed in the first nucleus council meeting of the school year. Classes are allocated on a seniority basis: each teacher sequentially chooses a class according to is or her preferences. This implies that newcomers (usually beginning or inexperienced teachers) are given the classes that are rejected by their more experienced colleagues. Usually, these are the most difficult classes, both behaviourally and in terms of learning-level heterogeneity.

[In my] eight year of service, I applied again and I was appointed to this [the current] school. I had the 4th grade, but the class also included three pupils who were at the 2nd grade level. It was one of those classes that are made after all the other pupils have been well distributed [among all the other teachers] and that is left for...

Q: You got the remains ...

I: It is left for the teacher who arrives for the first time in the school. (T2,1, pp. 16-17)

Coordination among regular classroom teachers and teacher specialists (namely, special education and physical education teachers), and between them and support teachers, is achieved in a mostly ad hoc manner. Regular teachers respect their specialist colleagues’ curriculum “space” and simply hand them over the pupils whenever appropriate or possible. Few discussions about each others’ work are maintained, with the exception of the occasionally more frequent (but brief) informal
exchanges of impressions with support teachers on a particular pupil’s current difficulties.

When there is a need to cover for an absent teacher (a situation that seems to be frequent in Bela Vista), staff who are contracted for substituting colleagues and supporting pupils are called in. However, in the school, there are only two teachers available for this function; if additional ones are needed, the nucleus coordinator has to call the Basic Integrated School office for help with back-up personnel (T2,2, p. 31).

The integration of primary institutions into BIS has introduced a new relational challenge for primary teachers: the need to coordinate their work with colleagues from other cycles of basic education (the 2nd and 3rd cycles). Some interview accounts suggest that, because of differential status perceptions, this interaction has been difficult.

The guidance and socialization of new teachers is one of the aspects that seems to deserve less attention in Bela Vista and in other schools where the participants have worked or currently do. The less experienced teachers, in particular, complain that every innovation, every additional activity that has to be developed in a school is attributed to them.

New teachers also complain about the lack of guidance that they receive about their class when they are first given a job in their school. When help is made available to the young teacher, especially in the beginning of the year, it subsequently seems to vanish, although it is still regarded as highly needed by them. Even more experienced teachers admit that it is usual for their younger colleague to be treated light-heartedly and unfairly in schools.

2.3.2. Informal relations among co-workers

Informal communication among colleagues is a vital aspect of the coordination of work in Bela Vista and in many other primary schools. In participants’ experience, informal relations with colleagues and even more structured and regular teamwork among them have been usual. Some of these experiences are remembered, with some nostalgia, as very positive moments in their professional lives.

It is interesting to note, however, that the majority of this type of accounts refers to past times; very few instances are reported of current, systematic and regular informal communication among colleagues relating to professional matters. A good example of this is Maria’s experience of teamwork in Bela Vista when the institution had a P3 open area mode of functioning, and how this mode of collective work was gradually abandoned by the teachers.

The more usual situation seems to be occasional, unplanned contacts over lunch, at coffee time or after school, in which teachers rapidly share views or information. Informal exchanges with more experienced teachers seem to be more common and regarded as more legitimate.

Another interesting point is that informal contacts also seem to be more frequent with specialist and support teachers (most of them young and new to the institution), who don’t share the same type of work, for none has a class under his or her sole responsibility. This serves to avoid direct comparisons between colleagues doing similar work, suggesting that in these teachers’ culture it is more legitimate to discuss specific aspects of one’s work with people who are not regarded as “direct competitors” for professional reputation. In any case, the overwhelming majority of contacts materialises itself in superficial exchanges of information and advice (“nothing new”, as one teacher put it), with few or no implications for the change of actual professional practices. Most of these contacts are of an exploratory and confirmatory nature.
Finally, a recent political decision by the government to increase public employees’ retirement age seems to be provoking a worsening of the work climate in Bela Vista, because teachers who expected to retire and who now have to stay in teaching for a few more years are disappointed and outraged with the new legislation.

2.4. Management of work

Another relevant part of teachers’ work lives is how their professional activity is led, evaluated and monitored. This involves three main issues: teachers’ relations with their hierarchical superiors, the evaluation of their performance, and their experiences of contact with school inspectors.

2.4.1. Relations with formal leaders

Participants’ relations with their hierarchical superiors are very rare, except for contacts between teachers and their nucleus coordinator, and between this coordinator and the BIS top leaders. The nucleus coordinator is not, however, regarded as a superior by teachers, but simply as a colleague who temporarily performs a coordinating function. The fact that coordinators are elected by their peers contributes strongly to this view.

In the interviews, there were no reports of difficult, strained or hierarchical relations with school leaders, not even in the times of the dictatorship (which has to do with the Portuguese organizational school model and with the egalitarian ethic prevalent in the teaching culture).

However, some communication habits and channels with superior authorities remain over time. For example, until 1974, during the dictatorship, there was an obligation to inform local educational authorities of the times and minutes of staff meetings. Schedules for these meetings were submitted beforehand to the approval of the Local Education Authority (the powerful “School Direction”). Today, primary institutions still have to inform their institutional superiors of the times that staff meetings are held. Each monthly “nucleus board” produces a minute that is then sent to the Executive Council of The Basic Integrated School for information. So, bureaucratic practices persist.

2.4.2. Teacher evaluation

Teacher evaluation has formally existed for many years, but no teacher regards it as a significant component of his or her professional life. Besides, before the 25th of April, all teachers were considered “sufficient”. Today, virtually all are evaluated as “satisfactory” (see WP2 report, section on teacher evaluation in Portugal).

2.4.3. School inspection

For most of the time covered by the interviews, inspectors visited classrooms unannounced. Currently, these visits are announced previously and discussed beforehand with school leaders. Then, as still today, inspections focused on individual teachers, rather than whole institutions.

Several participants report contacts with school inspectors in distinct moments of time, and all were left with negative evaluations of the experience. Most regard it as an essentially bureaucratic practice. A good example of this is the practice (witnessed by the researcher) of inspecting a teacher who was just weeks away from retirement. Another negative evaluation stresses the experience of “inspection without support”, of inspection as mere surveillance. Still another negative aspect refers to teachers’ experience of no feedback from inspectors, and no opportunity to clarify doubts with them.
Overall, the resulting picture is one of no major experience of pressure exerted by inspectors or feelings of extreme intimidation with their presence, although several teachers did experience anxiety for having been chosen to be inspected. This probably results from the fact that inspections have been rare and unsystematic, and have had no consequences for participants’ professional lives or those of their known colleagues.

3. Professional position and knowledge

Primary teachers’ professional position and their professional knowledge are subjected to a set of powerful forces and processes that go well beyond the immediate work circumstances under their reach. Professional positions depend on factors such as teachers’ overall public standing, their job autonomy and the salaries they are paid. Professional knowledge, on the other hand, is the result of various formal and informal, personal and collective training and learning processes that make up a complex combination in each individual case.

3.1. Professional position

3.1.1. Perceptions of public status

Primary teachers’ social status has changed significantly over the years, and, in the same moment of time, differs considerably, depending on the characteristics of the social, economic and cultural environment in which the institutions in which the work are immersed. These temporal and contextual qualities produce combinations of different types. Teachers’ status was higher in past times and in rural areas, and is perceived to be under attack currently, particularly in urban environments.

Indeed, in the 1970s and even in the 1980s, teachers enjoyed high social esteem in many rural locations and in small towns.

There were around four female teachers [in the school where I worked] who had many years in the career and who were very well-respected. The men from the town hall, when they went to the school to do something, they almost bowed in reverence to them. I thought that was nice and I liked it, because it was a very close village environment, the municipality services were nearby, there was the church, there were small businesses, we were there in this very good climate. I really enjoyed working in that school in Y. (T2, p. 7)

Primary teachers’ perceptions of their social status depend heavily on opportunities made available to them to feel pride for public recognition of their work. Several interviewees feel that the most negative side of their work are the constant policy changes and the public blaming of teachers. In the interviews, there were several testimonies of current disappointment with the educational system and with current public blaming of teachers. Teachers feel that today their work is undervalued. They feel hurt because of simplistic public blaming and lack of acknowledgment of the broad role that they perform, which cannot be judged, according to them, only on the basis of literacy and numeracy work, because so much time and energy is devoted to pupils’ personal and social development.

3.1.2. Work autonomy

Virtually all participants report enjoying a considerable degree of autonomy in their work. These
reports refer, mostly, to the way they plan, conduct and evaluate their work inside the classroom.

There were, however, a few comments about recent external pressures that are allegedly producing some losses of professional autonomy. For example, some interviews refer experiencing slight pressures from publishers and book stores concerning textbook adoption. Others refer perceived pressures regarding pupil retentions and transfers between classes.

A different kind of pressure on primary teachers is governments’ push towards the public presentation of high achievement results. This pressure was experienced both before and after the 25th of April, 1974, although it assumed distinct variations in each period. In the past, teachers were obliged to present a 100% achievement rate in the fourth grade. Failing to meet this target implied being the object of a judgement of professional incompetence. Currently, and especially since the 1990s, teachers still feel some governmental pressure to present high achievement results. Today, they feel that this is materialised in the creation of legal obstacles and mechanisms that make it difficult for them to retain pupils in the same grade level.

One participant shared the interesting view that currently one of the problems in teachers’ professional culture is that total autonomy frightens people. According to this participant’s point of view, the next big step in the evolution of the teaching profession needs to be the strengthening of links among education cycles, which is vital for teacher empowerment (vs. the current lack of cohesion).

3.1.3. Salary

Every participant declared him- or herself at least reasonably satisfied with the salary earned, although one was quick to add: “I think that we deserve what we earn, because we work so hard!” (T1,2, p. 40).

3.2. Professional knowledge and learning

In a previous section, we have seen that teachers mobilise professional knowledge in multiple domains of their work life, in the various professional situations with which they are confronted. But teachers also experience a variety of situations in which they learn professionally, and construct, deconstruct and reconstruct this knowledge: intentionally, in some cases; involuntarily and without even becoming aware of their knowledge shortcomings or of its growth, in others. This section focuses and the nature of this learning, and on the circumstances in which it is realised, used and/or put to the test.

3.2.1. Place of learning in professional life

In participants’ accounts of their professional lives, reports of feelings of professional stagnation are common.

Throughout those years, in C [small rural village] and especially in the years in F [another small rural village], I felt somewhat isolated from the other colleagues. I felt that in those years things didn’t change much, I wanted something with which I could learn, something different, where I could... have other situations in which I could renew myself, because I thought that I was falling in a certain... that kind of self-indulgence... (…) I felt the need to have something that forced me to … to learn different things. (T1,1, p. 8)

Teachers agree that the updating of professional knowledge is vital for work innovation and that initial teacher training is only a first but limited step towards that goal. However, while most
participants refer that their employers support them in getting some kind of professional training, a few testimonies suggests that some schools still raise obstacles to the further training of their staff.

3.2.2. Learning needs

Every participant refers to particular knowledge areas where he or she feels there is clearly a need to improve. The area mentioned most often is informatics; To use a participant’s expression, “it’s my Achilles heel” (T2,2, p. 37). According to the interview testimonies (and to actual work observations conducted in Bela Vista), most primary teachers don’t know how to use computers. This shows that it’s not enough to equip schools with computer machines and software (aspects in which, as we have seen in section …, schools still experience many shortcomings); training is vital. A few teachers who are able to master these new communication and information technologies describe their usefulness for the work that they carry out in the classroom.

Another area where teachers reported a need for more learning refers teaching strategies, especially, for diverse classrooms. A further area requiring more learning is the administrative side of school life. Within the context of increasing diversity within the classroom, one teacher mentioned another area deserving further training: dealing with children with specific disabilities.

3.2.3. Learning sources

Several sources of learning are evident in participants’ accounts of their professional lives. These include initial teacher training, in-service training, additional formal learning (namely, complementary training courses and master’s level courses in education), the performance of formal professional roles (for example, cooperating teacher, or pedagogical animator), colleagues, connections to pedagogical movements, mere work experience, and self-learning.

3.2.3.1. Initial teacher training

Initial teacher training is mentioned by only mentioned one participant (Carlos, a beginning teacher) as an important learning source. This is probably due to the absence of other sources of learning in this teacher’s work experience, since he is professionally isolated from most colleagues.

3.2.3.2. In-service training

In Portugal, there was massive public investment in the in-service training of teachers since the mid-1980s. These training opportunities seem to have had a significant impact on teachers’ attitude and relation to professional knowledge, especially, on a growing eagerness to get more training.

Despite valuing the fact that professional training offer is now much more generous than in the past, teachers point to what they regard as major limitations of the current in-service training policy: its exclusive concentration on a single week during the whole school year, teachers’ search for training as a “hunt for credits” for career progression, and the irrelevance of most in-service sessions for their real professional needs. Issues of training quality has thus come to the fore, since the quantity of training opportunities has clearly improved and is not regarded currently as a major problem.

From one participant’s point of view, the quality of in-service training improves considerably when there is a connection between schools and higher education institutions, which plan and offer training according to the needs expressed by the schools. He sees this as an important step that needs to be deepened, so as to overcome what he regards as the current amateurship that still prevails in training policy and practice.
A point emphasised by all participants refers to the need for more applied and contextualised knowledge dealt with in in-service sessions, so as to attend more to teachers’ actual training needs. Another suggestion is that in-service is organised throughout the year, in an after-school time schedule, instead of being concentrated on a single week in a whole school year (the so-called “training window”, where classes are interrupted for a week so that teachers can attend in-service training sessions).

3.2.3.3. Additional formal learning

Teachers’ interview testimonies suggest that the link to universities is a powerful source professional learning and renewal for them. In the research interviews, this was visible in several respects, but especially with regard to the attendance of formal long-duration university courses, namely, Complementary Training courses, and Master’s in Education ones.

3.2.3.3.1. Complementary training course

The participants that attended and completed the two-year long Complementary Training courses offered by the local higher education institution greatly value the experience in terms of professional growth and learning (besides career progression consequences, which were very significant in most cases – see, for example, T2,2, pp. 20-22). As one participant put it, complementary training should occur more often, because it is a way of overcoming professional stagnation.

There are several aspects related to professional knowledge that are most valued by the teachers who attended. One is a greater ability to deal with differences among pupils in the classroom and to make teaching more learner-centred. Another was to be able to study, discuss and understand new government legislation relevant for the organisation and development of classroom work.

The complementary training course also made teachers aware of their need to learn more (for example, in the teaching of math and social studies to their own pupils), something of which they were not fully conscious before, and it helped overcome some of the shortcomings and limitations of their in-service training.

In the complementary courses, teachers value especially the opportunity to “acquire” applicable, “how to do” knowledge. Some participants also highlight the research experiences that they had in the course as a very significant learning period, which helped them gain awareness of the potential professional value of the teacher-as-researcher role. Complementary training also developed teachers’ sense of agency, by stimulating their awareness of their potential role for educational change in their school.

3.2.3.3.2. Master’s in education course

At the time of data collection, two of the focus group participants were attending a master’s in education course. In this course, they value the learning of ways to analyse and develop school educational projects, as well as of significant innovative practices and models in education. The research work that the teachers had to do as part of their master’s course obligations is also regarded as a very fruitful professional learning experience.

3.2.3.4. Learning through the performance of formal professional roles

There are multiple examples of instances in which teachers learn professionally outside formal occasions or planned processes. Three prominent examples are the performance of leadership roles,
the cooperating teacher role, and the pedagogical animator function. It is relevant to underline that in most of these cases, the participants had no formal training for the roles; the learning came mostly from the actual enacting of the roles.

For example, in relation to the school nucleus coordinator role (a school leadership function), Victoria underlines how it has helped her gain a much better knowledge of how schools operate and, particularly, how her own institution functions, as well as the intra- and interpersonal intricacies that are useful for understanding how each teacher relates to his or her workplace.

Maria, a former director of Bela Vista, also reported having learned substantially about school organisation and about the institution’s link to other entities relevant for pupils’ development, namely, social workers and child support institutions. Another participant reported on her professional learning as temporary member of the school district team. For her, the main learning experience has been understanding “the other side”, that is, administrators’ own conditions, perspectives, possibilities and limitations for contributing to educational improvement.

Performance of the cooperating teacher role is regarded as a very valuable (albeit professionally demanding) experience by all of those who have or still perform this type of function. In this respect, the teachers involved stressed the positive consequences of being in contact with young teacher candidates who bring energy, new ideas and new materials to the school; the training opportunities that the teacher training institutions provides them as a result of being cooperating teachers; the mere contact with university staff and the learning of appropriate technical language and new educational initiatives. One interviewee summarised it all by saying that “it’s a real in-service training process for me” (T2,2, pp.17-18).

Interviewees also stress the impact of being observed in the classroom as cooperating teacher. This is regarded as a difficult experience and forces teachers to invest in more learning and more planning, as to become better models for the student-teachers appointed to be under their responsibility.

The role of pedagogical animator (which gradually vanished since the 1990s) was another educational function that helped teachers grow professionally. This is illustrated in the case of Victoria (T2,2, pp. 12-17), who was involved in the pedagogical animation project since it was initiated, until its extinction (in 1994/95). Pedagogical Animation was a staff development project sponsored by the Regional Secretary of Education that was based on teachers’ collective reflection on several themes, which was carried out in mandatory monthly meetings. Pedagogical animators held a previous meeting with their district coordinator, who passed them documents and “gave some hints on how to prepare the meeting”. Then, the animators analysed the documents, they prepared a work plan and they led sessions with the teachers from a given number of schools. While she was an animator, the interviewee developed personally and socially, due to the fact that she had to prepare her work with her colleagues, which implied reading, gathering information, and searching for a clear rationale for what she was doing. She feels that this experience also improved her professional practice, because she “had to study carefully the things that she would have to explain [to her colleagues] so as to show them how they could apply them to their teaching”.

3.2.3.5. Informal learning with colleagues

Teachers also experience numerous occasions throughout their professional lives where they learn informally with their colleagues (within the constraints, however, pointed out in section …). Some of these are school leaders; however, more often, they are colleagues in similar work circumstances, although usually more experienced ones. Teamwork is especially emphasised as a valuable form of
This type of informal learning occurs in schools, particularly when teachers are inexperienced and meet difficult situations for the first time. A case in point is having work with disabled students. In these special circumstances, teachers commonly receive informal advice and information from more experienced and specialised colleagues.

### 3.2.3.6. Learning via connections with pedagogical movements

Another form of learning professionally is being connected to inter-institutional (sometimes, national-level) educational networks or pedagogical movements. This type of learning was referred only by one the focus-group participants, who described her connection to the Modern School Movement as an important source of learning.

### 3.2.3.7. Learning through experience

In some cases, the main learning source seems to be work experience itself; with no particular person being important in one’s professional learning, and no particular training experiences with significant impact on one’s professional knowledge, one learns mostly spontaneously, by trial and error, and by personal insight and reflection on one’s practices and achievements.

### 3.2.3.8. Self-learning

Self-learning is also prominent in teachers’ accounts of their development as professionals. One of the interviewees stressed the importance of one’s own initiative in improving one’s professional knowledge (FG-TC, p. 56). However, all participants are quick to stress the limitations of self-learning, *per se*; formal learning opportunities are still the preferred mode of professional learning.

### 3.2.4. Emerging forms of relating to knowledge

Overall, the interview transcripts and the field notes taken from the observation of teachers’ work in Bela Vista suggest that professional knowledge is regarded, conceived and treated as unproblematic by the teachers involved in the study. It is viewed in a taken for granted way, as “chunks” of information that can be acquired through formal training and then applied to work contexts and transmitted to pupils. Episodically, the teachers displayed a slightly more flexible approach to this conception, admitting, for example, that the topics in the program of studies can be worked in a sequence different from the one that is presented in official curriculum documents, or that pupils’ work can be organised around particular themes that are more meaningful to them. However, generally speaking, these “alternative” conceptions maintain intact the sacredness of the pre-defined contents and are seldom employed in actual classroom work.

In the classroom, teachers applied a series of instruction routines that they learned and gradually fine-tuned over the years of work experience (sending pupils individually to the blackboard to solve exercises, having them read textbook excerpts sequentially across the whole class, and so on). Even the beginning teacher was already socialised into these pre-formatted ways of working (indeed, he displayed the most traditional style of teaching), which suggests that these may have been internalised as early as his own school experience as a pupil.

The spatial organisation of classrooms itself, although presenting some variations (from Carlos’ totally traditional parallel lines of desks to Maria’s and Victoria’s U-shape arrangements, with the teacher’s desk on the open side) relied heavily on the teacher as main initiator of all interactions and activities. Teaching was heavily teacher-centred; no instances of pupil group work or cooperative
learning were observed, nor mentioned by the teachers in their interviews.

There was, however, evidence of certain past initiatives and practices that portrayed professional knowledge in more complex ways, as socially-constructed and contextually-adaptable form of knowing. Interestingly, these forms of relating to knowledge seemed to be vanishing from the policy landscape and from the world of teachers’ professional practice. In this regard, three types of initiatives and practices, documented in the interviews deserve attention: school area curriculum development, pedagogical animation activities and environmental education projects involving multiple institutions. These involved pupils and often teachers organising their learning on the basis of research work conducted about relevant themes, linking with communities, reflecting on local contexts, working in teams and discussing issues collectively, and using work results in classroom activities.

4. Professional ideals, values and motivations

Teachers’ professional ideals, values and motivations can be detected in their stated reasons for having entered teaching, as well as in their sense of professional mission and their motivations to work.

4.1. Reasons for becoming a teacher

Several participants explain their entry into teaching as the realisation of a sort of call, a vocation. The love of children and the desire to work with them and to see them grow surfaces as paramount in these accounts. In several cases, however, primary teaching is also presented as the best choice that was available at the time that they decided on a work career.

4.2. Sense of professional mission (professional values and ideals)

Among the research participants, teaching still seems to give rise to strong intrinsic rewards from working with children. Therefore, their professional values and ideals are all connected to the idea of children’s well-being and learning. However, this extremely general pattern is nuanced, depending on the teachers involved.

Some emphasise the contribution to pupils’ learning so that they may become successful adults, professionally speaking. In some cases, this emphasis on the strictly instructional side of teachers’ professional mission is focused even more exclusively on specific areas, such as teaching students how to read.

No major changes in the broad values and ideals concerning childhood education throughout time were reported; they seem to have persisted quite consistently over the years. However, several participants refer to changes in their priorities within these values, namely, progressively putting less emphasis on early “utopian” pedagogical ideas and on the curriculum, and opting for more work flexibility and more emphasis on dealing with pupil as persons.

4.3. Motivation to work

All interviewees feel happy for being teachers and (with the exception of the teacher about to retire) still feel motivated to go to work. None regrets having chosen teaching as an occupation.
5. Work-life balance

Teachers’ professional and personal lives intertwine in various ways. Work experiences and trajectories impact on their personal lives, and events in the former affect and sometimes produce significant changes in professional lives.

Examples of the former relation are instances in which, because of job scarcity and professional instability, teachers are forced to work in distant locations, thus living apart from their husbands, wives or close relatives, sometimes during relatively long periods of time. Job applications can be contingent upon affective reasons (for example, not applying for certain geographical areas because of the will to stay close to loved ones. One of the participants even considered changing occupation, not because she didn’t enjoy teaching (which was truly her vocation), but because she wanted to be nearer to her family.

Busy schedules and short lunch breaks make teachers stay in school during lunchtime, rather than have lunch at home with their relatives. Teachers’ work also implies frequently having to take many things to do home.

One way of easing the tensions between family and work demands is to hire a housemaid. Some women teachers resolve the tensions in their professional and personal lives by giving priority to their children and putting the husband in second place. Enjoying the collaboration of the spouse (an experience common to all married participants) considerable eases the tensions between work and family demands. Being married to spouses who are in teaching or in akin occupations (as is the case of most participants who are married) and, thus, understand the nature and the subtleties of teachers’ work, also helps avoid family tensions, especially, when professional work is taken home.

Friends and family are often important when teachers need to air their frustrations and their work-related anxieties and don’t have a colleague at school who they can trust.

When there are no children, the balance between home and work is easier; when the first child is born, things change. The birth of children is thus the most difficult situation to manage, especially for women teachers. Usually, they recur to baby-sitters to help them make professional and family life compatible. Sometimes, devoting too much time to work creates feelings of guilt, especially among teachers who are mothers, for not giving sufficient attention to their own children.

Being a parent usually has a significant impact on teachers’ posture and behaviour towards pupils: they tend to view them in a new light, more as persons than as mere subjects to teach. Interestingly, becoming pregnant also can improve relations of women teachers with particularly difficult pupils, because some of them have numerous siblings and are thus particularly sensitive to motherhood issues and difficulties.

Despite the difficulties, raising children seems to be compatible with most teachers’ work responsibilities; work is reorganized in school according to maternity leave and baby-breastfeeding needs, and demands from both sides are thus more easily reconciled.

Work is more difficult to make compatible with child-raising when teachers simultaneously attend intensive training programs (like complementary training courses). In these circumstances, family cooperation is critical for teachers’ sense of balance. In some cases, family responsibilities have delayed attendance of these important programs until the very last opportunity.

The research data suggest that work intensification and its consequences for a lower-quality private
life is experienced not so much by regular classroom or support teachers, but especially by those who are in positions of formal responsibility. For example, the school nucleus coordination role implies taking much work home, as well as the need to chair or participate in numerous meetings that take away time from the family. Work and family life thus become particularly difficult to conciliate when teachers occupy positions of formal responsibility, especially when they go through complex periods of organisational or policy change in their workplace.

So, it was a whole kind of administrative work [as school director] that totally overwhelmed me. At that time, I was already the mother of two children ... no, I already had three, the third one was very small and I had to... it was a very sudden change, both in the family and in the school, because I finished [teaching] at 3:00, and to make things worse, it was a first grade class, I experienced the integration of two pupils [in the class], both with deep disabilities. (T1,1, p. 11)

Although respondents admit that sometimes “the profession enters fully into one’s life” (FG-TC, p. 11), most state that they are still able to find a balance and don’t feel that they are totally overwhelmed by their work. When the family is extended and there are grandparents to take care of the children, the balance is much easier to achieve.

Overall, teachers report that despite the hardship of their work, they still find free time for themselves, to dedicate to their families, to pursue hobbies and to be with friends. Clearly, work doesn’t seem to invade every inch of these educators’ private space. However, while most participants seem to have stricken a balance between family and work like, for at least one of them (a school coordinator with young children at home) this balance is something that they still aspire to achieve in the future.

Conclusion

On the basis of the data presented an analysed in this report, it is possible to draw the following general conclusions:

- Most state-mandated reforms (as reviewed in WP2) do not seem to significantly affect the participants’ work experiences; the world of these teachers seems to be impermeable to most of these changes, particularly, curricular ones, which are regarded by most respondents as “just words” with no actual relevance or implications for their professional practice;

- Organisational changes (especially the implementation of the local management of schools in the late 1990s and the subsequent integration of primary schools into Basic Integrated groupings of institutions) have significantly affected teachers’ working conditions, as have cuts in public spending in regular and support teacher contracts;

- The abovementioned changes are viewed mostly in a favourable light by the majority of participants, because of perceived advantages such as resource sharing and acquisition, some collegial interaction, and some professional empowerment;

- Mandated curriculum, policy and, particularly, organisational changes affect especially teachers with formal leadership responsibilities, who often feel overwhelmed with the change process; regular classroom and support teachers are much less directly affected by these changes and experience them in much milder ways;
Professional knowledge is regarded, conceived and treated as unproblematic: it is thought of mainly as information that can be acquired through formal training and then applied to work contexts and transmitted to pupils; socially constructed and contextualised notions of professional knowledge are rare and seem to be gradually disappearing from participants’ work experiences;

Teachers’ relations with professional knowledge change, especially when they are in contact with higher education institutions during relatively extended periods of learning, or when they themselves assume training roles that demand that they contribute to the professional learning of colleagues or of teacher candidates;

Self-learning is of little importance in participants’ work life and is regarded by them, *per se*, as of limited potential for professional growth; formal training occasions are much more preferred;

Participants appreciate the generous availability of in-service training opportunities, but criticise its format, organisation and scheduling, especially, the creation of “training windows” that restrict in-service sessions to a specific week of the school year in which classes are suspended;

In formal training, participants seek mostly “how to” (instrumental) knowledge that they can apply directly to work situations;

Participants seem relatively satisfied with their work autonomy and salary, but much less satisfied with their work conditions (especially, work spaces, and material and human resources) and with what they perceive as the current public blaming of primary teachers for the low-quality and poor outcomes of public education in Portugal;

So far, state restructuring in education seems to have little impact on most participants’ sense of balance between their professional and personal lives; again, school leaders seem to represent an exception to this tendency;

The gender factor seems to operate, mainly, in terms of participants’ work-life balance (motherhood and childrearing have a bearing on women teachers’ capacity to ensure this balance); in the other thematic areas that were researched, this factor seemed to be irrelevant.
Chapter 8

Irish primary teachers’ work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing contexts

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1. Introduction

The overarching ambition of the Profknow project is to understand knowledge at work among nurses and teachers as professional actors, situated between the state on one side and the citizens on the other side. This report is related to workpackage 4 of the project and concerns life histories of Irish teachers. The title of the workpackage is “European Schoolteachers work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing contexts”. It aims “to get a deep understanding of schoolteachers’ personal experiences of work life changes and of professional expertise in the present as well as over time” and “to present ethnographic descriptions and analyses of primary school work and life”, in an Irish context.

This report examines how educational restructuring in Ireland has changed teachers, their working lives and their professional knowledge by documenting the identities of three generations of professionals. Life-history interviews with teachers were conducted focusing on thoughts, feelings and judgements about changes that have occurred in Primary Education during their career as a teacher. The individual biographies illuminate the outlooks and personal approaches of teachers and vividly highlight their shared working environment and demonstrate how restructuring has altered the profession and what life is like for these primary teachers in Ireland.

This text was created with the help of recorded and transcribed stories about the lives of teachers. These stories are told by three primary school teachers, but have also been supported with notes from shadowing these three teachers.

With regard to our conception of professional knowledge, as practitioners, as well as researchers and academics, we are aware that much knowledge is tacit and remains unarticulated. From a more intellectual perspective, we readily recognise that concepts of knowledge are contested and problematic, particularly when considering the epistemic through a postmodern lens. The tacit unarticulated can be readily captured when we consider, for example, recognition of a person’s face among a thousand though usually we remain inarticulate about how this knowing works either practically, theoretically or conceptually. We take some comfort from Schon’s (1983) notion that competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing in practice, much of which is tacit.

According to Schon (1983) knowing/ knowledge has the following properties.

- There are actions, recognitions and judgements that we know how to carry out spontaneously; we do not think about them prior to or during their performance.

- We are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them.

- In some cases, we were once aware of the understandings which were subsequently internalised in our feeling for the stuff of action. In other cases we may never have been aware of them. In both cases, however we are usually unable to describe the knowing which our action reveals.

When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected for it, then we tend not to think about it. But as Schon (1983) states

*when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing, promising or unwanted we may respond by reflecting in action. Reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action it-
For instance when teachers allow themselves to experience surprise, puzzlement or confusion in a situation which they find uncertain or unique, they may reflect on the phenomena before them and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in their behaviour. They carry out an experiment that serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation.

While much of knowledge therefore may be regarded as tacit, this is not the whole story. There is espoused knowledge, while there is also a knowing in the doing, a knowing in action. Rather than differentiate sharply between espoused knowledge and practical knowledge, or knowing in action, we prefer the Aristotelian notion of phronesis as it captures the wisdom of practice rather than a more reductionist notion of skill whereby the latter becomes separated from understanding and judgement. We regard phronesis as encompassing the theoretical and the practical and holding them in productive tension. This is the theoretical turn that we bring to data analysis.

The carrying out of the Irish case studies followed the objectives set out by the Technical Annex, the guidelines provided by the Finnish partners and the agreements reached at project meetings. By examining narratives of the lives of three generations of teachers changes in the work-place and professional identities can be investigated. The term restructuring will be used to refer to 1) societal changes such as a change in population demographics 2) national government inspired changes affecting Education especially since the 1990s and 3) changes occurring from within the teaching profession.

The school where fieldwork was conducted was chosen on the grounds of personal long standing contact with its current principal. It fulfilled the project requirements of being a primary school with three teachers of different age groups willing to collaborate in our research. After an initial visit to the principal in October 2005, in order to present the project and its wider aims, three teachers were recruited by the principal. A teacher with one year experience, a teacher with five/six years of experience and a teacher with thirty-two years of experience. There are very few teachers in the school with more than six years of experience. It is a very young staff. A formal contract ethical agreement was signed between the researchers and each teacher that indicated mutual responsibilities during the research. Fieldwork started at the end of October 2005 with the first round of interviews and finished in February 2006.

The first round of interviews was semi-structured following the thematic guidelines distributed in the Consortium by the Finnish colleagues. Our clear emphasis during fieldwork, analysis and report was on the working conditions, social relations at work and knowledge/professionalization. Maeve Dupont conducted all interviews and ethnographic observations. Interviews were later transcribed and observations were returned to the teachers for their feedback. The first and second interviews combined extend between 40-45 pages for each participant when transcribed. Subsequently a draft of this report was given to the teachers and a focus group was conducted so as to discuss issues that arose during the process of analysis. This was part of a process of triangulation and verification of our interpretation of data with teachers. Thus we attempted to increase the authenticity of the accounts (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
2. National context

Ireland can be characterised as having a centralised administrative structure for education. There are no regional educational authorities. Practically all schools depend massively on the state for their capital and current costs including teacher salaries and are governed by State rules and regulations. However, approximately 90% of primary schools are privately owned and managed by the Catholic Church.

Teachers’ salaries are paid entirely by the State. There is a common basic pay scale for both primary and secondary teachers. The OECD (2003) comparative data for teachers’ salaries show that Irish teachers are relatively well paid by international standards, ranking in 7th place of the 27 countries surveyed. In Ireland the proportion of current educational expenditure applied to teacher salaries, at about 76% was significantly higher than the EU average.

There are state prescribed curricula at primary and secondary level. Practically all schools observe the state curricula and participate in the public examinations administered by the state. The decisions on curricular policy are the remit of the Minister for Education and Science. The Department of Education and Science (DES) formally sets out the curricular framework for all schools. It is noteworthy that while the DES has the decision-making power on curricular content it works closely with the statutorily established National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Under the Education Act of 1998, the NCCA has significant responsibilities regarding the development of curricula. The Council has a full time director and staff of the Council and sub-committees are comprised of representatives of key stakeholders such as teachers, parents and school managements. According to a report from the OECD (OECD, 2003) within the DES, the NCCA and other agencies research is conducted on curricula and examination issues and a strong tradition exists for the publication of discussion documents and engagement in consultative process on such issues.

Actual expenditure on Education increased from about 1.74 billion euros in 1990 to 5.39 billion euros in 2002 (see OCED, 2003). However, while actual expenditure increased substantially it has not kept pace with the very high increase in GDP. In 1999 expenditure represented 4.6% of GDP and it has declined further since then. According to OECD report Education at a Glance (2006) Ireland spends less than 4.5% of GDP on educational institutions.

In a recent study (Fitzgerald, 2002) of the productivity of Irish Education, the economist and statistician and former prime minister, Dr Garret Fitzgerald concluded:

*It is clear that primary and second level education are under-resourced to the tune of something like one third. But the evidence also suggests that the average standard reached by Irish students is at or slightly above the EU average, and that the proportion who complete education to age 18 is slightly higher than the EU average. Thus in terms of what might be called “educational productivity”- output in qualitative and quantitative terms related to input of resources-Ireland seems to have been performing about 50% better than the rest of the EU.* (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 130)

In a statement by the general secretary of the primary teachers trade union the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) concern was expressed that the Irish government is failing to use the wealth of the economy for the benefit of education. Mr Carr (the general secretary) comments on the irony that in the 1960s when we could least afford it we invested more in education which went on to produce the economic boom of the present day.
Now when we have the boom we are selfishly not prepared to reinvest even 6% of the profits into preserving the economic and social fabric of the future\textsuperscript{75}

A recent report (OECD, 2006) shows that in the area of early childhood education countries like Denmark, Hungary, Iceland and Mexico spend 0.8% or more of their GDP. In Ireland, the majority of early childhood education is delivered in private institutions. The Irish government provides for free education for students between four and twenty-four but fails to cater for those under the age of three.

\subsection*{2.1. Local context}

The research took place in a co-educational primary school located in a suburb of Dublin. It is a national school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It has an administrative principal, 30+ mainstream class teachers, 11 resource teachers and 6 special needs assistants. It has a current enrolment of over 900 children. This number includes 12 children from the Traveller community, 8 children assessed as having low incidence special educational needs, and close to 300 international children. All of the children are included in age appropriate mainstream classes.

There are thirty-one classes in the school: four classes at each level up to fifth class and three classes at sixth class. There is an approximate average of thirty pupils per class. In addition to the class teachers there are eleven teachers with responsibilities such as language support and learning support. These teachers withdraw pupils from their regular classes in order to provide intensive sessions on an individual or small group basis. Hence they require rooms to facilitate this service. The school was built in the early 1980’s and due to the considerable expansion of the school population (pupils and staff) there is insufficient space in the original building to accommodate such large numbers. Consequently many classes take place in temporary accommodation (prefabricated buildings). At the time of study a building programme was in progress and now the new school building has been operational since September 2006.

The school is very large by national standards. A very small percentage of national schools have such a large number of pupils. Similarly very few schools have more than twenty teachers. No data is available on the percentage of international pupils in national schools in Ireland\textsuperscript{76}. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the school has a considerably greater than average proportion of such pupils.

The first international children were enrolled over seven years ago. Their number has grown significantly over the past five years. At present almost a third (31.3\%) of children attending the school are international. The principal and staff have expressed frustration with the failure of the Department of Education and Science to assist the school in supporting the inclusion of these children in their mainstream classes.

\textsuperscript{75} (as accessed at http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/PressReleases/2006/OECDReportEducationalSpending12906/)

\textsuperscript{76} Fitzgerald (2004) reports the Irish Department of Education and Science plan to develop an electronic pupil database including gender, ethnicity, Traveller indicator, country of birth, mother tongue and any special needs.
The school is situated in an area that has experienced rapid growth and change over the past ten years. The principal reports that vandalism, drug abuse and crime are all too common. This past year alone there have been at least three murders in the area and over 100 windows have been broken in the school costing in excess of 16,000 euro, which is more than the total cost of damage to the school for the previous twenty years.

The organisation of the school day is similar to that of all national primary schools. School begins at 8.50am and finishes 2.30pm. There is a ten minute break at eleven o’clock and an half hour break at lunchtime. Teachers operate a rota for yard duty.

3. Each collaborator’s life course in a nutshell

3.1. Conor (one year experience)

Social background (childhood family)

Conor was born in a remote rural part of Ireland. He grew up on a farm and he felt that there was no start and finish time to work. He learned the attitude that you didn’t ask whether work had to be done you went ahead and did it.  Conor considers that his upbringing may have encouraged his independence in learning.

Educational background (primary and secondary)

He attended a very small primary school in rural Ireland. There were only two teachers in the school and twenty-six pupils.  He had a very positive experience of schooling at primary level and speaks in glowing terms of the teacher and the learning atmosphere. He feels that his own experience may have contributed to his leaning towards primary education (as a career). In particular he felt that his primary education helped build his self-confidence and independence in learning. This was because the amount of teacher student interaction was greatly reduced so they had no choice but to be independent. His teacher is described as very kind and patient. She gave them great freedom and autonomy and facilitated them to do projects and allow their imaginations run wild. He found the transition to secondary school difficult and felt like a small fish in a big pond. He feels that it toughened him up for the real world. He felt that there was a lack of creativity in the teaching approach at second level.

Choice of a profession, professional education, qualifications obtained

Conor had it at the back of his head that he would apply for teaching and subsequently went off the idea thinking that perhaps it might be a bit mundane if he had to do it everyday. At one point he thought of studying Law but changed his mind after talking to a teacher who encouraged him to do teaching saying that it is a wonderful career. He says that he is delighted that he made the change on his college application form. He was attracted to teaching in so far as he knew he would enjoy it and it would allow him to have other interests and study at night if he so wished. In addition the working conditions were appealing

there’s great freedom in the job too you know. We have wonderful holidays and we have great time off and as a consequence you come back in to your job more refreshed and more interested.

His choice of career was also motivated in part by practical concerns. He had to fund a lot of his
way through college so he needed to be qualified to do something at the end of it. He also chose teaching because he thought he would be able for the course and the workload. He feels that he got the best of both worlds because he was able to keep his interests (he did English to degree level and gained a teaching qualification too.) He agreed with the teacher’s assertion that Law is years of hard slog and you won’t get the value of your twenties where you can be kind of enjoying life.

He thoroughly enjoyed his years in teacher education college ‘singularly the best three years of my life. I thought it was brilliant, loved it.’ He loved the academic side of things and the freedom of it as well. He got involved in clubs and societies. There was great camaraderie and they would get together in groups to work on assignments and share information. He did teaching practice in a disadvantaged school and it was exceptionally tough because the kids had a lot of social difficulties. He felt that if he had a class like that he would be going out of his mind by the end of the first year.

He thinks that now a lot of the things he did in college are coming into practice like philosophy, psychology and sociology. At the time he felt it was hard to put them into context but now it is all useful and pertinent. He has not gained any professional qualifications since his BEd but has recently commenced studying for a Masters in Education.

Professional career and current job

Conor is at the beginning of his career. He is in his second year teaching. He teaches at the senior end of the school. He is at such an early stage in his career that he would not consider changing occupation.

I’d like to think that I would go on to do other things purely just to I suppose not to become stagnated in anything that you do not that I would be in a rush to get out of the school or a rush to get out of teaching.

He talked about getting involved in research and doing a Masters in Education. He also said that maybe ten years down the road he might want to apply for principalship or maybe even work in the Department of Education. He doesn’t see teaching as necessarily a lifelong career.

I just like to think that I would always be open to the opportunity of change and open to the possibility that there might be other things out there in the future that I might be interested in doing and I just wouldn’t close all doors and say that’s me sorted now for life full stop.

He hasn’t been given a post of responsibility in the school but he has become more involved as a member of two committees reviewing various aspects of school policy.

Family relations, hobbies, friends and networks

He lives with friends. They have different occupations but are always interested to hear stories from school. They are supportive in so far as they will always listen. A lot of his friends live in the city. He has taken up swimming this year and is shortly going to begin evening classes in French. He likes the fact that he lives in a city rather than a remote village because it allows him to pursue other interests.

If I was at home this evening after my days teaching and decided I wanted to go to the cinema more than likely I wouldn’t be able to because it is so far away. Trying to co-ordinate with other people would be next to impossible and it just... probably wouldn’t happen
3.2. Sarah five years experience

**Social background (childhood family)**

Sarah is the second eldest in a family of four children. Her mother is a nurse and her father works in the Revenue Department. She had a stable happy childhood. Her siblings work in business areas. When she was young she used to love being the centre of attention. She always loved children and used to enjoy looking after the younger children in her neighbourhood. She was always interested in getting groups together and being in charge. She got a blackboard as a Christmas present and would make maths worksheets for her friends and they would play school in the garage.

**Educational background (primary and secondary)**

She was very happy in primary school. She describes herself as a good above average student not the best in the class but kind of in between...and co-operative. She had a lovely teacher in primary school. She found the transition hard at second level and felt like a little fish in a big pond. She kind of went into herself and became a bit withdrawn in secondary school. When she was studying for the Junior Cert something hit her and she thought ‘God I have to work’. She really focused on her study right up to the end of 6th year. She did work experience in a primary school during transition year and established good links with the teacher there. She always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Some of her second level teachers said ‘what on earth would you be doing wanting to be a teacher?’

**Choice of a profession, professional education, qualifications obtained**

Sarah knew she wanted to be a teacher from an early age. Everything she put down on her college application form was to do with teaching. She always loved children. She didn’t adore college but she made nice friends there. Most of her best friends are from college. She particularly enjoyed the teaching practice aspect of college and put a lot of work into it. She discovered that it wasn’t as easy as she had originally thought. She has not gained any formal qualifications since her BEd.

**Professional career and current job**

Sarah started her first job in September 2000 teaching third class in her current school. She was made permanent within the year and took a career break after two years teaching in order to go travelling. During this time she taught for a short period in Australia. She enjoyed being in different classes just to get ideas. However, she didn’t like the system there. She found that there wasn’t as much respect for teachers and everything was focused on the parents and the child and if the child did anything wrong very little was done to deal with it. She recounted an incident where a child was particularly disrespectful and she got very little support from another teacher. When she returned to Ireland a year later she found a big change in the school and in the local community. She taught a senior class for two years and was frustrated that she was spending a lot of time on discipline. At the time of the study she was teaching first class.

She has been promoted to a Special Duties post of responsibility. The position takes up a lot of her time.

**Family relations, hobbies, friends and networks**

She is currently living alone. She recently moved out of her family home when she bought her

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77 Teachers can apply for Special Duties posts with extra responsibility for Sport, Art etc. They are renumerated for taking on such positions.
own house. Her parents were very supportive of her as a teacher. Most of her best friends are from college. When she started teaching she would go out with friends from work on a Thursday night. Now when they go out it tends to be a Friday instead. Generally every evening when she comes home she’ll relax in front of the television. She often goes to the gym and that takes up a lot of time.

3.3. Teresa 32 years experience

Social background (childhood family)

Teresa is from Dublin. She was the eldest grandchild and it was expected that she would go to third level. Neither of her parents are teachers nor did they go to college. Her mother’s highest level of education was the Primary Cert. She was the first in her family to pursue a third level education. I think a lot of eldest girls end up in teaching. She reports that her mother was very strict on them. She was given a lot of responsibility from a young age when her mother was ill with back trouble. She feels that she learned a certain amount of independence from the experience.

But there was a lot of responsibility on me at that stage and maybe that’s where the bossiness of being a teacher came from I don’t know (laughter)

Educational background (primary and secondary)

She started primary school when she was four and a half but the school had a policy of pushing pupils forward so she skipped second class which meant that she was very young (seventeen) doing her Leaving Certificate. She attended a small secondary school in the city. Not many pupils stayed in school as far as the Leaving Certificate. There was a mixture of pupils from the city centre and from more affluent suburbs. There were only eighteen pupils doing the Leaving Certificate. They were given a huge amount of responsibility in the school such as minding classes. Furthermore, she remembers helping the principal to do timetabling and that might have had an influence on going into teaching.

She loved school and feels that most people who end up being teachers had positive experiences at school which probably puts them at a disadvantage in teaching children who don’t like school. She was very afraid of one of her teachers “I think that’s an experience everyone in my generation has had.” She recalls an excellent teacher and even in an era when corporal punishment was accepted it was something she never used. The pupil teacher ratio was far less favourable during her schooling than it is today.

When I think about it now she’d have sixty of us in the class and she managed to get round us all. She was a fantastic teacher. One of these people who never had to raise her voice. She didn’t need to use the stick. We didn’t need fear. She would have been a very big influence on me.

The range of subjects offered at second level was somewhat limited: they didn’t do PE or Science because they didn’t have any facilities. Similarly, there was no choice of subjects.

Subjects taught take it or leave it. There was French, Commerce, as it was then, Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography were the subjects we did whether we liked it or not.

The Primary Certificate was a State exam at the end of first level education and was indicative of the fact that the vast majority who attended primary school did not progress to second level. In many respects it was the Leaving Certificate Examination of its time.
Choice of a profession, professional education, qualifications obtained

She would have had ideas that she would be a teacher from the time she was in secondary school. Her grandmother wanted her to be a nun. She thinks because she was the eldest grandchild

*it was expected that I would do something like teaching you know the teaching, civil service, or the bank or nursing. The ones we were nearly expected to do and there was a lot of pressure.*

She is motivated to work as teacher because she likes working with children. She is not sure what her initial motivation was in becoming a teacher

*I don’t think it would be as conscious a thing as that you know it was just an idea I had. I was very young going into teaching I don’t know how much of it was maybe even being steered into it by the nuns in the school I don’t know but I mean I have no regrets ever*

She went to teacher education college in Dublin. She was among the first cohort of girls to attend. There was about 300 men in the college which is very different to the situation today. The college only accepted girls from Dublin so they became a very close-knit group because they were coming and going together in the evenings. She describes her experience there as very enjoyable. She said that they didn’t have that much free time but she got very involved in the drama society.

She gained a National Teacher (NT) qualification in two years and then went on to do a BA at night. You were eligible for an exemption from first year Arts if you received a 55% grade in your four academic subjects in teacher education college (see Sugrue, 2006). The format of teacher training is quite similar to that of today. They had blocks of teaching practice including infant teaching practice.

*Because we were the first girls there we were the first to ever have infant teaching practice and that was a new experience for the college.*

She has gained a number of qualifications since her degree. She thinks it is important to take the opportunity to do different courses and upskill. When she moved into resource she felt that she needed more knowledge

*I was sinking rather than swimming and I just felt I needed to upskill myself and get some ideas.*

She has a diploma in special education and is currently participating in a mentoring programme. She is enjoying the further study and feels it might open more avenues for part-time work. For example, she may be considered as a suitable candidate for teaching practice supervision.

Professional career and current job

Teresa qualified as a teacher in 1973. She then taught in a school in Dublin for eight years. At the time there were plenty of jobs and a choice of schools in which to teach. She resigned from her post in 1980 after her first child was born. Career breaks weren’t that common then. She was out of teaching from 1980 to 1987 but she did some subbing during that period. She particularly enjoyed her experiences subbing because she had the opportunity to teach in a variety of schools and at a variety of levels. She came back to teaching full time in 1987 and secured a permanent job in 1989 in her present school. She was doing class teaching until five years ago and now she is doing a mixture of learning support and resource. The principal has a policy that no one stays at the one level so at this point she has

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79 This was because at the time there was no on campus accommodation for female students as until then the college had been for male students only (See Sugrue, 2006).
experienced all classes. She has been promoted twice since she started working in the school. Her first promotion was to a special duties post. She has since been promoted to assistant principal. She feels that participating in the mentoring programme might create new opportunities for her. She is happy to be teaching. When asked if she would choose teaching as a profession today she laughed and suggested that she wouldn’t get sufficient points in her Leaving Certificate examination (to gain entry to a teacher education college).  

*Family relations, hobbies, friends and networks*

She lives in a county bordering Dublin with her husband and three children. Her husband was a learning support teacher for years so she taps into his knowledge and they share resources. She is involved in her local Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club. She takes the youngest children on a Saturday morning for an hour and a half football and is also secretary of the juvenile section. She is secretary of a local history society. There are no deadlines they make the agenda themselves. She views her participation as a social outlet. She feels that she is at a stage of life where her children are less demanding than they would have been.

4. Thematic Analysis

The teachers’ experiences, thoughts, perceptions and judgements with regard to various aspects of their working lives and the Irish Education system in general are presented below. This information is supplemented with observation data and the evidence is organised into themes and sub themes. Following each theme the comments are put into context by referring to relevant literature and restructuring processes in the Irish context. The impact of restructuring on their professional life and professional knowledge will be discussed in the conclusion.

4.1. Working conditions

4.1.1 Organization of work (school building and school expansion)

Sarah’s classroom is located in one of the prefabricated buildings. These structures were built to cater for the expansion of the school population. She needs to cross the school yard in order to gain access to the facilities (such as staff toilet, PE hall and computer room) in the main building. Teresa takes pupils in what was once the library. She was relocated due to the building works and shares the space with another resource teacher. A mobile blackboard divides their “classrooms” and during observation it was possible to hear what was going on in the next class. Conor occupies a classroom in the main building.

Conor thinks it is an exciting time to be in the school with the new building. Sarah did not mention the building or construction plans and Teresa felt that the construction work impacts on the pupils that she can take.

*I would have had maybe some of the younger groups and some of the older groups but because I am based here and the people who are in the main building are moving into the new school it wasn’t feasible this year to have a mixture of groups because it would be too far to travel for the children when we do move into the new school so it was more limited this year.* (Teresa)

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80 The standard of entry to teacher education college is quite high (top 25% of those who sit the Leaving Certificate Examination). See Central Applications Office Statistics [http://www.cao.ie/institutions/DEG04.HTM](http://www.cao.ie/institutions/DEG04.HTM)
The expansion of the school population is largely attributable to the increase in immigrants in recent years. For example in September 2005 forty-eight international children out of a total of 120 children were enrolled in Junior Infants. Similarly an examination of school records shows that forty international children out of a total of forty-six children were enrolled in classes from Senior Infants to sixth class in September 2005. According to the principal, based on applications and requests to the school for places, it would appear that this upward trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, even with the current development of new primary schools in the area.

Restructuring (societal changes) and the school population

Ireland owes its enlarged immigrant population to increased movement from other E.U countries as well as increases in asylum seekers and in those issued work permits. During the economic boom years of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, significant labour shortages developed which had a negative impact on economic growth. The number of workers from EU countries was not sufficient to meet the economy’s labour needs. As a result work permits were issued to Non-EU citizens to fill specified jobs. In 2004, 34,054 work permits were issued to Non-EU citizens. This shows a substantial increase from 2000 when only 18,000 such permits were issued (see NCCA, 2005). Another group of recent immigrants to Ireland comprises those who are seeking asylum. Between the years 1991-2004, the number of people seeking asylum rose from 31 to 4,766 (NCCA, 2005).

It is thought that the area in which the school is located has received a disproportionately large number of immigrant families. There is a perception that this is because there is a large amount of rented accommodation available in the area. Hence families arriving in Ireland are housed in the district.

4.1.2. Management (as support)

Management is more frequently mentioned in terms of support rather than supervision and inspection. Sarah and Conor referred to a new scheme whereby a senior member of staff is assigned to each class level to offer support and advice if needed. Sarah mentioned if the first class teachers have discussed a problem and need further advice they can approach a mentor/assistant principal. Conor commented that if a child was misbehaving or maybe not applying themselves they could be brought to the assistant principal. This system is only just up and running and Conor said he has never had to use it. However during the observation period a pupil from an infant class was brought to Teresa’s room following a teacher’s concern about the pupil’s behaviour in class.

Restructuring and management as support

In the past, and to this day, teaching reflects a rather flat career structure. Opportunity for promotion was limited to principal, deputy principal or A and B posts of responsibility. Since the 1990s some additional posts have been introduced namely; Special Duties Posts. This new management structure was developed by the DES in order to help create a culture of shared leadership, devolved responsibility and collegiality in schools. In this particularly large school the middle management scheme seems to be effective in devolving responsibility from the principal. There also seems to be a spirit of collegiality in so far as teachers frequently look to each other for support.

Management (supervision, inspection, documentation, evaluation and accountability)

Teresa is part of the middle management in school. She has recently adopted a mentoring role through

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81 particularly from the new EU accession countries
the induction programme\textsuperscript{82} for newly qualified teachers who have not yet been probated. She sees herself in a supportive rather than a supervisory position.

\textit{It is at their request really it is purely voluntary thing if you get the feeling that the teacher doesn’t need or doesn’t feel they need support you just pull back it is totally voluntarily on their part as well (Teresa)}

Sarah commented on the absence of inspection stating that she is largely left to her own devices and it is assumed that she is doing a good job. Although teachers are obliged to provide evidence of short and long-term planning, such evidence is rarely sought.

\textit{And no one comes into our class asking us well are you teaching this and are you teaching that . . . it’s just assumed. And I suppose we are respected in that principal and senior management just assume that we are doing a good job in our classroom} (Sarah)

One reference to inspection or monitoring is the ‘cuntas miosiuil’\textsuperscript{83}. A requirement under The Rules for National School (1965) is that teachers produce such accounts each month. Conor feels that they are not gone through in depth but serve the purpose of making sure that all the teachers at a particular class level are pretty much going at the same pace. Conor also makes reference to his probationary year. He admits that he doesn’t do half as much folder work/documentation now.

\textit{I spent time preparing up aims and resources and writing up bits from the curriculum to reflect what I was writing myself and I spent so much time doing that I didn’t have time to prepare things for the children or prepare resources for them.} (Conor)

Although evidence of planning appears to be infrequently requested, the teachers are strongly encouraged to document in other areas. For example, they said that they learned the hard way the importance of recording observations at regular intervals. Apparently there was an issue with a child in the yard. Presumably documenting the incidents would have clarified the particulars of the situation.

According to the teachers, documentation serves a number of purposes. It can be used to support a child’s application for additional learning support within the school. For instance, by recording incidents where a child is experiencing difficulties with behaviour or learning a pattern can emerge. Such data is helpful when a Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)\textsuperscript{84} considers the child’s eligibility for additional support.

Recording incidents can support a teacher’s hunch that a child is being neglected. Conor notes times when a child has no lunch or comes to school without a coat. Such information is helpful if a social worker makes an enquiry.

Sarah talks of situations where a new teacher can blame herself and feel guilty for a child’s lack of progress. However, if the previous teacher has documented concerns s/he can demonstrate that the child’s problem is not new. This is also important in the context of the staged approach to assessment. Before a child can be assessed by an educational psychologist the teachers must provide evidence that they have tried a number of strategies which have proved unsuccessful in managing the child’s difficulties.

\textsuperscript{82} The school is participating in a pilot induction programme for newly qualified teachers.
\textsuperscript{83} Monthly accounts documenting the work that they have covered.
\textsuperscript{84} Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) deal with applications for additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant support for children with special educational needs from all schools. The SENO positions were developed following the establishment of the National Council for Special Education in 2003
The class teachers are encouraged to liaise with the teachers in the resource unit when planning learning objectives for pupils with special educational needs. Teresa has taken the initiative to develop a form seeking information from the class teacher regarding teaching schemes for the following two weeks. The teachers complete the form in their own time and Teresa feels it is less intrusive on teaching time. In this way she can attempt to prepare the pupils so that they can better participate in class lessons. The form also serves as evidence of collaboration and planning. This type of collaboration is exclusive to Teresa and the teachers of her pupils with special needs. Sarah does collaborate with a learning support teacher but in a less formal way.

Teresa’s potentially useful system of collaboration is not practiced throughout the school. Hence her professional expertise in terms of planning and her knowledge gained through co-operation is not systematically exploited or shared in the school.

Other examples of records include: school reports and results of standardised tests. They are kept in a central location within the school.

Restructuring and management (supervision, inspection, documentation, evaluation and accountability)

According to the Education Act (1998), schools have a responsibility to ensure the quality of teaching in their establishments. Our data suggests that the teachers self-evaluate more often than they are formally evaluated by management or inspectors. This finding corroborates Coolahan’s assertion (OECD, 2003) that in general the tradition has been that once a teacher has qualified and undertaken a period of probation, little formal evaluation of his/her work takes place subsequently. Profknow survey findings lend further support for this idea. 78% of Irish teachers surveyed considered that the control of their supervisors exerted little or no effect on their daily teaching practice. It seems that the work of Irish teachers is rarely monitored or controlled. Almost three quarters (74%) of teachers in the Profknow survey disagreed with the idea that supervisors acted as an obstacle to the realisation of their ideas. Perhaps this is because 90% of teachers claimed that someone in authority checks on their work less than once a week or never. Despite perceptions of increasing accountability (among Profknow survey respondents) only 56% of surveyed teachers stated that there were procedures for checking their professional competence at work.

Until very recently, schools as a whole were inspected every four to six years. This process (which was largely ritualistic, benign, and without sanction) has metamorphosed into Whole School Evaluation (WSE). Within this new model of quality assurance there is an emphasis on school development planning through internal school review and self-evaluation, with the support of external evaluation carried out by the inspectorate. Schools (rather than external evaluators) are encouraged to take responsibility for quality assurance and decisions about change. However in 2006 the Minister for Education and Science decided to publish the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports and this move may alter the dynamics and increase demand for external accountability.

The Education Act (1998) also outlines the responsibility of the school to establish and maintain systems whereby the efficiency and the effectiveness of its operations can be assessed including the quality and effectiveness of teaching in the school and the attainment levels and academic standards of students. In this school it appears that the primary means by which the quality and effectiveness of teaching is formally assessed is through the traditional monthly accounts (cuntas miosuil) documenting work completed. The data suggests that evidence of short or long term planning is

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85 In 2005 the Profknow survey was launched to a total of 1,100 teachers in Ireland. It dealt with questions of work-organisation; authority and power; professional practical knowledge and expertise.
infrequently sought. However, Teresa does seek short-term plans from teachers so as to assist her in the development of learning objectives for pupils with special needs. With regard to assessing attainment levels of pupils, the resource teachers keep records of all testing done on children. Furthermore, the attainments and academic standards of all pupils are assessed with standardised literacy and numeracy tests. Records of their results on such tests are kept in the school.

The impact of the aforementioned evaluation and assessment policies on the professional lives and knowledge of teachers will be discussed in the conclusion.

4.1.3. Decision making

All the teachers felt that they (rather than supervisors) control their practice within the classroom. The teachers make decisions about what, how and when to teach. They acknowledged that there are guidelines (in the form of the Revised Curriculum, GoI, (1999) or Learning Support Guidelines, DES, (2000)) but they are not restrictive or limiting. Sarah said that she is encouraged to try different things so long as they have educational value. Conor and Teresa’s comments suggest that they feel free to interpret the curriculum and adapt it as they see fit.

There is nobody putting a gun to my head and saying no you can’t do that. I mean the principal or deputy principal doesn’t come in and say how many hours have you spent teaching this subject or have you spent so much time with such and such a student. There isn’t that kind of pressure on me to do that. (Conor)

I think I would have a … fairly good amount of control over the amount of work that I do and the work that I am covering and again the curriculum is there and I am there to follow it but I suppose it’s my interpretation of it in many ways. (Conor)

I mean there is obviously guidelines that you use but the way you do it and the materials that you use are pretty much up to you. (Teresa)

The teachers comments concur with the Profknow survey findings where 96% of Irish teachers (primary and post-primary) said that their own conception of how work should be done very much/rather much influenced their everyday work as a teacher.

While the teachers expressed a sense of autonomy in terms of teaching related decisions, they lacked authority to make decisions about access to resources. For example Conor stated that he would like more autonomy in decisions concerning which international pupils go out for language support and for how long. International pupils receive language support for a maximum of two years but it is thought that this policy is about to be relaxed.

And I really feel that we should be given a small little bit more autonomy ourselves in deciding who should go out and for how long….We see the need and we are just trying to respond to it and sometimes you just feel that the Department can be a bit of a brick wall. You get two language support teachers and that’s it. Stop asking us for more. It’s a shame because the children need the help and they’re not getting it. (Conor)

It is pertinent to note that a considerable proportion of surveyed teachers in the Profknow study also had little or no input into decisions about staffing or the distribution of funds in their school.
Restructuring and decision making

The freedom to make teaching related decisions independently might be somewhat attributable to the non-prescriptive and flexible nature of the Revised Curriculum (GoI, 1999). Primary teachers are encouraged to interpret the curriculum in response to local needs and there is an emphasis on the development of skills rather than the accumulation of knowledge. In a sense the Revised Curriculum is a document of trust - the Government has placed faith in the professional expertise of teachers to adapt the curriculum as they see fit. The Revised Curriculum was introduced on a phased basis in 1999. The curriculum is child centred rather than subject centred and allows for flexibility in timetabling and a wide variety of teaching methods are promoted.

While the teachers (in the survey and interviews) indicate considerable discretion relating to pedagogy and content, influence beyond this is heavily circumscribed. With centralised funding there is very little discretionary funding at the level of the school and staffing and allocation of resources is controlled centrally.

4.1.4. Colleagues and cooperation

Colleagues are frequently referred to as sources of knowledge and support. All of the teachers consider their colleagues an invaluable resource. There are class level meetings once a month where teachers meet to discuss various issues. Conor finds the sessions useful for overcoming uncertainties within himself and for bouncing ideas off others. Colleagues are also used to share resources and, in a sense, the workload.

*I do find that you do share the workload because you're not going to have resources for every lesson and for every topic and there's things that you know you might be stuck on and a colleague will have some resources there or will have read something somewhere and will be able to put you in the right direction. So definitely yes we do we share ideas and thought.* (Conor)

Conor talked about how other teachers help him with anything he needs and that everyone has an area of expertise. He also mentions that they validate his efforts.

*I suppose it gives you a sense of worth in teaching that you know other people are using your ideas or that they at least might value your opinion and that they know their opinion is valued by you as well.* (Conor)

Colleagues are particularly relevant to Conor. He appreciates having male colleagues with whom he can relate a bit more at lunchtimes and says that he is in part motivated to come to work to see his colleagues who are also his friends. He describes them as fantastic really lovely people.

Sarah echoes Conor’s thoughts about teachers encouraging her efforts.

*Definitely staff would be the the people who would give the most compliments.* (Sarah)

She finds the class level meetings beneficial for discussing teaching methodologies, time frames and ideas.

*For example, with the topic of tens and units, we might discuss how many weeks we are going to spend at it or how we will approach the topic. Often you will get great ideas just by listening to the other teachers talking about what they have been doing or what they plan to do.* (Sarah)
She also uses her colleagues as a reference point to see if she is on track. Sarah considers her teaching colleagues a vital source of knowledge. When she walks into another classroom or at staff meetings and planning days she feels that she gets great ideas from teachers. Sarah comments how she seeks the advice of other teachers particularly if they have experience of her current class.

Despite being one of the most senior members of staff, Teresa talks about learning a lot from her colleagues. She thinks that there is great potential for learning especially in a large school with plenty of staff

because no matter how experienced you are there are teachers coming on stream have a huge amount of new ideas and maybe a different perspective on things. (Teresa)

She values the support system offered by her colleagues and is glad that she can always get advice from people. She feels that the policy of changing teachers around allows her to work with different people at each level. Hence there’s plenty of opportunity to exchange ideas. The resource teachers also get together every second week for an hour to discuss ideas. She thinks there is great openness among the staff. She wonders if the openness is due to the fact that there are so many young teachers.

I think the mentoring scheme as well has opened up things because suddenly teachers are going in to look at other teachers teaching or they are being encouraged to ask for help. I think it has made it ok to ask for help and ok to give support either. (Teresa)

**Restructuring and co-operation with colleagues**

The evidence presented here suggests that a culture of individualism (as described in OECD, 2003) is gradually giving way to more collegial if not entirely collaborative relations (see Hargreaves, 1994) where professional knowledge at work is exchanged and co-constructed. Perhaps the increasing collaboration and collegial professionalism has come about (as Hargreaves, 2000 suggests) as a consequence of role expansion or diffuseness. Indeed in recent years there have been several structural changes within Irish Education that have impacted on the teacher’s role. Changes include curricular reform and legislation such as Education (1998), Welfare (2000), and Special Educational Needs (2004). In addition, as mentioned previously there is increasing multiculturalism in Ireland, due to the unprecedented influx of international students. It follows therefore that Irish teachers look to their colleagues to expand/enhance their knowledge and professional development in order to assist their capacity to meet needs. The Profknow survey figures suggest that colleagues have an important role to play in terms of regularly contributing to teachers’ professional knowledge, and that perhaps ‘on-site’ experience is a prominent aspect of teacher professional development. Sarah’s comments corroborate this idea.

*We had a staff meeting the other day and you hear ideas or as part of that day we had planning day and you get great ideas from teachers.* (Sarah)

However one may argue that the structure of the school day continues almost unchanged since the 19th century and is particularly inimical to collaboration.

The structural (curricular, legislative and societal) changes will be dealt with in turn in order to examine their possible contribution to the role of the teacher and the emergence of the collegial professional.
The Revised Curriculum

The launch of an entire ‘revised’ primary curriculum in September 1999 (GoI, 1999) presented a particular challenge for novice and experienced teachers alike. The Revised Curriculum differs from the 1971 curriculum in several respects. New curriculum areas were introduced namely SPHE, Drama and Science. In addition subjects such as Social Environmental and Scientific Education, and Physical Education evidenced a great change from the previous curriculum. There was also a shift in emphasis on some existing curricular areas. For example a communicative approach in Irish is recommended and there is a renewed emphasis on oral language in English and on the Arts, and greater attention to estimation skills and real life problem solving in Mathematics. The importance of ‘integration’ is also highlighted. Furthermore since the principles underlying a curriculum have implications for the appropriateness of assessment procedures, approaches to pupil assessment have had to reflect the basic principles of learning in the Revised Curriculum. Hence the introduction of the Revised Curriculum had significant potential to impact on the role of the teacher in terms of expanding his/her teaching methodologies, and classroom management and planning skills and to challenge more established routines of knowledge at work.

One might assume that the introduction of the Revised Curriculum presented the greatest challenge to Teresa since (unlike Sarah and Conor) she learned about the 1971 curriculum (GoI, 1971) during her pre-service education. However, in order to support teachers, the DES provided comprehensive provision for the phased implementation of the Revised Curriculum.\textsuperscript{86} Co-operation and collaboration among colleagues appears to be an essential element to successful implementation. According to the Primary Curriculum Support Programme\textsuperscript{87} (PCSP) an important factor in implementing the curriculum at individual school level is the setting aside of time for colleagues to discuss, reflect and plan.\textsuperscript{88} For this reason, the framework for in-career development and implementation incorporates school-based planning days. Thus, during these sessions the teachers collaboratively reflect on the in-career development days, consider the documentation, and start planning for the introduction of the curriculum, having reviewed the schools' existing provision.

Special Needs legislation

Legislation may have contributed to greater levels of team-work and co-operation among teachers. The Education Act (1998) provides that all children have the right of access to and participation in the education system according to their potential and ability. Thus all pupils including those with special needs have a statutory right to have their educational needs met by the State. Similarly the purpose of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) is to make detailed provision through which the education of children who have special educational needs because of disabilities can be guaranteed as a right enforceable in law. Such legislation means that the previously homogenous education system is being seriously tested. Teachers need to be familiar with assessment and diagnostic procedures for the identification of special needs. Similarly they need to know how to provide for a wide range of special needs and consideration has to be given to children with special needs who are learning through a second language. In many instances, lack of knowledge base in the area of special education indicates that teachers are having their established

86 The process of implementation represents one of the biggest projects of the Department of Education and Science. In the year 2000, about 94,000 in-service days for teachers, at a cost of over £3 million, were provided. By the time the entire “package” has been provided (2007) up to 50 million will have been expended. CPD on such a scale is totally without precedent.

87 The Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) was established prior to the launch of the revised curriculum. The purpose of the PCSP is to mediate the Primary School Curriculum for teachers towards enabling them to implement it in their schools.

mindsets and pedagogical routines severely challenged. Teresa admitted that she felt she was sinking rather than swimming when she moved into her position as a learning support teacher. Perhaps the pace of change has prompted teachers to meet, share expertise and knowledge, and co-operate regularly in order to meet new requirements. It appears that workplace learning has become a necessity rather than an option.

The resource teachers get together maybe every second Monday for about an hour again to discuss what is going on to identify children who might need to be tested or discuss different ideas. (Teresa)

The notion of co-operation, collaboration and sharing expertise is evident in the role and responsibilities of learning support teachers as outlined in The Learning Support Guidelines (see GoI, 2000). Moreover a whole school approach to supporting children who are experiencing learning difficulties is strongly advocated. According to these Guidelines a key element of successful learning support intervention is a very high level of consultation and co-operation between the class teacher and the learning-support teacher. Central to this consultation is the development, implementation and review of Individual Profile and Learning Programmes.

it is vital that class teachers and learning-support teachers have a shared understanding of the learning needs of individual pupils, and of their relative responsibilities in responding to these needs, so that they can co-operate closely in the implementation of effective learning programmes. (GoI, 2000, p.8)

Teresa and Conor have made some efforts in this regard by sharing and co-ordinating their fortnightly plans.

Special needs assistant (SNA’s) are relatively new employees in mainstream schools. They have responsibility to give general assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with duties of a non-teaching nature. Hence teachers have an additional person with whom they must co-operate.

Other legislation

It appears that co-operation is encouraged by law! The Education Act (1998) set out the functions of the principal and teachers. It states that they shall promote co-operation between the school and the community which it serves. Correspondingly, the Education Welfare Act (2000) has necessitated co-operation between principals, teachers, parents, and the educational welfare officer. The aforementioned stakeholders are obliged (following a consultation process) to prepare and submit to the Board of Management a statement of the strategies and measures it proposes to adopt for the purposes of fostering an appreciation of learning among students attending that school and encouraging regular attendance at school on the part of such students.

The changes in legislation and policies reflected here are in effect reshaping the workplace and environment of teachers where more emphasis is placed on shared responsibilities, leading to sharing and building of expertise.

4.1.5. Pupils

The teachers’ comments in relation to pupils highlight the value they place on (and satisfaction they derive from) cultivating and maintaining a good relationship with pupils. Indeed connecting with the pupils seems central to their role.

Teresa likes the fact that in her position as a learning support teacher her relationship with the
pupils is all positive. She thinks that the biggest thing is her relationship with the children. Sometimes she misses the buzz of the classroom and the opportunity to do creative projects with brighter children.

There are twenty-nine pupils in Conor’s class and he is teaching them for the second year. He considers them

*an absolutely lovely really really nice bunch... I really love coming in the morning. I’ve never not wanted to come in which is great. I'm very happy with that and long may it continue you know.*

(Conor)

Conor thinks it is important that the children are able to relate to him and vice versa. He values an appropriate level of friendliness and an air of ease about the classroom. He likes that the children care enough to share their news with him

_Not that you want to be involved in every aspect of their life but that they feel em they feel at ease enough with you to talk to you that it's not just about what you are putting on the blackboard or writing in their copies that you can expand._ (Conor)

He said that he has learned an awful lot about the children and how individual and vulnerable they can be. In addition he realises that the children are aware of his vulnerabilities and that they can appreciate how people feel or think. He considers them very clued in and thinks they should be given the respect that they deserve in that regard.

Sarah’s interaction and relationship with the pupils seems to impact on her job satisfaction. She loved her first year of teaching and developed a very strong bond with her first class. Consequently she was very sad to see them go. She wonders if the bond was attributable to her enthusiasm or the fact that she had them for such a long time (over two years). When she returned from Australia she noticed that the profile of the school, and the surrounding area, had changed since she had started. Teaching was only one aspect of the job. She taught a particularly difficult senior class and felt that she was spending an awful lot of time disciplining unco-operative pupils and trying to get their parents on board to support her. She was frustrated that she couldn’t get on with her teaching and do all the exciting stuff. She grew fond of the pupils causing trouble but was ready to say goodbye at the end of two years. She wonders if it is easier to cultivate a good relationship with the younger children because she gets to know their families and nearly feels like a part of their life.

Sarah commented that a few of the international children seem to be less respectful towards female teachers

*I think it’s part of certain cultures where males seem to dominate and there is not as much respect for women. It’s obviously frustrating when you’re trying to correct a child for his behaviour and he doesn’t appear to be taking you seriously.* (Sarah)

Restructuring and teacher-pupil relationships

It seems less likely that valuing a good relationship with pupils is related to a change in legislation, curriculum or population demographics. It is more probable that a positive disposition towards children and towards working with children is characteristic of primary teachers in general. Indeed the international literature provides some support for this suggestion. Working with children appears as the primary motivating factor across studies for those already teaching, and for prospective teachers (Spear et al., 2000; Goh and Atputhasamy, 2001; Carrington, 2002; Thornton, Bricheno and Reid 2003; Simpson, 2004). Furthermore a review by Spear et al (2000) suggests
certain motivational factors remain stable over time for PGCE students, namely job satisfaction and working with children. Another less significant factor is students’ wish to improve children’s life chances.

A recent study in the Irish context (Morgan, Kitching and O’Leary, 2005) found that relationship and engagement with pupils is frequently associated with job satisfaction. In this study of teachers’ diary entries it is suggested that pupils’ engagement in learning, pupil achievement and pupils’ well-being are major factors in incidents triggering feelings of satisfaction among beginning teachers while pupil behaviour and perceived difficulties around home influences are major factors in teacher dissatisfaction.

Although connecting with and relating to the pupils seems to be a stable motivating factor among teachers there has been a change in the form of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (DES, 2001) that has caused teachers to be more cautious in their interaction with pupils. For example Sarah refers to precautions she takes in various situations.

I suppose with legislation and things like that and kind of news items I suppose you’d always be careful that if you are on your own with a child that the door ... is always open or things like that. Or ...say for example if a child got sick or if a child even wet himself or herself that you wouldn’t really you wouldn’t go into the toilets on your own you would wait for a parent to come over and change the child or you’d make sure another child is there with you or whatever just to be on the safe side kind of just em just to cover yourself basically like you know. (Sarah)

Similarly Teresa referred to the impact of the guidelines on her practice. She acknowledges that the guidelines are to protect both children and teachers.

things like not allowing teachers to be in positions where there can be accusations made against them. You know if you have a child on a one to one to make sure the door is left open. You know all those sort of things. (Teresa)

Teresa refers to the pastoral role of teachers and the responsibility to be alert to and to be aware of what to do in situations where child abuse may be a concern or suspicion.

Procedures to take if you feel a child maybe has bruising on the body or if a child is coming in with no lunches you know all of that type of thing and I suppose an awareness too that we would tend to think of sexual abuse but there is a huge range of abuse that you know without going as far as sexual abuse (Teresa)

It is possible that one of the unintended consequences of such legislation is a kind of defensive “no touch” teaching that runs counter to a commitment to care and is inimical to trust and relationships (see Sachs, forthcoming)

4.1.6 Parents

Teresa feels that there is a considerable change in parents’ attitudes to school. Previously, during the early stages of her career, parents would almost have been in awe of teachers. In the past (ten or fifteen years ago) if a child was chastised in school she knew she’d have the support of the parent. Now it seems that the parents see more in terms of the rights of their children. She thinks it is good that there is an awareness of children’s rights but feels that lack of parental support puts a lot of pressure on the teacher. Teresa also thinks that it is more difficult to get in contact with parents because both parents tend to work. As a working parent herself she can understand that by the time parents get home in the evening

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and there is a note in the journal from a teacher giving out about your child you’re not as understanding of it maybe as you would have been if you were at home all day. (Teresa)

Sarah also expresses her feelings about parents’ attitudes. While she admits that most parents are very encouraging she regrets that there are some who would be the first to come in if there was a problem and then fail to express any thanks or show their appreciation of the work she does with their children. Sarah thinks it is important that parents feel able to communicate if there is a problem but she feels that equally they should be able to say thank you or well done. She said that it is only now that her own mother realises the importance of showing recognition for the teacher’s work.

This suggests that the workplace knowledge in action of teachers is sometimes invisible and therefore taken for granted or ignored.

Sarah refers to the effect of a parent who scribbled a note of thanks.

this mother after the two years just tore a piece of a page out of a diary that said ‘thanks for all your work with Karl over the past years’ and that meant everything to me. I was delighted that she appreciated the efforts I had gone to with her child. And that’s all you want . . just a thank you. . that they realise that you are doing your best you know.(Sarah)

Sarah and Teresa’s comments suggest that sometimes there is a conflict between the values of the teachers and those of the parents. In order to reconcile the differences Teresa operates from the perception that there is no such thing as bad parents but it’s our perception of them being bad parents rather than the fact that they are bad parents. I think every parent wants to do the best for their child and does their best. It may not be the best in society’s eyes and it may fall very short of being ideal but it is the best. I think when you are dealing with parents if you come from that stand that they are doing their best but there may be a lot they can improve on and be more understanding (Teresa)

Sarah uses the skills of tact and diplomacy when imparting values to the children of parents with possibly contrary values.

Years ago you would have said ‘oh too much tv is bad for you’ or ‘you shouldn’t be eating chips every day’. Now you have to think about what you’re saying and who you’re saying it to, because the message will go back home and the parents mightn’t take it too kindly you know. Instead I’ll encourage them to get some fresh air or praise them for eating fruit and vegetables, and hope it does the trick. (Sarah)

Similarly when communicating with parents about issues such as pupils’ punctuality, their lunch, homework or uniform she talks of the need for tact and diplomacy in these situations. Sometimes pupils come to school with no lunch or the wrong uniform. She is also aware that some pupils are awake very late at night.

They are the parents and I don’t want to be telling them what time they should be putting their children to bed at, but I know there is something wrong when I am in bed earlier than some of them. (Sarah)

Part of the challenge therefore to taken for granted aspects of teachers’ workplace knowledge is the value relations of the post-modern condition. In such circumstances the changing dynamics of workplace conditions increases the uncertainty of teachers’ practice thus rendering it more tentative.
and provisional while also requiring a more reflective turn (Schon, 1991).

Teresa states that the school has a fairly open policy for parents. Staff are willing to meet parents as long as there is a set procedure in the school that teachers don’t talk to parents first thing in the morning because the children are unsupervised.

*parents make an appointment to see you and once they do that I think you know we’d be fairly open to talk to them.* (Teresa)

The idea of making an appointment fits with the idea of being viewed as a professional. Indeed Sarah stresses the importance of maintaining a good professional relationship with the parents.

*I just think it is so important to develop and maintain a good relationship with parents. You don’t have to be a friend to them, but courteous and respectful. I often say to parents at our open meetings at the beginning of the year ‘Look, we are both here for the same reason. YOUR CHILD .., we both want the best for him/her so let’s work together to make it happen’.*

*I think having a good relationship with parents is extremely important.* (Sarah)

While Teresa feels that in her school there is a good working relationship with most parents, some of her friends (who teach in more affluent areas) seem to be less fortunate. Teresa is of the impression that these teachers have expressed a preference for parents to be more co-operative supportive and appreciative of teachers’ efforts.

Sarah needs skills of diplomacy when asking questions about bringing notes home. She refers to the variety of family situations.

*You can’t say ‘mammy and daddy’ as much... You have to say bring this note to mammy or daddy or whoever else is at home. Or often, for example, all of the children in the class would be living with their mothers anyway, so I could say ‘ bring this to your mammies’, but then you don’t want to be leaving the daddies out. So I often include .. ‘or your older sister or brother or whoever is at home’.* (Sarah)

Sarah values the support of parents in terms of involving them in their child’s learning. For example it is hard for her to get the time to check pupils’ knowledge of sight vocabulary individually so the children practise reading at home with their parents.

Conor talks about the parents being involved in making decisions about homework. They were asked to complete a survey seeking their opinions on issues surrounding homework. Conor thinks that the pupils learn respect from home. By comparison with pupils in the disadvantaged school

*I think their parents are obviously very respectful and even from meeting the parents at the parent teacher meetings I can see that being respectful to and particularly their elders those in authority is very important to these parents.* (Conor)

*Immigrant parents: Cultural diversity, increased uncertainty?*

Dealing with international parents has presented challenges. Sarah feels that they have different expectations and manners. For example on occasion they have wanted to talk to her in the middle of the school day and then failed to show up for a meeting another day and neglected to apologise for their absence. Developing her ability to communicate with parents of different cultures is identified as an area where she would like to develop her knowledge and skills.
These comments collectively indicate that rapidly changing school demographics have a significant shaping influence on teachers’ knowledge at work; their individual voices suggest that previously taken for granted routines have to be altered in subtle ways, while recognising and learning to live with increased risk and uncertainty. In addition to demands for curricular reforms, without opportunities to learn and a very supportive environment, such demands can be overwhelming.

Restructuring and parent-teacher relationships

The teachers’ comments highlight the value they place on involving the parents in their children’s learning. They express a willingness to co-operate with parents and include them in decisions about their children. Such a partnership approach is advocated in several government initiatives and policy documents. For instance the Primary Curriculum Support Programme website89 outlines specific ways in which parents can support the work of the school. Parents are advised to provide a home environment where there are opportunities for children and adults to participate in language, literacy and mathematical activities.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has pushed this development a stage further. In order to encourage parents in supporting the work of the school a new DVD for parents was presented to the National Parents Council at their annual conference in April 2006 by the Chief Executive of the NCCA. The DVD entitled The What, Why and How of children’s learning in primary school was developed by the NCCA in consultation with parents across the country to find out what they wanted to know about what their children were learning in primary school, and how best to support the child’s learning at home. The DVD was developed following the NCCA’s first phase of the review of the primary school curriculum (see NCCA, 2005). The review found that schools, teachers and principals wanted support in engaging parents more in the life of the school. To facilitate catering for an ever increasing ethnic mix in Irish schools the DVD is available in five languages – English, Gaeilge, French, Lithuanian and Polish.

The Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) pay special tribute to the pivotal role of parents in a child’s education. They assert that parents, through their unique knowledge of their own child, have much to contribute to their child’s learning programmes.

International research has demonstrated the positive influence which the involvement and participation of parents can have on children’s learning and overall progress in school. This influence has been shown to be powerful and lasting. It applies, in particular, to the capacity of individual parents to enhance their child’s learning in specific areas such as language development, literacy and mathematics. Collectively, the active involvement of the community of parents in school life has also been shown to enhance the effectiveness of the school as a whole. Finally, collaboration and sharing of relevant information between teachers and parents have been shown to be of critical importance, particularly in situations where the child requires learning support. (DES, 2000, p.52).

The establishment of The National Parents Council (NPS) in 1985 provides indication of parents seeking to have their issues and interests represented and heard in the agora of Education. The NPC is recognized by the government and the Education Act (1998) as the body representing parents. It aims to improve and enrich the education of children and to support the involvement of parents in their children's education. The NPC offers a range of courses, talks and workshops through county branches. NPC training activities are funded by the In-career Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science, and the European Social Fund.

Sometimes there seems to be a conflict between the values of the teacher and that of the parents.

Teresa’s comment in particular demonstrates that she operates from the perspective that all parent want the best for their child even though their ‘best’ may be very short of ideal in the eyes of society. This sentiment is echoed in a press release from the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) where it is reported that Educational Welfare officers claim that the vast majority of parents want their children to have the best opportunities in life, including educational opportunities.

4.2. Professional Knowledge

4.2.1 Tasks, requirements and demands.

The teachers’ principal task is to teach and care for the children. Not only are they required to teach all curricular areas (eleven subjects) but they also expressed a need to foster the moral and social/emotional development of pupils. Observation of the teachers’ class routines revealed that they needed to be able to manage groups of children so that effective teaching and learning could occur.

In order to achieve this end they require professional knowledge and skills. Conducting classroom observations were an important opportunity to document their knowledge at work to gain insight into and understanding of their workplace knowledge and its practice. The subsequent interviews provided an invaluable opportunity to enable them to reflect on that knowledge in use and in the process enabled them to varying degrees to reflect on their expertise, thus articulating taken for granted aspects of their embedded knowledge.

4.2.2 Professional knowledge and skills

Observation and interview data suggest that teachers’ professional knowledge includes: subject matter knowledge; knowledge about managing groups of children, knowledge about how children learn; and knowledge about designing lessons.

Subject-matter knowledge

The teachers require a sufficient knowledge base for each curriculum area namely; English, Mathematics, Gaeilge, Science, History, Geography, Visual Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education, and Social Personal and Health Education. They also teach Religious Education.

While Conor acknowledges that teachers need to keep up to date with new suggestion or ways of doing things, he considers that he has a strong knowledge base to tackle any of the subjects in the curriculum. Knowledge of the constructs of music is identified as one area requiring improvement. He seems to have particular expertise in the area of Information Technology as evidenced by the class project on World War One. He taught the class how to create an animation on the computer.

Knowledge about managing groups of children

In order to facilitate managing a large group of pupils and create an atmosphere of order, Sarah and Conor insisted that pupils asked questions from their seats. There is an established expectation that pupils raise their hand and wait their turn when they want to speak in a whole class situation. Sarah was observed to reinforce this rule.

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Moreover, silence was insisted upon when a pupil asked a question. Implicit in this action is the knowledge that (with silence) pupils can better attend to and learn from the teacher’s directions following the question, a regular feature of classroom discipline.

During the second interview Conor explicated his reasons for insisting on quietness during individual work.

Well concentrating on like we’ll say Maths. I mean it is very hard to add up figures if somebody is talking in your ear and you know ‘cause you have to save in your head almost. Or you know if you are writing an essay it is a creative type of thing and you are trying to bring all the forces of your imagination to the forefront of your mind and trying to write something as creatively as you can and that is very hard to do if there is somebody chatting beside you. (Conor)

In the learning support group the number of pupils does not exceed five. They did not raise their hands to contribute. However pupils did take turns to speak and frequent participation was encouraged and expected. Implicit in this action is the knowledge of small group dynamics and a more relaxed discipline regime that is responsive to context.

The teachers’ classrooms were organised in such a way so as to create order. For example, pupils had easy and immediate access to necessary equipment (pencils, rulers, textbooks etc). This reduced the need for them to spend time off task looking for pencils etc. In addition, the seating arrangements were designed to maximize pupils’ ability to attend to lessons. For example those pupils who require a lot of learning support or need close supervision and monitoring are seated at the top near the teachers’ desks. Sarah articulated this knowledge with regard to her seating arrangements.

You have weaker kids up the top of the class, you have kids who are troublesome ... up the top ... so a lot of it is separating certain kids. (Sarah)

Moreover, the pupils were seated in groups so they could discuss in pairs or groups without moving furniture. More generally, what is evident here is a particular “technology” of discipline deployed by the teacher as a coping strategy that embraces concepts of discipline, teaching and individual learner’s needs (see Hargreaves, 1984).

Many classroom routines suggest that they are informed by knowledge about creating conditions to encourage acceptable behaviour (that teachers regard as a prerequisite for teaching and learning). This was evident during routines for entering and leaving the classroom by table or in a line. Similarly knowledge about behaviour management was evident during routines such as changing between activities and distributing and collecting copybooks. For example, in Sarah’s class, songs and rhymes are used during transitions between activities in order to maintain the children’s focus in an enjoyable way, a form of discipline that resonates with a child centred philosophy of schooling (see Sugrue, 1997).

If we come in after break or even coming in in the morning they are all unsettled and once you start a song or a poem they’ll all join in and you’ll get their attention...straight away. And the same with giving out copies otherwise they’d all be talking...just to keep them still and attentive and ... together. (Sarah)

A reward scheme to encourage co-operative behavior was evident in each classroom. Sarah used a co-operative reward structure where pupils could work together to gain privileges. Sanctions such
as warning cards and time out were also used to discourage inappropriate behaviour.

In Conor’s classroom pupils earn stars for good behaviour

*if they are working well in class and they are behaving themselves or they are being kind to somebody in class.* (Conor)

Sanctions are also used and include

- Sending a note home in the child’s journal (for example if their homework wasn’t done)
- Denying them a treat (He emphasises that he would never deny them anything from the curriculum. They have to get their PE and their Art.)
- Giving them five or ten minutes sit out time in his or another teacher’s classroom where they’d have to do extra work or even just think for a little while (He only resorts to this sanction following a serious breach of conduct)
- Giving them extra homework (maybe two extra questions)

Sarah uses a sound button to regulate the amount of noise in the class. If the sound button is at ten by the end of the week they get a reward.

*We might do an extra circle time or maybe an extra PE. They might do a jog around or something or a game or something in class like nothing major you know.* (Sarah)

Moreover, school systems such as ‘class of the month’ encourage co-operative behaviour. Teresa has responsibility for monitoring the yard book where incidents of good and bad behaviour are recorded.

Implicit in these reward schemes is knowledge about how to encourage positive behaviour and discourage negative behaviour. The teachers have identified reinforcers of behaviour to motivate the pupils to co-operate. Similarly their action suggests a belief that praise and positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment in promoting good behaviour. The knowledge implicit in their actions resonates with the literature on behaviour management (See O’Donnell et al, 2006).

Observation revealed that the teachers need to know how to reprimand and redirect pupils effectively. Implicit in their actions is the knowledge that immediately attending to minor misdemeanours prevents incidents with more serious consequences. Conor articulates this thinking with regard to reprimanding a child for attempting to trip up another

*the child didn’t get hurt but I think it’s the potential that something serious could have happened and to instil in the child who tried to trip the other child that you know your actions while maybe you feel that they are ‘ah sure its not not going to do anything it’s just just a joke’ that it has serious repercussions and I think if we try to instil that in them now that later on in life when they are dealing with bigger issues about like taking drugs and alcohol and all that it’s only something small that they see that small issues become big issues if you don’t tackle them head on first of all.* (Conor)

This extract clearly indicates that embedded in Conor’s classroom action is an understanding of character formation with a future orientation with a more immediate and ongoing commitment to
Knowledge about children and how children learn

The teachers’ actions suggest that their professional knowledge includes knowledge about the necessary motivational states to learn. According to O’Donnell et al (2006) self-efficacy is a motivational state that energises and directs students’ behaviour. Self-efficacy may be thought of ‘I can do this’ judgement that one can cope effectively with the situation at hand. For example, Teresa attempted to foster the pupils’ self-efficacy beliefs when she was teaching the pupils with special educational needs to spell. She taught them to spell and read words that rhymed. Hence, once they learned to spell one word they were equipped with the skills to successfully spell a family of similar words.

Over here (in the learning support class) they achieve success because the work is geared to their level so you don’t set them up for failure... (Teresa)

This is consistent with a constructionist understanding of learning and the necessity for appropriate “scaffolding”.

Involving pupils in selecting their learning objectives is also thought to be a motivating factor. Teresa’s actions suggest that knowledge about motivational states informs her practice. She asked the pupils to select the spellings they wished to learn for homework. In this way the act of setting homework fosters pupils’ disposition towards taking responsibility for their own learning.

By incorporating enjoyment and fun into lessons the teachers fostered children’s motivation to learn. Teresa emphasised fun to sustain interest and engagement. Pupils made up nonsensical sentences such as ‘the baboon with a balloon on the moon’ in order to consolidate their learning of the ‘oo’ sound. Sarah motivated pupils to learn Irish vocabulary and phrases by fostering a desire to communicate. The pupils were encouraged to learn the Irish expressions so they could get an opportunity to present the news through Irish. The element of fun was enhanced by chanting a jingle after each news segment. In this manner it becomes evident that teachers’ knowledge at work is imbued with a belief that fun learning is more effective than an oppressive or intimidating atmosphere.

Teresa’s knowledge of research investigating effective learning strategies for reading and spelling also informs her practice.

The thinking now on the experts in reading would be that a knowledge of rhyme is one of the most important things a child can have. And they talk about phonological awareness, an awareness that words even spoken words are made up of sounds, and that reading involves putting the sounds together and spelling and writing involves being able to separate ...the sounds and ... if they can’t hear the rhyme none of that matters ... they can’t do any of the rest of it. (Teresa)

Teresa demonstrates evidence of reflecting on her prior understandings about children and how children learn and generating new understandings consistent with constructionist principles.

we are trained to take the child’s own personal experience and start teaching from that level and then build up to new experiences but all the time referring back to their own experiences. And their own experiences have changed a lot ... there is more instant gratification with them and attention is a huge thing with the children these days ... lack of being able to sit down and listen for a long period of time especially if somebody is speaking to them. So you have to change your teaching to be more interesting, to use more visual equipment, more visual aids, IT, videos that type of thing.
Her responsive teaching approach is also consistent with the spirit of the Revised curriculum (GoI, 1999)

The teachers expressed a wish and a need to foster the moral, social and emotional development of the children.

You are there not just to teach them ...you are there to kind of I suppose inspire and promote social awareness and promote good citizenship and all those kind of issues as well. (Conor)

Their actions imply that they know how to develop pupils socially, emotionally and morally. For example, Conor’s innovative approach to the classroom routine of calling the roll demonstrated that it could be used as an instructional activity to develop the values of respect and co-operation with classmates. During roll call pupils are asked to give a positive response about someone in the class.

I think even just verbalising things like that it puts it in to their head and it makes them think that you have to be more responsible for people around me and be more caring of the people around me that it’s not just about me all the time. (Conor)

Conor is at least tacitly aware of the pedagogical possibilities of “teachable moments” (Woods, 1995).

In order to further develop the pupils’ caring skills Conor used to ask another child to take down homework for a pupil who went out for support. Now the pupils take the initiative, he no longer needs to ask.

While there is appropriate awareness of commitment to care on the part of the teachers, this obligation is being squeezed by competing interests for the teachers’ attention in a climate of increasing demands for accountability. Education for citizenship is an ongoing and in many respects a more significant part of knowledge at work in an increasingly multicultural and contested terrain.

Conor also shows an understanding of how pupils learn cultural values. He articulates his approach to instilling respect for the Irish language.

by repeating things in Irish by giving directions in Irish, phrases and modes of speaking will just kind of get into their head and they will remember things a lot easier that way so I suppose it’s just to help them retain Irish and also to give them a respect for the language. I think they will gather from your use of it what you feel about the language. If you don’t if you are just using it in the forty-five minutes they are going to know that it is strange and you are doing it because you have to do it where as if you are talking to them in Irish and giving them instructions they will see that you actually want to speak it. If you want to speak maybe they might want to speak it as well. (Conor)

Sarah also expresses how she imparts cultural values She prefers to model cultural values rather than express disapproval and in doing so indicates awareness of the notion of teacher as role model.

I said that I was only going to eat sweets at the weekend and one of the boys said that he was only going to play his computer on Thursdays. And I really complimented him on it so suddenly all the rest of the children began to say ’I’m only going to play mine on a Thursday as well’. (Sarah)
Designing lessons

Teresa feels that the basic philosophy of teaching hasn’t changed over the last twenty years. Her lessons are designed with the needs of the child in her mind.

You look at the need of the child whether it’s the needs children had twenty years ago or the needs of the children nowadays and you base everything you are doing on the needs of the child or whatever the child is presenting with. (Teresa)

Teresa’s lesson plans seem to be informed by the idea of building on what the child already knows. It seems that she plans learning objectives with regard to identified learning needs.

it is very much a case of differentiating what the other class is doing and working back to see what level they are at and I would maybe look back over say I have children in fourth class I would look back to the second class curriculum and see what skills are they missing from the second class curriculum and I would work on that. (Teresa)

Implicit in her actions is knowledge about assessment and differentiation. However there may be room for expanding this knowledge- she identified writing individual education plans as one area requiring improvement.

Observation of lessons suggested that the lesson design was informed by knowledge of pedagogical skills. For example the teachers used modelling, structuring and scaffolding skills to build on and guide the pupils’ learning. Teresa articulated some of the aims and objectives of her lesson

The word broom for example was a word today that was in their spelling book it’s not something that would be in their experience so you are teaching them ‘oo’ you are teaching them the ‘br’ sound at the beginning of the word and you are also teaching them you are enlarging their vocabulary and you are teaching them how to explain a word and you are teaching them how to use the dictionary so there is a huge amount in everything you do I suppose. (Teresa)

Conor talks of the knowledge informing his lesson preparation. He needs to know what to teach, how to teach and why.

I know what the topic is and I plan out my topics and what I am going to teach and how I am going to teach them and why I’m teaching them of course. (Conor)

Sarah used a pedagogical approach whereby a cognitive disequilibrium is created to motivate the pupils to gain a greater understanding. This was evident during a mathematics lesson. The pupils were predicting the length of the yard in footsteps and Sarah asked whether the size of people’s footsteps would make a difference. The pupils then got an opportunity to measure the yard to test out their hypotheses.

Restructuring and professional knowledge and skills

The introduction of the Revised Curriculum (GoI, 1999) has demanded that teachers have knowledge of new curriculum areas namely Social Personal and Health Education Drama and Science. Given the wide range of subjects it is unsurprising that Conor feels that he needs to develop his knowledge in one area. It is generally accepted that the primary curriculum is overloaded.

Conor and Sarah were educated about the Revised Curriculum during their pre-service education so
the need to teach Drama, SPHE and Science is not a new requirement for them. Teresa has recently moved into learning support position and is not required to teach every subject in the curriculum. However in her position as mentor (for beginning Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)) she needs to be knowledgeable about the subject matter and pedagogical skills endorsed by the Revised Curriculum. As mentioned previously the DES has provided considerable support for the phased implementation of the curriculum.

The pedagogical knowledge and skills implicit in the actions of teachers (and sometimes espoused in their interview comments) may be connected to the introduction of the Revised Curriculum (GoI, 1999). For example Conor (and Sarah’s) use of Gaeilge conforms to the communicative, task-based approach to language learning advocated by the Revised Curriculum. Sarah’s observed use of questioning in the Mathematics lesson follows the Curriculum recommendation that a strong emphasis be placed on developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems, and to interact effectively with others. Conor’s reference to planning why he is going to teach particular lessons resonates with the curriculum emphasis on planning a programme that is appropriate to the individual school’s circumstances and to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the children.

Teresa’s comments about differentiation suggest that she assesses the needs of the learners prior to planning learning objectives. This practice concurs with the curriculum philosophy where assessment is described as an integral part of teaching and learning. Similarly it is clear that she takes into account the pupils’ affective and social development (as recommended by the Revised Curriculum) when she plans opportunities for the pupils to enjoy successful learning experiences.

The principle of guided activity and discovery learning and engaging the child with the immediate environment (another principle of the curriculum) is demonstrated by Conor’s approach to science experiments. This principle is recommended in the teaching of all curriculum areas.

Teresa’s philosophy of teaching (responding to the needs of the learner) was possibly informed by the 1971 curriculum (GoI, 1971) and the Revised Curriculum (GoI, 1999). Both advocate a child centred approach to teaching. Her knowledge of learners’ experiences appears to be informed by knowledge about how children spend their leisure time. Perhaps Teresa developed her knowledge of how children learn to read through further study at postgraduate level.

It is less likely that the teachers’ pastoral approach to teaching is influenced by changes in legislation, curriculum or population demographics. It is more probable that being motivated to make a difference in the lives of children is characteristic of primary teachers in general. A review by Spear et al (2000) suggested that student teachers are motivated by a desire to improve children’s life chances.

4.2.3. Learning (formal and informal, practice and experience)

Conor feels that it is only now that he is beginning to appreciate the relevance for practice of theoretical issues raised during pre-service. He refers to the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and sociology. At the time he thought it was hard to put them into context but now it is all useful and pertinent. Conor’s comments suggest that he adopts a reflective approach.

*it’s not a case of you teach English in this way but rather you think about it yourself and come up with the ideas yourself.* (Conor)
He said that they were trained to interpret the curriculum and deliver it with reference to the children that they have.

Sarah feels that when she left college that was nearly the point where the learning was to begin.

‘cause I feel that in college I wasn’t fully prepared for what I was doing once I got into the classroom. (Sarah)

She considers that perhaps there wasn’t enough practical experience. Teaching practice was an aspect of college that she particularly enjoyed and she put a lot of work into it. She refers to talks about going out one day a week to teach and then coming back to discuss the experience but that never happened. With hindsight she asserts that she would have liked more input into teaching pupils with special educational needs in college but at the time it didn’t seem that relevant. Nowadays it is very rare to get a class without a child with special educational needs. Similarly she would have liked more preparation on dealing with different cultures.

What Sarah’s experience illustrates is the necessity for workplace learning and support as well as opportunity for ongoing learning. The structure of the school day is often inimical to the reshaping of the environment as a learning community (Wenger, 1998).

Teresa feels that the relevance of what she learned in college became apparent later on. She echoes Conor’s thoughts about the material not making sense at the time. She comments on the difficulty of quantifying what was learned during her college education but supposes that she did learn. Inherent in such a perception is the difficulty of describing knowing which action reveals. Teresa also states that she was unaware of having learned to do things. The implication is that she simply found herself doing them. For Teresa some knowledge and skills are gained without realising it.

You probably absorb an awful lot more than you think you do. And it probably comes out in different ways you know when you are teaching- without realising it even. (Teresa)

These comments strongly suggest that there is tacit learning that becomes part of workplace practice.

However it is also possible that what Teresa and other teachers do in such circumstances is to fall back on their “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) to the extent that it is their own experience of schooling rather than theoretical or research based notions of teaching that shape their practice. In the absence of conditions for reflective critique in the workplace it is more likely that in Britzman’s (1991) terms “practice makes practice”.

However, Teresa also acknowledges the role of on site learning particularly from her colleagues. Learning is a lifelong process for her.

with teaching I don’t think you ever stop learning. I think you are learning all the time. (Teresa)

She explicitly states that there is a lot that you can’t learn in college because it is on the job learning and one of her tasks as a mentor is to bridge the gap between the theory of college and the practice of teaching. Teresa has taken responsibility for her professional development and attended courses and gained qualifications. Part of her motivation was that she needed more knowledge and skills in the area of teaching children with special educational needs. She felt that she was sinking rather than swimming. What her story illustrates is that the ongoing development of professional knowledge extends beyond the workplace.
Restructuring and formal learning

The Bachelor of Education programme was introduced in 1974. This Degree replaced a two-year Diploma Programme that was based on apprenticeship, awarded by the Ministry of Education, whose inspectorate was its external examining body. The three-year degree programme is awarded at pass and honours levels, while it is necessary to study for a fourth year (on a part-time basis) for honours for those students whose degree is awarded by Trinity College Dublin. The design and structure of teacher education programmes can be categorised thus

- Subject matter studies (academic subjects)
- Foundations of education studies
- Professional studies, including methodology and curriculum courses and courses based on knowledge generated through research on teaching
- School experience and teaching practice.

The basic structure of the BEd programme has changed very little since its inception but has evolved piecemeal, with significant additions making the programme even more overcrowded. Sarah’s comments about her pre-service education indicate that in hindsight she was dissatisfied with the level of input around the area of special needs education. Sarah qualified in 2000 which was prior to the publication of the Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004). Hence (at pre-service level) she was neither supported in implementing the recommendations of the guidelines nor in dealing with the implications of special educational needs legislation. Her remarks about dealing with pupils from different cultures suggest that the influx of international pupils (and the associated challenges) were not anticipated during her pre-service education either. This is unsurprising since the increase in immigrants really began to accelerate during the late 1990s. Given the pace of change, therefore, there is more need than ever for lifelong learning in and beyond the workplace.

The Report of the Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education, Government of Ireland (2002a) put forward a number of proposals that it believes should underlie the approach of colleges in preparing students to deal with special needs. Students should be provided with a broad overview of special needs and special education which addresses the identification of special needs and is linked with students’ work in assessment and diagnostic procedures. Courses should address issues relating to children with learning difficulties (e.g. in literacy and numeracy), and should cover broad matters relating to provision (inclusion, special schools, special classes, and the role of special needs resource centres). Consideration should also be given to children with special needs who are learning through a second language.

Recently it has been recommended that the length of formal training and education for primary (and also secondary) teachers be extended (GoI, 2002a, GoI 2002b). The Working Group recommended that the B.Ed programme be extended to four years. A number of considerations influenced this decision. The most compelling reason was considered to be the need for more time to allow students to integrate and apply their experiences in the practice of teaching. The amount of time that could reasonably be required to cover the variety of curriculum areas that students will have to teach in primary schools was a further consideration. However, nothing of a formal nature has happened in relation to the recommendations of the pre-service education reports and more recent evidence suggests that this development is unlikely. However, such recommendations, given the adoption of a policy on inclusion and the rapidity of change, underlie the necessity for space and
opportunity for much more workplace learning than current structures allow.

Teresa’s commitment to lifelong learning is espoused in many government policy documents. For example, the Government’s Statement of Strategy (2005-2007) acknowledges that the changing teaching environment requires ongoing training, support and development. Since the launch of the revised curriculum (GoI, 1999) there is general recognition that lifelong learning will have to become the norm, when policy states that “initial teacher education cannot be regarded as the final preparation for a lifetime of teaching.” (GoI, 2002a).

Teresa’s pursuit of postgraduate qualifications has been made possible by the significant increase in professional learning opportunities for primary and secondary teachers in Ireland during the past decade.¹ In the case of education departments within old and new universities, there has been a significant increase in the provision of graduate diplomas and degrees, many of them with administration, management or leadership in their titles. ³ Colleges, too, (since they have become more integrated into university structures) are providing masters programmes with particular focus on aspects of primary schooling.

Her mentoring skills have been enhanced by the mentoring programme. The project was established under the auspices of the Standing Committee of Teacher Unions and University Departments of Education, and funded and supported by the Department of Education and Science, the National Development Plan and ATECI.

**Learning from experience/on the job**

Interestingly one reference Conor makes to learning from experience is when he says he learned to stop work when he needed to stop because for the first few months of teaching it can just take over and dominate so much of his time. He realised that you have to stop because it is not good for you and it is not good for anyone else.

Sarah’s comments suggest that she attaches a lot of importance to ‘on the job’ learning. She said that every year she learns more and more and that you never stop learning with teaching. For Sarah practical experience is more predisposed than others towards “learning by doing” but one size does not fit all. She talks about acquiring knowledge from experience, reflection and consulting with colleagues.

_I feel definitely that I would be improving each year as in that I am learning from the people that I am working with you know. And learning from the children as well . . . I suppose you see the way that they learn things . . . you recall an activity they might have enjoyed and then you might repeat it with another class, or alter it slightly._ (Sarah)

Teresa’s comments illustrate that she has developed her professional knowledge and skills through formal education and on-site experience and subsequent reflection. For example her knowledge of the experts’ thinking on developing reading skills was informed through further study. In addition, she says that she enhanced her interpersonal skills through the mentor training programme. She was trained on how to give feedback to teachers after observation. She talks about learning from experience. When she was in college she thought of the formal aspect of teaching such as teaching isolated English/Maths lessons. She underestimated the informal aspect of teaching. It was when she was teaching senior infants (5/6 year olds) that she learned that getting the pupils to put their books away

¹ See C. Sugrue et al., _The Quality of Professional Learning for Irish Primary and Post-Primary Teachers: A Critical Analysis_ (Dublin: St. Patrick’s College, 2001).
³ See C. Sugrue et al., _The Quality of Professional Learning_.

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and line up was a lesson in itself. Furthermore she has learned from experience teaching children with
special needs that you can never assume that they know anything. This informs her teaching in so far as
she constantly reinforces material and explicitly teaches skills that their mainstream peers may take for
granted.

However what is not apparent from this evidence is the extent to which such workplace learning is
adapting and refining of previous thinking and strategies rather than anything more fundamental. In a
time of rapid change exclusive reliance on this kind of learning only is probably inadequate.

_Restructuring and learning from experience on the job_

The teachers’ comments suggest that they have been influenced by the rhetoric surrounding the role
of the teacher as described in the Revised Curriculum (GoI, 1999).

_the teacher needs to adopt innovative approaches to teaching and to be aware of changes and de-
velopments in educational theory and practice. It is important, therefore, that the teacher is com-
mitted to a process of continuing professional reflection, development and renewal. (GOI, 1999,
p.20)_

In addition, Teresa’s participation in the mentoring programme has possibly enhanced her
understanding of how to facilitate workplace learning.

### 4.3. Social position

All participants are permanent members of teaching staff. Conor and Sarah were made permanent
within their first year. Teresa has been permanent since 1989. There is a very young staff in the
school. Teresa has been promoted twice since she commenced teaching: first to a special duties post
and then to an assistant principal. Sarah has been promoted to a special duties post.

#### 4.3.1. Symbolic aspects: respect and prestige

There is consensus between Sarah and Conor with regard to a somewhat unfavourable public image of
teachers. Teresa comments on the diminishing status of teachers.

Sarah expresses frustration with the public image of teachers. She feels that there is a perception that
teachers have an easy job.

_I hate the way people think that teachers have an easy job and think that oh you finish at half two
when I know myself I don’t finish at half two…(Sarah)_

Conor notes that there is an attitude among other working professionals that teachers work fewer
hours and so deserve less pay. He feels that

*this is ludicrous since every teacher works before and after school and not just when the children
are in our care.(Conor)*

Sarah’s comments in relation to the parents (as mentioned previously) indicate that she is
disappointed with the lack of appreciation and respect for her work that is demonstrated by some
parents.

Teresa commented on the change in public perception of teachers. She suggested a number of reasons
for her sense of their diminishing position and status. One such reason is the change in the attitudes and
experiences of parents.

According to Teresa previously teachers enjoyed higher status and respect from parents.

*there would have been a lot of respect for the teachers maybe too much. ..they would maybe see them on a pedestal.* (Teresa)

She attributes this respect to the fact that parents weren’t as highly educated as they are today.

*Very few of the parents would have been to secondary school or passed their Junior Cert themselves so they would have been in awe of anybody who did go to college but now there’s so many people going to college there isn’t the same distinction.* (Teresa)

While Teresa feels that in her school there is a good working relationship with most parents, some of her friends (who teach in other schools) seem to be less fortunate. Teresa is of the impression that the friends have expressed a preference for parents to be more co-operative supportive and appreciative of teachers’ efforts.

When Teresa began teaching there was the idea that teaching was a vocation. She thinks that now there is a move towards the notion of teaching as a profession. Hence she considers it important to be very careful that teachers come across professionally in their manner and dress.

Teresa wonders if the feminisation of the profession will make it less of a profession in the perception of the public. She thinks that there is a perception among boys that teaching is a female job and that perhaps there isn’t much opportunity for promotion. Conor echoes Teresa’s thoughts on the image of teaching as a female career. He acknowledges the fact that there are very few males entering the profession. However he asserts that teaching is a great career and if somebody has the interest then they should go for it

Restructuring and social position

The OECD Report Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers (OECD, 2003) notes that various attitudinal surveys have indicated that teaching is one of the most highly regarded professions by the Irish public. According to the same report (OECD, 2003), the role of teachers has been traditionally 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. It is suggested that the significant involvement of religious personnel in earlier times may have helped to foster a favourable public perception of the career. The report states that further evidence of the esteem in which teachers are held is evident in policy documents of the nineties. The government paid generous tribute to the work of teachers, affirmed the significance of their roles and proposed a proactive series of measures in support of the teaching career.

However the comments of the teachers suggest that they don’t feel particularly valued and respected by the public (and parents in particular). It is possible that industrial conflict and a changing economy have influenced public perceptions of teachers. There are signs that the respected role of teachers may be under threat. An indication of this emerged in the context of a recent bitter industrial dispute by the Association of Secondary teachers of Ireland (ASTI), who withdrew from membership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and did not participate in the government appointed Benchmarking process set up to examine public salary relativities with the private sector. The Association expressed grave dissatisfaction with prevailing salary scales of teachers all of whom are paid on a common salary scale with extra

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allowances for some qualifications and the exercise of special duties posts in schools. The dispute continued for almost three years in the course of which relationships between the ASTI and parents and the general public became fraught. Media coverage conveyed a new asperity in public comment on the teaching profession, which is likely to leave a residue in public-teacher attitudes at least for some time.

Furthermore, in the new economy with proliferation of new occupations, it is generally accepted that the status of teachers has declined in a more educated society. OECD (2003) report that an older tradition may be changing whereby many teachers no longer encourage their sons and daughters to follow in their professional paths, but to aspire to other careers in a greatly diversified job arena. Teresa’s comments in particular corroborate such assertions.

In addition, during the late nineties and early part of the 21st century, the shortage of primary teachers meant that unqualified personnel were drafted in to work as teachers. This may have had a negative impact on the occupational prestige of the teaching profession. Possibly the unqualified members of staff were unconsciously incompetent. Furthermore, there is a widespread view that the part-time nature of the Hibernia teacher education course is damaging to professional status and prestige. The Government decision to accredit this course is unlikely to enhance the status and public perceptions of teachers.

4.3.2. Material aspects: earnings

Although Teresa feels that her salary is adequate for her needs, she thinks that if you think of a teacher as a young professional the salaries are probably not in line with other professionals. She comments how her children do not view teaching as a lucrative profession. She thinks they got this impression by seeing their friends’ parents who work in business and maybe have a lot of money. Conor concurs with Teresa’s thoughts about young teachers’ salaries. He feels that considering the hard work teachers invest in their jobs, they are paid somewhat poorly.

With the high cost of living in Ireland, teacher's wages do not go far enough, especially in the early stage of one's career. It takes many years and a lot more responsibility for teachers to earn anything like what they deserve. (Conor)

Conversely, Sarah (who is only six years qualified) felt that she was on a reasonable salary.

Conor’s greatest gripe is that teachers are not adequately credited for professional development. He is currently studying for a Masters in Education and he does not receive financial assistance for fees or books from the DES. Furthermore when he completes the programme he will receive what he describes as ‘an insultingly small increase in wages’.

Restructuring and teachers’ salaries

According to OECD country background report for Ireland (2003) while the ASTI has been the most vocal, all teachers consider that their salaries have not kept pace with those of similarly qualified professionals in Ireland. This view has been endorsed by the Benchmarking Body’s Report in July 2002 (GoI, 2002) which recommended an increase of 13% for all teachers, with further increases for senior personnel in schools. In the context of the new social partnership agreement, “Sustaining Progress”, the government has agreed to implement this recommendation, over a time period, subject to a number of “modernisation” conditions by teachers. Such conditions include the holding of parent/teacher meetings of locally agreed duration half-within and half-without normal school time; and the holding of one staff meeting per term of locally agreed
duration half-within and half-without normal school time. In respect of the existing agreed commitments, it was agreed that they would be completely implemented and in operation for the school year 2003/2004. In respect of parent/teacher meetings, the parties agreed to enter discussions with the education partners, with a view to extending the existing agreed commitment, by the school year 2004/2005, in a way which provides flexible, formal parent/teacher meetings at times convenient to parents and teachers and which minimises disruption to students’ tuition time and to their parents. Consequently parent teacher meetings are now held entirely outside school hours.

Furthermore agreement was reached with the education partners on the standardisation of the school year, which came into effect from the 2004/2005 school year. Under the terms of Circular M21/04, schools are required to standardise Christmas, Easter and mid-term breaks. Previously schools were free to decide on holiday periods and mid-term breaks on an individual basis. This led to variation in the closure times of schools, which caused problems for families where children were attending different schools.

Hence through a system of centralized bargaining called “partnership” salary increases are being tied to more flexible work practices thus slowly workplace conditions are being restructured,

The OECD (2006) comparative data for teacher salaries show that Irish teachers are relatively well paid by international standards, ranking in 7th place of the 27 countries surveyed. In Ireland, the proportion of current educational expenditure applied to teacher salaries, at about 76%, was significantly higher than the EU average while other surveys indicate that the cost of living is higher than almost all other European countries.

4.4. Work life balance

Conor thinks that it is really important to follow other interests and go down other avenues if you are to sustain yourself in your career teaching

because it can dominate completely it can just take over your entire life you can spend every waking moment doing something in reference to school.. but I have taken time out to kind of follow other interests and go down other avenues so I am happy about that.(Conor)

He said that he’d find it very difficult to go home to rural Ireland as a teacher

because I think it would be a two teacher school or three teacher school and it would be I think a small bit too parochial. I think you’d go out of the school in the evening and you’d meet the children when you go to the shops or when you’d go anywhere. And you’d meet the parents if you went out socialising or whatever. (Conor)

He is glad that in his current position he might never meet the parents and the children from one end of the weekend to the next.

And I think that’s great because you can come back in to the classroom on Monday morning refreshed or after the holidays refreshed and ready to go again and fully recharged. (Conor)

Sarah finds that work can take over if you let it.

There are very few weekends when I don’t bring work home with me. As much as I would like to be able to leave my work in work, it’s just it’s the only way I seem to be able to get things done. I find it
difficult to feel that I have done my job because I feel that there is always something I can be doing, no matter how much I have done. I always feel that there are a hundred and one more things that I could do. (Sarah)

She generally stays back in school until about 4.00 or 4.30pm and she brings a bit of work home with her.

I might just spend an hour doing it when I come home or before going to bed. Often I won’t get to do all that I have planned, because once I’m home I need my time out. I’ll prioritise my ‘list’ of jobs and do the more urgent tasks. Then I’ll go to the gym or meet up with a friend. (Sarah)

Teresa does work at home for school and for her further study. She finds the work life balance ok and has plenty of interests outside school such as the aforementioned history society and GAA club.

Restructuring and work life balance

The teachers’ comments, with regard to there being a sense of no end to the work, may be understood in the context of curricular, legislative and demographic changes mentioned previously. It is likely that demands associated with such changes have tilted the balance in favour of work rather than ‘life’. The impact of such changes on teachers’ working lives and professional knowledge will be discussed in the conclusion.

4.5. Emerging themes

Challenges associated with inclusion

The international pupils have raised a number of issues and necessitated an adjustment in terms of the teachers’ approach. Sarah has to deal with pupils who have been traumatised in their home country, pupils who have no English, pupils who are being bullied because of a body odour problem related to their diet.

So you really have to know the background of all the children and take that into account before you plan what you are doing or before you open your mouth really you know. (Sarah)

Sarah talked about the difficulty of attending to the needs of all the children in the class.

If you have a child who is very weak or with little English, then as well as trying to cater for the whole class you need to spend a lot of time giving one to one attention. And I find that very frustrating because the time just isn’t there. (Sarah)

Sarah talked about the need to differentiate lessons according to the needs of the children. She takes into account the various cultures and makes sure that the Muslim/Jehova children do not engage in any activities contrary to their beliefs. For example a Jehova child could not do anything to do with celebration.

You definitely have to differentiate more now… you’re not really teaching a whole class anymore. You can’t just go in and teach a lesson without thinking… you have to know WHO you are teaching. (Sarah)

Conor experiences conflict with regard to supporting international pupils struggling in the class.

I could give every child in the class just busy work to do for an hour and I could actually sit here
and spend an hour with that child who needs the help but my conscience and my professional judgement would have to say that is not fair on the other children who need support. It is not fair to have them just sitting there pushing a pen for an hour. (Conor)

He expresses frustration with the lack of resources to adequately support their progress.

But we have such a limited number of resources to cope with them and to help them and it can feel a bit debilitating at times for the teacher that there are children in your class that you know are falling behind that you know are not being given support. (Conor)

Conor sees the value of language support for the pupils and for the teachers

I see the value of the outside support. It is so valuable and I can see how it really helps the teacher to em just in the day to day teaching. I mean it can be very overwhelming at times when there are so many children that need help and it is great to have that boost from outside just to give you a lift you know when you are pinned to the collar you are pinned to the collar to try and get your work done. (Conor)

But he is frustrated with the limitations on it. A child who is learning English as an additional language is only entitled to a maximum of two years language support but this is about to be relaxed as part of the next partnership agreement.

because it is restricted by the Department you know that this child is going to be brought so far and then the door is going to be closed in their face. And I suppose it could be very disappointing and disheartening when you see them coming on so well and knowing that well in a years time that is going to be stopped and kind of why do we bother putting in the effort when we are not being given the support to sustain that. .. you can see how disheartening it can be for the children and for the parents as well because they obviously are going to see results and suddenly they are just stopped because of funding. And I know it is easy to just complain about it but it is very hard to see children being stopped and being prevented from progressing when there is great potential there. (Conor)

Restructuring and integration

The aforementioned rise in the immigrant population has certainly contributed to the challenges experienced by the teachers. The growth in international pupils has put increased pressure on teachers to create a more inclusive classroom environment. This implies that teachers need skills in teaching English as an additional language. Similarly an adaptation in teaching approach is required for those with limited English proficiency. One response to the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity is the publication of ‘Intercultural Education in the Primary School – Guidelines for Schools’ (NCCA, 2005). The aim of these guidelines is to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable. It is hoped that the guidelines will support teachers, both individually and as teams in developing a more inclusive classroom environment. They aim to support whole school planning and policy development within schools and to contribute to developing a school culture that is respectful and sensitive to the needs of children. However no continuous professional development has been provided to date.

Special needs legislation\(^\text{91}\) has placed similar pressures on teachers. A more reflective, differentiated and targeted teaching approach is required. While learning support teachers have received specific

\(^{91}\) The Education Act (1998) and Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)
in-service training with regard to supporting pupils with special educational needs, no such support has been made available for mainstream teachers.

There is much evidence here of rapidly and radically changing workplace conditions that challenge workplace learning and the capacity of teachers to keep their knowledge base on a par with those changing conditions. Collectively then they suggest that a more radical restructuring of the working day is necessary to facilitate more systematic learning in a climate of increasing uncertainty and complexity.

5. Conclusion

Our research set out to examine how educational restructuring in Ireland has affected teachers, their working lives and their professional knowledge. Interviews and ethnographic descriptions have provided insight into the lives of primary teachers in an Irish context. The following section summarises the impact of restructuring on various aspects of the teachers’ working lives and on their professional knowledge in particular. In addition reference is made to the professional strategies employed by teachers to cope with the pace and extent of reforms.

Structure of school day

The working conditions of Irish teachers have not changed radically in the sense that the structure of the school day has changed very little since the 19th century. Teachers still teach a similar number of hours per day. However, parent teacher meetings now take place outside of school hours and the school year has become standardised. These developments have impacted on teachers’ salaries. In the context of the new social partnership agreement, “Sustaining Progress”, the government has agreed to pay a salary increase of 13% for all teachers, over a time period, subject to a number of “modernization” conditions. Holding parent/teacher meetings outside school hours and standardising the school year were two such conditions. Thus, increased flexibility is one professional strategy teachers have employed in order to receive greater renumeration.

Promotion

The middle management scheme seems to have been effective in devolving responsibility from the principal and has possibly led to increased collegiality in this particular school. However, the opportunities for promotion remain limited and teaching still has a rather flat career structure. One response to the limited prospects is to look outside the profession for job diversification. It seems that teachers are partly motivated to pursue further education in order to enhance their employment prospects. By engaging in postgraduate education their knowledge is expanded and it is possible that the knowledge gained is also useful in other settings.

Evaluation, documentation, and accountability

According to the Education Act (1998) schools should establish and maintain systems whereby the quality and effectiveness of teaching in the school can be assessed. The teachers’ evidence of long and short term planning is available for inspection by the principal and external inspectors conducting Whole School Evaluations (WSEs). Such evaluations are held approximately every four years. However, with the exception of WSEs and ‘cuntas miosuil’/ monthly accounts, our data suggests that more frequent monitoring and evaluating of teaching is not done in a formal and systematic
manner. This implies that the professional expertise and knowledge inherent in planning documents is not systematically exploited or shared in the school.

All the teachers showed signs of responding to the climate of increasing accountability. For example the teachers talked about recording concerns, incidents, observations and progress results for particular pupils. As a result patterns can emerge which can lead to theories about the causes of the pupils’ difficulties. Part of the incentive is that, when a SENO is considering a child’s eligibility for additional support, the teacher’s log book contributes to the analysis of need. Teachers must show evidence that a child is failing persistently, despite intervention, before they can be assessed by a psychologist and/or eligible to receive resource teaching. This process has contributed to teachers’ professional knowledge in so far as they are forced to reflect on their teaching approach and try alternative strategies when a pupil fails to make adequate progress. Their working life is affected in that they require more preparation and planning time.

The teachers also referred to another reason for recording and keeping accounts. They log information that may be needed when there is a situation of suspected neglect. This activity has the dual purpose of teacher protection and child protection.

In sum, teachers do not feel that they are evaluated or monitored on a regular basis. However, they increasingly take measures to demonstrate accountability to their pupils. The professional strategy of documenting seems to be based on altruistic motives, a wish to maximise the pupils’ learning potential and a wish to avoid allegations of neglect. Moreover, the need to keep records, plan, and differentiate are system requirements.

**Decision making**

While teachers make decisions individually or collaboratively regarding what goes on in their classroom they have little or no input into decisions about resources or staffing. Such decisions are made centrally (by the DES) and it is a source of frustration for the teachers who are overwhelmed by demands to teach pupils with wide and varied needs.

The teachers’ professional strategies involve doing their best within existing resources to cope with the limitations on language support for pupils with limited English proficiency. Although such pupils are only eligible to receive support for two years, the language support teachers within the school are flexible and will cater for pupils with a high level of need. In addition, children with limited English proficiency tend to score below the 10th percentile on standardized tests of literacy. Hence, they are eligible to receive learning support and the teachers group the pupils with similar language needs. However the standardized tests are not done at the start of the year therefore some children fall between the cracks and are unable to avail of learning support. This impacts on the teachers in so far as they feel guilty that they cannot give sufficient time to support these pupils and there are more demands on their preparation time for lessons. Similarly, more is demanded of their professional knowledge in so far as they are required to learn how to teach concepts to pupils (sometimes with additional special needs) who are unfamiliar with the language of instruction.

**Colleagues and co-operation**

Curricular reform, legislation (such as Education (1998), Welfare (2000), and Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)) and increasing multi-culturalism in Ireland, have possibly led teachers to work more closely. The pace of change and policy of inclusion and increasing cultural diversity has meant that teachers are having their pedagogical routines severely challenged. As previously mentioned they experience significant challenges with including pupils
from different cultures and integrating pupils with special educational needs. In this school, there is a forum in the form of class level meetings whereby teachers can meet, share expertise and knowledge, and co-operate regularly in order to meet new requirements. Formal measures such as protected time (within school hours) and class supervision make such meetings possible. For Teresa (and the newly qualified teachers) the induction/mentoring programme has also facilitated a great deal of co-operation.

There is a staff notice board where teachers pin up useful resources that can be shared. The committees with various responsibilities such as designing a policy for homework also meet to collaborate and divide responsibilities. This contributes to their professional life in the sense that workplace learning has become a necessity rather than an option. In addition more is demanded of their professional knowledge and skills. Teachers need: knowledge about teaching English as an additional language; knowledge about assessment and planning for teaching pupils with a range of special educational needs; and knowledge of different cultures. This has contributed to professional life in so far as it requires greater planning, differentiation and reflection. However the absence of formal systems of exploitation and sharing of knowledge (at a whole school level) reduces the potential impact of workplace learning.

**Co-operation with pupils**

Overwhelming demands have contributed to teacher guilt and stress when they feel they haven’t sufficient time to devote to pupils with a high level of need. Similarly they feel guilt about neglecting the needs of other children if they focus too much of their attention on a pupil with special educational needs. One professional strategy is to seek the support of parents to consolidate work at home. However, when such support is lacking, teachers caution themselves against getting annoyed with the child in a situation, for example where a parent fails to provide textbooks.

The Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (GoI, 2001) may have enhanced the professional knowledge of teachers in the sense that they are possibly more alert to signs of abuse and are more disposed towards recording incidents such as children coming to school without lunch or a coat. In addition, teachers are more aware of how to protect themselves from allegations of neglect/abuse. However, is possible that one of the unintended consequences of such legislation is a kind of defensive “no touch” teaching that runs counter to a commitment to care and is inimical to trust and relationships (see Sachs, Forthcoming)

Changing pupil demographics means that teachers have to deal with pupils from cultures where it is not usual that a female occupies a position of authority. This causes problems when female teachers are attempting to discipline unco-operative pupils. The professional strategy to cope with this situation is to look to colleagues for social and emotional support.

**Parents and co-operation**

The partnership approach (with parents) espoused in numerous policy documents seems to have been embraced by the teachers in the study. There are a number of ways in which the involvement of parents is sought. According to the teachers, parental participation makes the teachers’ job easier. Conversely, when parents are less supportive, teachers feel frustrated and stressed by the additional demands placed upon them. For instance if a parent hasn’t bought a child the necessary textbooks the teacher has to photocopy pages. If a child is not reading at an age appropriate level and the parents fail to practice and reinforce reading exercises (as prescribed by the teacher) at home this hinders the child’s progress and requires that the teacher try to compensate for the absence of parental input.
The changing demographics of pupils and correspondingly their parents has impacted on teachers’ working lives. They are required to be more reflective in terms of how and why they communicate certain values. Skills of diplomacy are also necessary when communicating concerns about pupils. For instance, one teacher had to suggest to a parent that ten biscuits is not considered a balanced lunch.

In order to cope with demands and lack of support and gratitude teachers look to each other for social and emotional support, feedback and encouragement.

**Professional knowledge and skills**

The introduction of the Revised Curriculum appears to have influenced the teachers’ professional knowledge and skills to an extent. Their comments and observed practices resonate with many of the principles of the Revised Curriculum. For example they show a commitment to child centred teaching and learning. The development of Teresa’s professional knowledge and skills (associated with the Revised Curriculum) was possibly facilitated by the In-Service programme provided by the Department of Education and Science. Sarah and Conor, on the other hand, were introduced to the Revised Curriculum during their pre-service Education. Nonetheless they all participate in the in-service programme and it was not differentiated to cater for those with different and varying levels of education and experience.

**Professional learning**

In the context of curricular and legislative reform, and changing pupil demographics the demands on teachers’ knowledge and skills seem overwhelming. Sarah indicated that she would have appreciated more input (during her pre-service education) with regard to supporting international pupils and pupils with special needs. Teresa and Conor also indicated learning needs in these and other areas. This points to the necessity for lifelong learning in and beyond the workplace. The teachers have responded to learning requirements in a number of ways. The class level meetings provide a forum where teachers can learn from each other. Similarly, the school development planning days (as part of the DES in-service programme) are used to share knowledge and expertise in various subject areas. The staff notice board is frequently used to share resources for teaching and learning. Teresa has developed a system to facilitate close collaboration with the teachers of her pupils with special needs. In addition, new commercially produced textbooks have accompanied the introduction of the Revised Curriculum. Teresa notes that there are very good teacher manuals with the textbooks. Perhaps such resources have assisted the development of the teachers’ knowledge and skills.

Conor and Teresa have adopted another professional strategy to deal with the pace and extent of reforms. They have taken the initiative to continue their professional development through pursuit of postgraduate education. However, this education is at their financial expense and Conor notes that the DES does not provide meaningful incentives for such education.

It is unsurprising therefore that they talk about using their qualifications to expand their employment prospects. For instance, Conor mentioned that he might have an interest in working in research at some point. Teresa suggested that her participation in the mentoring programme might make her a suitable candidate for teaching practice supervision, should she wish to take early retirement.

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Social position

In the new economy with a proliferation of new occupations, it is generally accepted that the status of teachers has declined in a more educated society. In addition, there is a widespread view that the increasing feminisation of the profession and the Government decision to accredit a part-time teacher education course are developments that are unlikely to enhance the status and public perceptions of teachers. Perhaps these changes have impacted on teachers’ feelings of being valued and this has implications for teacher retention and commitment to professional renewal.

Material earnings

Teachers have been able to secure a salary increase through a system of centralized bargaining called “partnership”. The salary increases (including payment for yard supervision) have been given on condition that teachers operate more flexible work practices.

Work life balance

As a result of restructuring, teachers are required to spend more time planning, preparing and differentiating lessons. This has the potential to disrupt the work/life balance. The less experienced teachers talk of the importance of protecting their personal time so as to sustain themselves in teaching. Sarah and Conor refer to a feeling that there is no end to the work. In order to cope with this Sarah prioritises her tasks and makes time for exercise or friends. Conor maintains the balance by pursuing other interests outside teaching. While Teresa says that she does work related to school every evening she finds the work life balance ok. Perhaps professional knowledge learned through education/ experience involves knowing when to stop. The professional strategies employed in order to cope with a demanding workload include making time for hobbies, family and friends. For Conor living at a distance from the community in which he works (and in a city with plenty of amenities) is an important factor in maintaining a satisfactory work/life balance at his particular career stage.

5.1. Restructuring and generations

Given that there were only three informants in our study who work in the same school a degree of homogeneity seems inevitable. This was particularly apparent when the teachers talked about their working conditions. They all confirmed that management have faith in their expertise and commitment. They agreed that they are similarly limited in terms of the decisions that they can make with regard to resources and staffing. In addition, each participant expressed the importance of colleagues (in supporting their endeavours). The teachers also demonstrated comparable commitment to care and making the pupils' learning experiences enjoyable. They all emphasised teaching children rather than teaching a curriculum. Similar views were also expressed with regard to the public perception of teachers.

With regard to restructuring the teachers have responded similarly to changes such as catering to the needs of international pupils and pupils with special educational needs. The mainstream teachers differentiate more and they experience frustration and guilt when trying to attend to a wide variety of needs within school hours (presumably Teresa doesn’t experience this conflict because she teaches pupils in small groups who have similar learning needs). The homogenising influence of the school context is highlighted by the fact that the school is having a planning day to discuss how to attend to multicultural issues.

Thus, considering the aforementioned similarities, identifying generational differences becomes
more difficult. Where evident the generational differences are functions of external society/ the socio-economic environment rather than the internal workings of the school.

The life history narratives highlight how women’s choices in the past were rooted in family and gender expectations and how this has changed over three generations. Teresa as the representative of the older generation noted four possible career paths (teaching, nursing, the civil service and the bank) that were open to her when she left school. She talks of possibly being steered into teaching by the nuns in secondary school rather than making a conscious decision to become a teacher. This situation contrasts with that of Sarah. When Sarah was at second level her teachers actively discouraged her from entering the teaching profession saying “what on earth would you be doing wanting to become a teacher”. Similarly, she was encouraged by her family to consider other options such as medicine. Sarah’s choice of profession stemmed from a childhood wish and was an intentional and conscious decision. Her parent’s entreaty to consider what was once a traditionally male dominated profession (medicine) illuminates how educational opportunities for women have changed enormously over the generations.

While the social construction of gender roles possibly exerted a steering influence that led Teresa into teaching, Conor’s comments indicate that such a construction may discourage men from considering teaching.

I suppose maybe it's like a lot of careers there is just an image out there that it is female. I know one of the things we were asked to do when we started in college was to draw a picture of a teacher and one thing that we found was (this was an auditorium of maybe 200 people) nearly everybody drew a blackboard and an apple...You know it just goes to show that people have very similar views if they are going to draw a blackboard and an apple why wouldn’t an awful lot of people think the teacher is female ‘cause they have had a lot of female teachers in the past. (Conor)

However, the perception of teaching being a female profession clearly didn’t discourage Conor. A number of factors may have lessened the impact of gender stereotypes on his choice. He had a significant role model who extolled the teaching profession and he was motivated by practical concerns (since he had to fund his way through college he needed to be qualified to do something when he finished college).

The teachers’ experience of pre-service education differed in respect of the male to female ratio and the qualifications they obtained. Teresa trained at a time when men far outnumbered women in the college. When Sarah qualified twenty-seven years later the proportion of men in the BEd programme had dropped to approximately 10%. The ratio remained at a similar level during Conor’s time at college. There are a number of historical reasons why men were well represented in primary teaching in Ireland until relatively recently (see Jones, 2006).

The teachers’ qualifications differed in the sense that Teresa graduated with a National Teacher diploma after two years and Sarah and Conor gained a Bachelor in Education after three years of study. One might assume a difference between the generations in the knowledge they bring from their pre-service education but in practice teachers share a common working context and do not speak of a wide generational divide. There are a number of factors which may have lessened possible generational differences in knowledge and approach. They include: participation in In-service initiatives and programmes for the Revised Curriculum; the induction/ mentoring programme; and the collaborative networks within the school. Learning from the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) could also minimise generational differences in approach.

It is generally accepted that the younger generation don’t subscribe to the idea of ‘a job for life’. 297
Despite being at such an early stage in his teaching career, Conor talks about future possibilities for change.

*I’d like to think that I would go on to do other things purely just to I suppose not to become stagnated in anything that you do not that I would be in a rush to get out of the school or a rush to get out of teaching. … I love what I do and I’m very happy doing it so I wouldn’t see any reason to change just now but I just like to think that I would always be open to the opportunity of change and open to the possibility that there might be other things out there in the future that I might be interested in doing and I just wouldn’t close all doors and say that’s me sorted now for life full stop.*  
*(Conor)*

Similarly Sarah said she couldn’t imagine herself doing anything for forty years. Yet she continues to be happy to be teaching.

One might imagine that Teresa views teaching as a job for life since she has been teaching for the best part of the last thirty years. Yet she too talks about alternative career paths and opportunities such as supervising teaching practice at third level. Perhaps her thoughts of branching out have been influenced by recent developments in Education. For example approximately 300 teachers and principals were seconded over the past number of years to provide Primary Curriculum Support as well as School Development Planning. These arrangements have begun to create alternative career routes for teachers while it is worth noting also that many of those who have worked as ‘secondees’ have subsequently become members of the Inspectorate or found more traditional employment in Colleges or with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment or the more recently established National Council for Special Education (2004) which again has created positions for approximately 80 Special Education Needs Organisers.

Despite the generation divide, the most and least experienced teachers share the view that further education can be used as a tool to diversify their job and enhance their employment prospects.

*you can always … move into different areas if you are willing to work and to expand your horizons a little bit it’s not … if I train to be … a teacher that’s it for life you know you can’t move … you are going to be stuck in that for the rest of your life. You can always study and do other things and expand your horizons … whatever your career is whatever you choose to do … there is other directions to take within that and that nothing is so solid that you are kind of trapped I suppose.*  
*(Conor)*

Teresa talked about using her skills and knowledge (gained through participation in the mentoring programme) to secure employment elsewhere.

There did appear to be a difference between the generations in terms of maintaining the work life balance. Conor and Sarah talked about making conscious efforts to stop work because it can just dominate. Whereas Teresa simply said she found the balance ok. Perhaps Teresa’s experience has taught her greater efficiency or perhaps there are fewer demands on her in her position as learning support teacher. For instance, she does not teach subjects such as Science or Art which often necessitate time consuming preparation of resources.

There was consensus between the more experienced teachers with regard to satisfaction with pay. However, Conor (the newly qualified teacher) felt that a teacher’s wage does not go far enough with the high cost of living in Ireland, particularly in the early stages of one’s career.
5.2. Restructuring and periodisation

Periodisation refers to the historical succession of changes as they happened in Ireland. As described in detail in Workpackage 1 and 2, and throughout this report, significant shifts have occurred over the last three decades and in the past fifteen years in particular. But when we look at it from the perspective of the “street level bureaucrat” the same radical shifts aren’t evident. This may be explained by the continuity provided by the robustness of the cultures of schooling. The teachers adapt to change and invest in learning. There appears to be a degree of continuity, contentment and commitment to care of children. Though informants may not be representative of teachers everywhere they seem to be coping well with the degree of change in terms of professional knowledge and expertise.
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In the times of the dictatorship and even in the first years after the 25th of April, 1974, entry requirements were set at a two-year course.

The focus-group interview was very useful for putting the life story interview findings into context.


Social support for students is organized into four levels (“escalões”): in the 1st level, the one where pupils are entitled to more support, they pay only 30 to 40 cents per meal. Precise figures for the school are hard to provide, because there was slight fluctuation in the number of pupils enrolled throughout the school year.

All names of institutions, places and people in this report are pseudonyms.

Legally, minor repair works are a responsibility of the local municipality; major constructions fall under the responsibility of the government.