THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

EARNING OR LEARNING?

CLASS, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY

SCHOOLING:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY FROM NORTHERN ENGLAND AND

SOUTHERN IRELAND

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by

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Contents

Schooling Earners or Educating Active Citizens?

This study will be concerned with answering a simple question; why it is that education in this country still falls some way short of delivering on one of the central principles of any social democracy, the right of all its young citizens to fully participate on equitable terms in the basic provision of state schooling. Now, for many, this may appear a somewhat strange proposition, given the extraordinary amount of attention devoted to educational matters in the political sphere as well as in the media-saturated culture of public life. But to even posit such a question in the first decade of the twenty-first century is at once to draw attention to the kind of lingering inequalities that have blighted the British education system since its inception. And while I would be the first to acknowledge that so much has changed in the intervening period that invoking past iniquities in many ways only serves to demonstrate how far we have travelled in that time, my insistence on doing so is intended to foreground just how long we have lived with the degrading consequences associated with this phenomenon.

For it is now over sixty years since the 1944 Butler Education Act signalled a recognition that opening up access to education could lead to a more equal distribution of societal 'goods', ushering in a brief juncture when it was widely held that equalizing opportunities to levels previously reserved for elite groups would benefit a broader spectrum of the population. And despite the well-documented limitations of the tripartite system, denying even for a moment that

for many young people such aspirations did in fact come to fruition would be patently untenable, as participation rates unquestionably reveal. However, neither do they tell the complete story, for an accurate analysis of post-war British education is one marked by continuity as much as change, as the process of democratising schools has been faltering at best, in the face of wider social and political forces determined to pursue what Carr and Hartnett (1996: 12) term "the pre-democratic purpose of excluding certain social groups".

Thus, while the vast scholarly literature detailing the subsequent period from a historical vantage point dutifully lists the advances achieved in moving towards this democratic and egalitarian goal, there is nonetheless an air of disillusionment rather than triumphalism characterising the collective response[1]. For aside from the brief era when 'comprehensivisation' briefly promised to challenge class divisions before being ruthlessly undermined, schools have proved to be a prime arena through which to maintain and justify social inequalities, as advantaged groups exploited existing and newly emerging asymmetries to reproduce their privileged position.

Indeed, as Sally Tomlinson (2005: 14) rightly notes, a central aspect of the Thatcher revolution was to reverse the democratic thrust of state-led 'social engineering' (Clark 2006) and replace it with the logic of market capitalism framed under the rubric of 'parental choice'. The ideological battle fought over an egalitarian ideal of 'equality of outcomes' was lost to the more conservative stance of promoting meritocratic 'equality of opportunities', thus ensuring that those socially positioned to profitably exploit their 'opportunities to choose'

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[1] See Floud et.al. (1956); Karabel and Halsey (1977); Silver (1980, 1990); Simon (1991); Benn and Chitty (1996); Chitty (2004); Tomlinson (2005).

invariably start as odds-on favourites in the meritocratic handicap stakes that constitutes secondary education.

Subsequent years saw issues regarding the general equity of the system subsumed as educational consumers were licensed to exercise individual liberty at the expense of the state promoting justice for the group as a whole, in effect reinstating inequalities based on social divisions back in as systemic structural features (Jonathan 1997). State schools, now forced into competition with one another, yet again reverted to an academic-vocational divide in desperately striving to attract pupils that might 'add value' to their league table performance, abandoning the social mix that had defined the 'comprehensive ideal' of 'common schools' catering for all the young people of a community in one institution.

A veritable mountain of research evidence documented how this move away from the 'common' secondary school and towards 'specialist' provision created a 'quasi-market' consisting of an array of 'status labelled' secondary schools (Haydn 2004: 247). Within this quasi-market, parents equipped with the right amount of social, economic and cultural capital deploy these advantages to get their children into the 'best' state schools, leaving those with less of these advantages to accept neighbourhood schools for reasons of financial necessity. This was a far cry indeed from the egalitarian model underpinning the promotion of 'equality of outcomes', through:

> "a school community in which pupils over the whole normal
> ability range and with different interests and backgrounds can

be encouraged to mix with one another, gaining stimulus from the contacts and learning tolerance and understanding in the process" (DES 1965, quoted in McCulloch 1998: 141).

Though nearly fifty years old, this statement could have been lifted out of any current policy document concerned to promote 'inclusive school practice'. But just how far the political vision of social and educational revolution had dissolved was demonstrated when hopes that installing a Labour Prime Minister might spark a rethink quickly faded as Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government developed further the notion of education as a market commodity to be competed over by 'enterprising' consumers. There was though, a noticeable gear change in policymaking, as if in recognition that the social costs of inequality had once been a fundamental concern shaping 'Old Labour's' vision.

More money was targeted at combating something called 'social exclusion', and a 'Third Way' declaration to work for greater social justice raised hopes that contemporary schooling might now be brought into line with democratic values and ideals. Alas, ten years on, the rhetoric has not matched the reality, as segregational policies to diversify the education marketplace further than even the conservatives were prepared to go signalled the first steps on the road to privatising public education, effectively restoring the longstanding tradition of disregard for those pupils, "who constitute the long tail of underachievement in UK schools" (Ball 2003a: 39).

One of the central arguments of this study therefore, is that a decade of New Labour government, rather than fulfilling its rhetorical commitment to 'tackle

social divisions and inequality'[2], actually deepened such processes by sanctioning selective mechanisms closely mirroring the reproductive functioning of an established social hierarchy. And as I will argue later on, the political imperative of continuing to proclaim the moral legitimacy of meritocratic credentialism has led to a fragmenting of the schools marketplace that, in contrast with the claim to be working hard to increase 'social inclusion', has actually polarized school intakes along sharply divided social class lines. Apart from reneging on the 'promissory' status of its declared social democratic aims, this lends weight to an argument that New Labour's ideological adherence to a competitive 'market' state, allied to politically expedient accommodations to narrow sectional interests, severely diminishes the prospect of more socially desirable forms of educational change being achieved.

Having posed my initial question and stated the overall argument I intend to pursue in this study, I shall now devote the remainder of this Introduction to explaining how one might go about answering such an all-encompassing question, and whether it is possible to gain an understanding of the issues involved through the vehicle of a case-study oriented ethnographic enquiry. In setting the scene therefore, I will be highlighting through personal reflection some of the organising principles that formed the groundwork upon which I carried out school-based research in this country and in the Republic of Ireland. I shall then conclude with a brief description of the structure and content of the study.

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[2] Quoted from Tony Blair's speech at the launch of the Social Exclusion Unit on the 8th December 1997 (c.f. Tomlinson 2005: 91).

Policy and the Personal Perspective

Before beginning the research that forms the main body of this study, education policy was not something that figured prominently in my thinking in respect of the work I was about to embark on. After all, here was I, a freshly minted 'social researcher' about to conduct fieldwork to see if there was anything more that could productively be said about the notion of 'social and cultural reproduction'. For at the time I started planning this project, this was a much-maligned and deeply unfashionable term, irredeemably tied to the work of Paul Willis in the late 1970s and the kind of sociological theorisation of working-class education that was now deemed outdated by the less determinist emphasis on identity formation proffered by postmodernist and poststructuralist accounts of social agency[3].

However, for reasons that inhere deep in my own biography, they retained a personal resonance that failed to diminish no matter how many critical assessments I read, so I determined to find a way to 'do a Willis' and check out how much had really changed. For as someone born and raised in the city where this research was to be carried out, I too had experienced similar disengagements with education that made me keen to see if things had really improved as a result of decades of school reform. In the event, partly I think due to the 'open-ended' character and 'discovery' oriented approach that typifies ethnographic investigation, but mainly because both the material and discursive effects of government policy forcibly confronted me at every turn, I eventually found myself quite inadvertently writing a cultural analysis of contemporary educational policymaking.

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[3] It is argued that theories of social reproduction, particularly those associated with Willis, have a renewed resonance in the light of contemporary concerns around social justice in education. See Madeline Arnot's (2003) insightful discussion along these lines.

Apart from my own surprise at how this study has turned out, which was certainly not my original intention, I think this tells us a lot about what it is like to spend time in school these days, as it was simply by being in the buildings and 'hanging out' with teachers and pupils that one finds it impossible to escape the 'hidden hand' of the state in all its manifold forms. Yet I would also want to stress that this study is not solely about what is done to schools through policy that has real effects on the young people that attend them, but is as much about the discursive effects of policymaking that are 'culturally engineering' what Ball (1994: 144) calls "the majesty of the market", to the extent that "all else is in danger of being drowned out". For this reason, in an era of growing inequalities between rich and poor and amid mounting concern over the root causes of social disorder, we need now more than ever to look more closely at the values shaping education and whether they are capable of contributing to social democratic arrangements consistent with those of a 'just' society.

In education, as with so many things today, we live in demanding times, seemingly beset by processes of ongoing turmoil. Over the last two decades, schools underwent a profound series of transmutations, as part of a wider context of social and economic change witnessed not only in the United Kingdom but also across the western world. In light of reconfigurations brought about under the weight of these radically new conditions, the role of formal educational processes have been subject to sustained interrogation, following which a period of restructuring was deemed necessary in confronting the challenges posed by the emergence of a post-industrial era. Some interpretations of these changes view them as an inevitable response to the twin pressures of individualisation and globalisation, in fundamentally altering

the relationship between the individual and the state by requiring that consumer choice, higher standards and better accountability take on a primary significance in shaping the schooling of young people.

Others however, argue that policy frameworks used to implement these reforms reveal the pervasive influence of neo-liberal ideas that extend market forces and the profit motive into every aspect of contemporary life, a move that is seen as at variance with a democratic approach to educational transformation that involves encouraging and enabling the participation of society's full compliment of nascent citizens. According to this line of argument, policymaking has constituted nothing less than a means by which to initiate a process of social and cultural realignment in the urgent quest for economic renewal. At the heart of these competing explanations are fiercely contested views about the basic purpose of schooling in the twenty-first century, in turn raising fundamental moral and political questions hinging on what the role of education should be in promoting desirable forms of social life in a 'good' society. Thus, it seems that even at this abstract level, it is impossible to separate education from broader issues involving the political and moral philosophy that underpins the kind of schooling young people experience.

However, a greater degree of consensus did exist over such things that we find difficult to comprehend today, when politicians, teachers, employers and other interested parties reached a level of 'historical compromise' (Olssen et.al. 2004: 127) in outlining a vision of the future that formed an educational settlement based on a comprehensive system of social welfare provision. And while plenty of evidence suggests that a slightly rose-tinted view of this period has

downplayed the conflicting interests and class struggles over the extent of this provision (CCCS 1981), it could be argued that there was a prevailing view in this era that education policy itself was a product of a similarly democratic process. Conflicts may have arisen, and disagreement persisted over retaining grammar schools, but nonetheless policies were brokered on the basis of a shared conviction that the future vision was more important than the personal desires of sectional interests, resulting in 90% comprehensive coverage by 1981 (Pring and Walford 1997).

In the 1980s and 1990s however, this all changed, as the state instituted mechanisms through which to take control of every aspect of education, in the process building in procedures that make it hard to argue that education policy will ever again be formed around a public debate over the same sort of collective values that informed that earlier era. Instead, the political dominance of 'authoritarian populism' (Hall and Jacques 1983) generated a concern to render intelligible and critically interrogate the social, political and economic effects of policymaking as the volume of reform continued unabated under New Labour's 'modernisation'.

An insistence on marking a clean break with the 'old' political distinctions of 'Left' and 'Right' through the notion of a 'Third Way' focused attention on "the persuasive instruments of the state" (Parkin 1974: 138) to explain why wave after wave of reform appeared to do little to address substantial faultlines developing in the system. Indeed, evidence from the burgeoning field of 'policy sociology' pointed unswervingly to reform itself being the root cause of mounting social polarisation, as the conservative tactic of deriding

comprehensive schooling was routinely invoked to justify the massive expansion in 'specialist' schools, which could not do other than increase segregation (Edwards and Tomlinson 2002: 11). Within such a policy regime, assumptions' regarding the universal freedom to 'choose' obscures the *sui generis* fact that not all parents are equally socially positioned to make comparative choices. Those families residing in economically disadvantaged surroundings, comprising the "working and non-working class" (Tomlinson 2005: 91), are more likely to opt for 'Hobson's choice' and 'make do' with the local school while better off parents actively cast the net wider to secure places in schools perceived as 'good'. The long-term effects of such manoeuvres, "was not to build a more fair and generous education system, but to reconstruct a more differentiated and hierarchical system which will more closely aid social reproduction" (Walford 1994: 142).

It is with the intention of capturing a portrait of how this reproductive process plays out at the level of an individual school that this study concentrates on one particular institution, situated at the 'undesirable' end of the education marketplace by dint of its location on a working-class housing estate of some repute. Here, on the 'bottom rung' of the educational 'ladder of opportunity', amid high levels of social and economic disadvantage, is a school challenged with meeting the contradictory goals set by New Labour education policy, in prioritising narrowly defined performance measurements of what counts as 'achievement', while simultaneously demonstrating a capacity to work towards 'inclusive education'. For while the government has staked much on the global drive to promote inclusive school practices, the real test is to see whether it is

possible to be both 'successful' and inclusive in the terms laid out under the current policy regime.

Documenting the ground level impact of policymaking therefore became the main purpose of this investigation, allied to searching for evidence of inclusive practice, on the understanding that it offers a realistic potential to reinvigorate schools as community-focused, participatory, democratising institutions. For the social benefits accruing from inclusion are precisely those being currently downgraded as the purpose of education increasingly adopts an economic function, with knowledge packaged as 'skills' and 'competencies' and 'learning' structured around a credentialist orientation. A more critically reflective, socially aware form of education based on caring, tolerance and respect for others within an equity-based framework of joint participation would be a useful starting point for reaffirming allegiance to those civic virtues of social justice and active citizenship that are required to 'educate' democracy. And by way of offering a meaningful comparison, another school, occupying a similar position in the socio-economic spectrum, but located in the Republic of Ireland, was chosen to raise questions about the significance of cultural context in comprehending what it means to be educated for 'new labour'.

The Irish Republic offers a useful setting through which to contrast school experience for a number of different reasons. Fellow members of the EU, the Irish in recent years have enjoyed sustained economic prosperity that has gone hand in hand with their elevation as a global power broker on the world stage. This economic miracle transformed what was a struggling independent state that, until fairly recently, still grappled with the historical legacy of colonial

domination and the subsequent doctrinal ethical and moral code arising from a 'Catholic proprietorial nationalism' (Callanan 1992: 175). The history of education in Ireland therefore reflects deep-rooted engagements with these social, cultural and political processes, the Catholic Church in particular retaining an influential management function in the contemporary terrain of schooling.

Thus, a system that formed the original template for English education but is now thoroughly imbricated with an entirely different set of cultural values and norms should offer an illuminating point of cross-cultural comparison that will hopefully aid us in casting a fresh eye on what exactly we mean by the contested term 'education'. For observing how things are done elsewhere teaches us much about the grounds upon which we do things here, and the virtue of the comparative method is in its capacity to disconcertingly instruct through the medium of ethnographic 'surprise' (Willis 1980). Thus, through the optic participant observation provides, I hope to offer a detailed account of the subjective experience of two distinct cultural communities, shedding light on the internal logic of their culturally mediated actions and the often unintentional consequences of those actions when translated into institutional outcomes.

For amid all the official rhetoric surrounding inclusive education, I will argue that schooling in its present format continues to be an exclusionary process for too many young people, buttressed by the increasingly threadbare discourse of meritocracy and strengthened further by the kind of individuating, subjectivating practices that constitute the policy field of surveillance, testing and 'standards'.

Whatever merits there are on both sides of the current debate over the purpose of education, attempting to understand the ramifications these changes are having on the lived realities of schooling must examine in considerable depth the impact felt by those who inhabit them on a daily basis. Only in this way might one begin to prise apart connections between national (and international) policy formation, the formal context of school policy, and the resulting school culture that is an intended, though not necessarily uncontested, outcome of such processes. Interrogating the actual effects of policy therefore, requires that questions are posed much lower down at the level at which they play out in the gritty materiality of peoples' lives, to discern the real consequences for the people that are on the receiving end, for better or for worse.

Outline of the Study

The study is divided into three parts. Part One consists of two chapters in which I situate the study theoretically and reflect on the personal consequences of the subsequent methodological undertaking. Chapter 1 introduces the conceptual and contextual frameworks utilised throughout this research. In it I chart the history of ethnographic educational research, from the Chicago School to the emergence of critical ethnography through the seminal work of the Birmingham-based CCCS, before rounding off by highlighting contemporary approaches offering new insights on the cultural landscape of social class inequalities. The current state of educational research in Ireland will also be touched upon, as I introduce the national setting for the comparative element of this study, which forms the location of the school in which I conducted further fieldwork. I also discuss the contemporary relevance of the concept of 'inclusive education' and contextualise its relevance in relation to a study of this nature.

Chapter 2 presents a reflexive account of how the research conducted for this study was actually carried out, concentrating on my early forays into the field as a fledgling school ethnographer in the English setting of Bridgepoint High school. The chapter focuses on this initial stage of the enquiry because this is when the pitfalls and dilemmas associated with researching people in real world settings confront one for the first time, leading to a strategy of reflexive engagement that subsequently shaped and informed the comparative fieldwork in Ireland.

Part Two contains two chapters that form the comparative case study element of this research. Chapter 3 offers a detailed description of life at Bridgepoint High, a large state-run secondary school situated on the Bridgepoint estate in the northeastern city of Crownport. In addition to describing the social and economic conditions that prevail on the estate, the chapter looks at the way that constant testing and surveillance combines with the pressures of the contemporary education market to privilege a meritocratic IQ-ism that results in a deficit-based attitude towards its pupils. A culture of interactional hostility and disillusionment with formal education is found to be a pervasive feature of Bridgepoint school experience, with largely negative consequences for everyone concerned.

Chapter 4 presents a case study of secondary education in the Republic of Ireland, represented by St. Oliver's Community College in the coastal city of Cove. Again, the chapter details the local surroundings and points to similarities not just in the two cities themselves but also on the estates where the schools are located. However, in sharp contrast to Bridgepoint High, St. Oliver's was

discovered to be a radically different kind of establishment, appearing on the surface to operate a more strict discipline code, but actually offering a calm, conducive and welcoming atmosphere characterised by surprisingly cordial social relations. The pressures of credentialism appear equally strong here too, but the willingness of staff to find alternate ways to celebrate pupil achievement, allied to shared investments in a positively ascribed local identity, are found to be at the heart of the outstanding sense of community witnessed at the school.

Part Three consists of three chapters, forming the 'analysis' section of the study. Chapter 5 attempts to explain what I see as the reasons why Bridgepoint High school is not 'successful', both in the official terms proscribed by current government education policy, and in terms of the quality of school experience that it provides for its teachers and young people. Here, I point to the reinvigorated culture of 'machismo' exhibited by staff and pupils, partly as a rearticulated and insecure response to the diminished status of traditional forms of working-class masculinity, and as a consequence of the 're-masculinizing' tendencies inherent in emerging forms of teacher subjectivities under the managerial regime of 'continuous improvement'. A school culture of strident homophobia, racism and compulsory heterosexuality is shown to present insurmountable barriers to improving school-based relations, without which the young people of the Bridgepoint estate will continue to prematurely disengage from education.

Chapter 6 presents a comparative analysis of how the two schools differed in their approach towards educating the young people in their charge, paying particular attention to the many similarities in structural constraint both schools

faced, and yet pointing to the varied responses within the schools to the challenges posed by these constraints.

Chapter 7 offers a complimentary analytical perspective to that in Chapter 5, this time presenting a thorough explanation of the reason why St. Oliver's Community College was found by all of those involved, including staff, pupils and the local community of which it is very much an integral part, to be in every respect a 'successful' school, despite its relatively lowly status.

While highlighting the substantial contribution that a 'Catholic' outlook on schooling undoubtedly plays in generating congenial working relationships between teachers and pupils, I also highlight the strategy of affirming value in locality as a major reason why the school has developed such strong links with the surrounding community. Ultimately, celebrating one's sense of belonging in a particular place is argued to have a huge impact on the self-confidence and esteem of pupils, who responded by sharing ownership of St. Oliver's in a shining example of the potential offered by inclusive education.

Finally, a brief Conclusion summarises the findings of the research and offers some tentative suggestions on how English schools, despite the policy constraints they face, need to apply a more community-centred model of schooling attuned to ensuring that people's concerns and realities are put at the centre of the educational agenda. Only then would members of those communities perceive themselves as active citizens, with their different ways of knowing valued as a resource in the shared enterprise of learning.

The schooling of young people is an emotive issue, guaranteed to spark heated debate over everything from what should be taught right through to whether education sufficiently prepares pupils for the rigours of contemporary society. That it ranks so highly in relation to what is important in the development of our children is not that surprising, for in addressing such matters, we are in fact taking a view on the future itself, and what sort of people we want to populate that vision of society that is to yet to come.

This study is also concerned with the future, inasmuch as education is conceived as a transformative project aimed at furnishing deeper understandings of self and society, a process of engagement generating opportunities for democratic renewal at the grass roots level. Studying to what extent schools in working-class communities are willing, or capable, of working towards this end under current circumstances is to be the thematic thread that runs through the entire length of this work.

PART ONE

THEORY, METHODOLOGY,

FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

1

Resurrecting Class Concerns in an 'Inclusive' Era:

The Critical Ethnographic Tradition in Educational

Research

Today it seems that we live in an era of mounting social inequalities, with relative poverty in the UK now standing at three times the level of the late 1970s, a troubling statistic recently highlighted in an act of deep irony by one of the chief architects of the 'Third Way' (Diamond and Giddens 2005). This trend is one readily acknowledged in current government thinking, through policy developments revolving around expressions of concern surrounding 'social exclusion' and the implementation of a raft of policies with the remit of making 'inclusion' central in marking out new forms of social governance (Byrne 2005).

As will become apparent in the course of this thesis, it is my contention that these represent a set of processes riven with contradictions in attempting to offset the socially damaging effects of acceding unquestioningly to the imperatives of a globalised economy. However, for now, by way of introducing the central concerns that serve to motivate this study, I want to concentrate on what is being occluded in much of this debate, the 'forgotten factor' that is rarely mentioned in official pronouncements and ministerial speeches yet is routinely invoked to signify a lack in some personal characteristic that requires the subsequent application of remedial interventions.

This, of course, as Stephanie Lawler (2005: 800) has observed, has the effect of "erasing social class as a system of inequality", and in this chapter I shall argue that rather than allowing this effacement of class to go unchallenged, we need to engage in rejuvenating the concept in order to document its continuing relevance in structuring unequal social relationships. As a modest contribution to such a project, I intend to situate this study in a long tradition of research into education that has been particularly attentive to the negative impact of social class differences in adversely affecting the life chances of young people from working-class backgrounds.

In the present context, where claims regarding the 'classless society' are visible reminders of the 'moral boundary work' (Sayer 2005a) involved in the reproduction of class inequalities, education is a key site in which class identities are found in policies and practices that bear the unmarked imprint of cultural processes of differentiation (Reay 2005). Therefore, in staking out the theoretical and methodological groundwork for this study, I want to make a case for renewing an interest in the fine detail of class analysis at a time when many others in the academic and political fields would have it excluded from educational debate.

Since the early 1980s, prominent commentators in politics and the academy have trumpeted the imminent 'death of class'. Fundamental social changes associated with post-Fordism, economic globalisation, individualisation and the rise of postmodernism have been held responsible for the demise of social relations primarily organised around class inequalities and identities. Transformations in employment and the kinds of people who are now engaged

in it supplied much of the empirical bedrock upon which this argument rested. Technological obsolescence and innovation played its part too, as did far-reaching shifts in the global division of labour, resulting in the virtual collapse of heavy industry in the West and a massive increase in the service economy of financial and retail services. This 'non-manual' 'white-collar' grouping in particular caused immense confusion among the occupational class schema of social scientists inclined towards 'tick box' analyses, and this was deemed sufficient justification for arguing that employment no longer provided the class-based social identity it once had, leading them to concur with Andre Gorz (1982) in bidding *Farewell to the Working Class'*.

Calls to turn away from analyses grounded in class-based forms of inequality placed social scientists in this country in an uncomfortable position, as for many years a concern with social class had been the central preoccupation of British academics (Saunders 2006: 184-5). In particular, for those studying education, they could quite reasonably point to a historical and political relationship between schooling and social class that goes back to the late nineteenth century. In pursuit of this continuously evolving relationship, they had forged a distinctive expertise that had, since the inter-war period, produced what Reid (1998: 157) describes as "a veritable industry ... of government and academic social science research".

Indeed, the emergence of sociology of education in this country was fundamentally intertwined with the elaboration of the 'political arithmetic' tradition associated with Glass (1954), Halsey et.al (1980) and Goldthorpe et.al. (1980), who developed survey methods to classify and measure social

inequalities as a way of defining social classes. The philosophically liberal principles of meritocracy and social mobility underpinning this approach also ranked high on the political agenda of the post-war era of 'welfare consensus', and clear evidence of such 'joined-up thinking (long before this term became fashionable) characterised the close association between the Labour movement and 'progressive' social scientific thinking of the time. In fact, this was a common feature of educational enquiries during the mid-twentieth century[1].

However, should we find ourselves looking back nostalgically at these seemingly more democratic times, we must also remember that they proved to be relatively short-lived, as transformations in the political and economic landscape were matched by a concomitant paradigm shift in social scientific thinking. For the macro-level theoretical framework of structural-functionalism, so dominant during the 1950s and early 1960s, began to have less analytical purchase as an emerging interpretive approach became an increasingly conspicuous presence. From this point on, viewing social reality through the eyes of participants grew in prominence, giving rise to in-depth, small-scale studies rather than the large-scale surveys of the 'Nuffield paradigm' (Savage 2000).

Widespread disillusionment with the 'political arithmetic' school led, in the 1970s, to a renewed investigative focus on class that adopted a more conflict-oriented approach. This eschewed large-scale survey research in favour of interactionist ethnographic techniques that highlighted the class-based inequalities embedded in everyday school practices. With the benefit of

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[1] Examples include The Early Leaving Report (1954), The Newsome Report (1963) and The Plowden Report (1967).

hindsight, it now seems clear that this relatively brief period, spanning little more than a decade, marked a highpoint in educational research dedicated to unmasking what Eder (1993: 9) has since called the "cultural texture" of class.

For the centrality of social class as a core concern would soon be challenged, as proceeding years would witness other variables such as gender, 'race' and ethnicity become increasingly significant once investigations sharpened on the issue of the individual subjectivities of purposeful social actors. While the legacy of this fairly diverse body of work, referred to variously as educational or 'interactionist' ethnography, and more contentiously as 'resistance studies', continued to influence researchers in education for many years, the 'class' paradigm more generally became gradually downgraded in the UK as the transformational social and cultural agenda of 'Thatcherism' promised the comforting delivery of a 'classless society'.

Beginning in the late 1980s, and continuing throughout the 1990s, education joined other areas of the public sector in being restructured in line with market principles. Meanwhile, class analysis, which had by this time been reduced to a marginal sub-field of pertinent enquiry[2], was being subjected to a sustained theoretical critique. An extremely eminent and influential body of opinion led by leading theorists like Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck suggested that processes of individualisation were uncoupling traditional, legal and other social ties and thus affording people an unprecedented level of freedom to make choices and develop in any way they chose. This is Giddens and Beck's treatise of 'reflexive modernisation', through which it is argued that there has been a

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[2] See Breen and Rottman (1995); Butler and Savage (1995); Lee and Turner (1996); Crompton (1998); Devine (1998).

'categorical shift' from an emancipatory politics concerned with eliminating exploitation and inequality to a 'life politics' centrally concerned with processes of 'self-actualisation'[3].

However, not everyone was so convinced that the discourse of individualism would be the liberating experience claimed by Beck and Giddens. In a seminal paper issuing a prescient and timely warning on the lessons of this period, Mairtin Mac An Ghaill (1996a) argued that following the 'New Right Hegemony' of much post-1988 educational policymaking, there was always a danger that social class was likely to be erased from government consciousness by what he deduced to be "a linguistic shift to the classless, genderless, investor citizen" (1996a: 163). This retreat from social class, witnessed particularly in the field of education, was achieved by replacing hard won 'equal opportunities' policies, largely built on foundations laid by qualitative educational research, with large-scale correlational studies relying on aggregated scoring to provide explanations of the relative worth or otherwise of individual schools. These studies eventually coalesced into the highly contentious and much criticised movement known as School Improvement/School Effectiveness research[4].

This movement captured the attention of policy-makers by locating itself in the discursive terrain previously occupied by the 'old' sociology of education, which had established a tradition of empirical research specifically designed to improve the quality of school experience for pupils. However, where the older tradition placed social class at the centre of its analysis, the new dominant

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[3] See Giddens (1991); Beck (1992) for the key arguments, and Lash and Urry (1987, 1994); Pakulski and Waters (1996) for practical prognostications.

[4] See Angus (1993); Elliott (1996); Slee et.al (1998); Thrupp (1999, 2001a) for critical assessments, and Thrupp and Wilmott (2003) for a thorough overview.

paradigm, with its reductionist managerial focus on 'improving performance', has "tended to ignore or downplay the influence of social class ... establishing a pervasive pedagogical perspective that often assumes working-class cultural deficiency" (Mac an Ghaill 1996a: 167).

In wholeheartedly concurring with Mac An Ghaill's sentiments that the late 1970s 'brand' of sociology of education, with its innovative, richly textured and insightful commentaries on cultural production, has much to commend it in this renewed era of 'abstracted empiricism', this chapter intends to begin by reviewing the rich legacy of findings bequeathed to successive generations of educational researchers by work emanating from within this tradition. However, in fully acknowledging the theoretical limitations and subsequent criticisms levelled at this diverse body of work, I will then move on to discuss how 'critical' educational researchers have sought to overcome these deficiencies by adopting emerging trains of thought to fashion fresh insights into the complex identities that emerge and are played out within the culturally contested arena of education.

Building on this tradition by addressing some of the problems associated with what came to be viewed as an overly structural approach has necessitated the development of an interdisciplinary perspective incorporating aspects of cultural theory and the literary studies movement. This newly forged merger of interpretive sociology and anthropology, cultural studies, neo-Marxist and feminist theory, as well as the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, has produced a unique genre of field research known as 'critical ethnography'. With an explicitly declared agenda of positive social change, it

seeks to illuminate the dialectical relationship between structural constraint and social agency while working towards the twin goals of empowerment and emancipation (Carspecken 1996).

What has emerged from this process is a 'new class paradigm' (Savage 2003) that is more subtle in its attentiveness to the nuances of cultural struggle in laying bare the assumptive 'normalness' of the middle classes, and the way in which this normativity is defined through practices that locate deficiencies in working-class culture. The increased profile this type of work is gaining surely tells us something about the current situation education finds itself in following two decades of neo-liberal 'reform'. For in the 're-moralised' (Cribb and Ball 2005: 117) agenda of the competitive education market, it is, as Cremin and Thomas (2005) have recently observed, these 'contrastive judgements', made against the comparative backdrop that frames the entire system, that is a major factor in differentiating and segregating pupils, and in so doing erecting structural barriers to genuine social and educational inclusion. It is the intention of this review therefore, to lay the foundations for the ethnographic study of secondary schooling in England and Ireland that follows, in which I hope, in exploring such processes, to counter the woeful lack of attention afforded to class issues in much of what has been carried out under the rubric of contemporary educational research.

For the kinds of issues that are beginning to surface once more, involving inequalities based on social divisions we were told had no further significance in the early years of the twenty-first century, are increasingly attracting the attention of researchers working within this critical perspective. A major source

of this fresh impetus derives from the suspicion among educational researchers that there exists what Norman Fairclough (2000: 155) identifies as a 'reality-rhetoric dichotomy' between claims made by 'New Labour' regarding commitments to 'social inclusion', and the unequivocal pursuit of policies geared to promoting an entrenched system of segregated schooling (Thomas and Loxley 2001: 77).

So, is the notion of social inclusion just the legitimating rhetoric of a government intent on imposing a managerialist agenda, or are there signs that the concept of 'inclusive education', seen in its broadest sense, is really a mode through which to meet the challenge of addressing inequalities, when, "the values of competition encourage and legitimate strategic action ... and ... these values work in the interests of middle-class families" (Ball 2003a: 35)?

The notion of 'inclusive education' is currently the predominant buzzword in state education across most of the industrialised world. Indeed, rarely is there a policy document issued or speech made without reference to this nebulous concept, to the extent that it has become 'sloganised', almost universally endorsed and thereby evacuated of any real meaning by the sheer ubiquity of its constant reiteration. But if, for a moment, we uncouple the term from its discursive positioning in New Labour policy, we find a concept grounded in genuine efforts to recognise the diverse needs and basic worth of all young people. First adumbrated in an educational context in Canada in 1988, inclusion was an attempt to move beyond ideas about 'mainstreaming' and 'integration' in the context of SEN (Special Educational Needs) schooling, in order to formulate

a more wide-ranging charter that would apply to any institution where education took place (Booth et.al. 2000; Thomas and Vaughan 2004).

Now, trying to straightjacket a singular narrative on this worldwide movement for social and educational change would be to grossly over-simplify a highly complex and variegated set of responses, but there are some common frames of reference that can be broadly identified. A growing body of research on the questionable effectiveness of 'special education' was certainly crucial in the early stages[5], while anti-discrimination legislation, mounting calls for laws to protect human rights and demands for greater social justice have all played a part in accelerating the legislative introduction of inclusive policies (Mittler 2000).

More recently, there has been a move away from the rather narrow and somewhat exclusive (and exclusionary) focus on 'special needs' in which the term is rooted in order to view inclusion more holistically as a whole school approach that extends "the comprehensive ideal" (Chitty 1999) to the goal of striving towards equity and welcoming diversity in all schools. Commenting on the UK, Tony Booth (2000: 79) has argued against viewing inclusive education as primarily concerned only with disability or categorisations of SEN, as this works to elide further factors likely to generate exclusionary processes like ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and judgements surrounding 'ability'. In fact, among the many competing definitions available, Booth's cogent summation of what inclusive education should amount to seems worthy of quoting in full:

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[5] See Booth and Ainscow (1998); Clark et.al. (1998); Armstrong et.al. (2000a, 2000b); Thomas and Loxley (2001).

"I define inclusive education as the process of increasing the

participation of learners within and reducing their exclusion

from, the cultures, curricula and communities of

neighbourhood centres of learning" (Booth 2000: 78).

However, as one of the leading researchers in the field, Booth urges caution in

assuming that 'inclusion' is ever possible or achievable as an end state. As

implied by the definition quoted above, a school claiming itself to be completely

inclusive is an ideal never fully accomplished and rather should be seen within a

site that recognises the processual nature of furthering inclusion and reducing

exclusionary pressures, whether institutionally based or arising externally. For

the danger of encouraging the view that a 'centre of learning' can become

'inclusive' simply by adopting a proscribed set of procedures is that such 'top-

down' approaches, with their formal implementation and predetermined

'outcomes', have a well-documented tendency to mask the slippage between

declared policy aims and objectives and the lived realities of everyday practice

(Booth and Ainscow 1998: 98). And if one needs proof that 'inclusive' policies

do not necessarily mean more 'inclusion', examples abound in the

'assimilationist' distribution of resources that sees knowledgeable middle-class

schools and parents attaching labels to individuals in order to attract more

funding while rejecting 'undesirable' pupils (Tomlinson 2005: 134).

The renewed social divisions created by such a system throw into stark relief

the limitations of the Third Way project, as the overriding insistence on

privileging a politics of 'choice' has highlighted what Ken Roberts (2001: 215)

describes as "one of the great illusions of modern times, of society becoming

fairer while consistently failing to deliver a more open society". It seems therefore that, in educational research at least, the 'death of class' lobbyists are finally receiving their response in a resurrected set of class-related issues that are re-established and take up a prominent position once again, as the implications of educational policies premised on competitive, neo-liberal ideologies show clear signs of sustaining and strengthening rather than alleviating longstanding social injustices.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH:
CLASSROOM ETHNOGRAPHY

The usual task of an anthropologist is to go out and produce accounts that render the strange familiar, but in the case of education this presents a particular problem. Schools, as institutions, are so familiar to everyone that education is accepted as a commonsense part of society, with its own set of predetermined expectations which we are all obliged to fulfil at specific points in time. Thus, in opposition to the usual task of anthropological research in geographically distant locations, the aim of school ethnography has to be to make what is already familiar strange (Spindler 1982; Delamont 2001). Educational ethnography, as a discrete field of social investigation has its roots in socio-cultural anthropology, and this long and relatively consistent tradition remains strong in research emanating from the United States, while in the UK, the discipline remains firmly embedded within the boundaries of what is usually termed 'the sociology of education'.

As far back as 1980, in the course of reviewing educational research in both Britain and the United States, Atkinson and Delamont (1980) concluded that American anthropologists were focusing particularly on the location of schools within specific cultural milieux[6], whilst British sociologists seemed much more interested in social class[7]. While this clear disparity in interests no longer seems quite so sharply defined as it apparently was at that time, and class could certainly no longer be said to feature as an abiding concern in the UK, it would still be fair to say that U.S. research adheres far more strictly to the anthropological tenets of long-term immersion and direct observation of a discrete field setting in addressing the problem of 'familiarity' (Delamont 1981; Delamont et.al. 2000).

Here in the United Kingdom, an already more sociologically oriented approach has been further affected by the disciplinary colonisation of ethnographic techniques by practitioner-researchers from the emerging 'health' sciences such as nursing studies and social work, while among educationalists too, qualitative approaches proliferated in relation to their primary object of study, schools. The all too frequent outcome of this 'generalist qualitative' outlook is the sort of 'smash and grab' ethnography that allows the inclusion of a short period of in-depth interviewing as a way of bringing 'colour' and 'spice' to an otherwise largely quantitative study. Indeed, as Paul Atkinson and colleagues (2001) state in their introduction to a recent collection devoted to ethnography:

"a good deal of what passes for qualitative research has little systematic grounding in the methods and commitments that we

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[6] See Kleinfeld (1979).

[7] Corrigan (1979).

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associate with ethnography. ... these are often important ways of understanding social life, but should not necessarily be equated with ethnographic research" (2001: 5).

While this chapter intends to review a broad and diverse range of research encompassing various national contexts, its remit will necessarily be confined to studies that recognisably fall within the aforementioned disciplinary tradition of ethnographic educational research. One particular national context that will be dealt with in some detail is the Republic of Ireland, for the research study this review is intended to introduce adopts a comparative lens to proffer ethnographic accounts of both an English and an Irish school setting.

Leading Influences: Chicago, Culture, Conflict

Ethnographic research in schools has an extensive history of empirical study stretching back more than five decades, in which it has been carried out in a number of countries, including Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States. While little qualitative educational research was done before the 1960s in the UK, Jackson and Marsden (1962) set the standard that would inspire many subsequent studies in focusing on the social class aspects of educational selection found in Huddersfield Grammar schools. Meanwhile, a number of American researchers had by then already identified two empirical topics of concern that would remain central for the rest of the twentieth century, Waller's (1932) study of school teachers and Thrasher (1927), Hollingshead (1949) and Cohen's (1955) concentration on the perennial problem of 'delinquency' among working-class boys (Delamont et.al. 2000: 228).

Much of this work was grounded theoretically in interpretive studies of social interaction primarily influenced by phenomenology and its related research perspective, symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead (1959) was a major influence here, and these ideas were later popularised by Herbert Blumer (1969), who argued for three organising principles to orient this approach. Firstly, humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. Secondly, this attribution of meaning through symbols is continuous and processual. Lastly, meaning attribution is a product of social interaction in human society. Thus, as social action occurs, cultures tend to develop, but much like the individuals they are constituted from, these are in a constant state of process, change and reconstruction (Woods 1992: 338). Aside from Mead, the emphasis on the self, the notions of identity construction, social interaction and voluntaristic human agency are largely derived from ideas initially developed by William James, C. H. Cooley, John Dewey and W. I. Thomas.

The tradition of empirically based urban ethnography established during the first half of the 20th century at the University of Chicago founded the 'first wave' of sociological studies dedicated to observing people in the modern industrial environment of western society. Later, when Parsonian functionalism threatened to eclipse the pre-eminence of the Chicago School, Blumer, along with Everett Hughes, Lloyd Warner and Anselm Strauss, initiated a 'second wave' of research, in which education finally found an outlet through Howard Becker's study of students and teachers in the early 1950s[8]. According to Robert Burgess (1995), the pioneering nature of this work was such that the

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[8] For an historical account of the Chicago School, see Deegan (2001).

series of articles that Becker published "influenced generations of researchers in the interactionist and ethnographic traditions in Britain and the U.S.A" (1995: 1).

The study provided a rich and persuasive account of the social class variations found in schools and the subsequent mismatch in cultural understandings experienced by teachers in relations with their students (Becker 1952a, 1952b, 1953). Becker also collaborated with colleagues on related studies of medical education and higher education (Becker et.al. 1961, 1968) and wrote extensively on the developing topic of research methodology, contributing "a range of insights about the social processes that occur in various areas of social life including education" (Burgess 1995: 2). A less obvious but equally important influence Becker and the Chicago School had was in their championing of the 'underdog' perspective, a deliberate commitment to providing a voice for those marginalized or situated outside the mainstream of society.

This fundamental aspect of interactionist ethnography, forever encapsulated in Becker's famous rhetorical question, "whose side are we on?" (1967), continues to figure strongly in much of the theoretical writing on critical ethnography, albeit reconfigured in the light of changing circumstances to the notion of 'research as praxis'[9]. The impact this research had on a UK social science community still operating under the ascendancy of a prevailing structural-functionalist paradigm was swift and rapidly made its presence felt. The publication of a key text edited by Michael Young (1971) was closely followed by the wholesale importation of Chicago School authors like Becker, Geer and Hughes into the Open University

[9] See Comstock (1982); Maseman (1982); Thomas (1983); Simon and Dippo (1986); Lather (1986).

course *'School and Society'* (Cosin et.al. 1971). This clearly signalled the profound influence interactionist ethnography was already beginning to have, both in its willingness to open up the 'black box' of school to the sociological gaze and in drawing methodological inspiration from the tradition of participant observation established in Chicago.

Indeed, one of the founding premises of the method was to ground enquiry in the empirical world under study, which meant that assumptions had to be bracketed off and research took on a dynamic, exploratory and essentially discovery-oriented character. Such an approach met with the approval of the 'new' sociology of education because, as Michael Young (1971) noted, too often in the past researchers had simply 'taken' educators' problems and treated them unproblemmatically, leading to a situation wherein they operated within a system perspective – one supporting, intentionally or otherwise, the status quo. What particularly appealed about the emerging research agenda was that it encouraged enquiries that focused on "certain fundamental features of educators' worlds which are taken for granted, such as what counts as educational knowledge, and how it is made available ..." (Young 1971: 2).

Peter Woods (1992: 350) provides a good example of this realignment in research outlook by citing Dale and Griffith's (1966) study of pupils' achievement deterioration, in which neither school policy, teacher practices nor pupil perspectives were considered worthy of investigation. The possibility that ability streaming might have consequences for teacher-pupil interaction and thus deteriorating performance only became apparent when subsequent studies researched the process holistically from inside and revealed the negative

impact of these procedures. Both Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) specifically addressed streaming and its effects on working class children in differentiating them from their high achieving peers in the schools they studied. These single site ethnographies were later complimented by Stephen Ball (1981), who took up the issue of class much more explicitly in questioning what social mechanisms were at play in schools to explain the unsatisfactory performance of working class pupils.

Ball's study, conducted at a time when growing tensions were appearing between symbolic interactionism and Althusserian Marxism, combined both interactionist and structural perspectives in detailing the constructed nature of pupil identities as they negotiated the streamed social environment of the school. Martin Hammersley (1990), in reviewing the combined efforts of Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball, concluded that this cumulative project, with its interrelated theoretical ideas tested in different settings, was probably unique in contemporary sociology of education research. He dubbed their collective findings the 'differentiation-polarisation theory' as it demonstrated with commendable clarity that streaming or banding pupils according to academic-behavioural criteria had the effect of polarising attitudes in the school population, with those ranked lowest subsequently rejecting the values of the institution.

These three studies, epitomising the increasing trend to embrace an interpretive approach and thus leading the way in attempting to "break out of the conceptual cul-de-sac of quantitative methods" (Rist 1980: 8), found that ethnography derived its legitimation from a core concern with social interaction and the

negotiation of meanings in context. Highlighting the importance of symbolic action served to "place human actors and their interpretive and negotiating capacities at the centre of the analysis" (Angus 1986: 61), bringing a much needed balance back into educational research following years of methodological orthodoxy and 'system equilibrium' functionalism. Trailblazing American work carried out in the late 1960s and early 1970s by a small group of anthropologists working in schools also provided researchers with numerous examples of this burgeoning genre[10], which they proceeded to emulate in a variety of UK contexts.

Thus, Nell Keddie's (1971) classic study of 'classroom knowledge' was closely followed by edited collections from Hammersley and Woods (1976), Stubbs and Delamont (1976) and Whitty and Young (1976), in which school organisation and subject content were systematically explored through participant observation case study enquiry. Collectively, they revealed schools to be contributing to a highly stratified social order that routinely differentiated not only on the basis of social class, but also on the grounds of 'race' and gender too.

At the same time as the ethnographic trend in educational research began to be taken seriously in academic and policymaking circles, it was being lent a major new critical thrust by the emergence of a disparate group of 'neo-Marxist' and feminist-inspired authors who raised further questions about the role of education in perpetuating these inequalities (Althusser 1971; Gramsci 1971; Freire 1971; Foucault 1972; Millet 1970; Oakley 1972). Yet another contribution evolved through the Frankfurt school critical theorists Horkheimer and Adorno,

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[10] See Jackson (1968); Smith and Geoffrey (1968); Cusick (1973); Rist (1973); Wolcott (1967, 1973); Spindler (1974); Ogbu (1974).

and their notion of the transformative 'negative dialectic' of praxis, an idea summarised by Held (1980: 204) as "mental labour, under changing historical conditions, alter[ing] its object world through criticism". Alongside these writers were others who could be said to be operating more within the mainstream field of sociology of education, whose work was theoretically commensurate with the broader themes that were emerging during this period[11].

One of the first results of this critical edge being applied to school-based research was an acknowledgement that future work would need to address the dangers of romanticism and relativism that Alvin Gouldner (1968) had first identified in Becker's symbolic interactionist studies of deviance (1963, 1964). Gouldner argued that by failing to locate institutions within their wider social context, interactionists were closing off the possibility of gaining any understanding of how they operated within larger social and political frameworks. This tension between traditional ethnography in education and a new current of critical thinking had already been apparent in the attention paid to broader social and political forces in Colin Lacey's (1970) *Hightown Grammar*, which had been carried out as part of the same Manchester study that Hargreaves (1967) participated in. But in deliberately steering away from the idealism of symbolic interactionism, researchers in the mid 1970s increasingly found themselves drawing on continental social theory, and in particular structural Marxism, to ground their research on schooling.

Sharp and Green (1975) therefore became, according to Quantz (1992: 455) "perhaps the first clear example of critical ethnography", by utilising power as a

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[11] See Bernstein (1971, 1973, 1975); Bourdieu (1976a, 1976b); Bourdieu and Passeron (1977); Bowles and Gintis (1976).

central concept in their observational study of progressive primary education. Combining a critical perspective with the case study research methods of symbolic interactionism, they produced an account that situated theory in the rich texture of everyday life and thereby threw into relief human agency in the face of an underlying structural logic of constraint. However, an even more significant development in critical ethnography was to occur elsewhere in the UK, in Birmingham, at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), and it is to that body of work that I will now turn

THE BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL:
SUBCULTURAL STUDIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF 'CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY'

It was here, at the University of Birmingham, under the stewardship of Stuart Hall, that symbolic interactionist ethnography became refashioned as critical ethnography. A small group of students, while keenly interested in drawing on the newly emerging neo-Marxist framework of Althusser, also felt that there had to be a way of tying this theoretical sophistication to reflected practice. Any potential solution had to be capable of allowing the researcher to "analyse and gauge the complex relations between representations/ideological forms and the density or 'creativity' of 'lived' cultural forms" (Grimshaw et.al. 1980: 74). Ethnography was subsequently adopted by CCCS as its primary approach to research; and one of its leading exponents, Paul Willis, explained this choice in the introduction to his pioneering study, *Learning to Labour* (1977):

"The ethnographic account ... can allow a degree of the activity, creativity and human agency within the object of study to come through into the analysis ... This is vital ...[as] ...I view the cultural not simply as a set of transferred internal structures ... nor as the passive result of the action of dominant ideology downwards (as in certain kinds of Marxism), but at least in part as the product of collective human agency" (1977: 3-4).

Outlined here is an ethnographic manifesto that seeks to transcend the 'naïve' interpretivism of Chicago by fully incorporating the formative insights of early British 'cultural studies' texts by Richard Hoggart (1959) and Raymond Williams (1961). These were the main references for what became known as 'subcultural' studies at Birmingham (see Hall and Jefferson 1976). In response to those who saw the importation of ideas from cultural studies as further 'softening' the social scientific credibility of this kind of work, Willis provides a closely argued rationale for undertaking the research while implicitly criticising Sharp and Green for their overt determinism, as well as the essentially functionalist 'correspondence theory' of social reproduction outlined in the U.S. by Bowles and Gintis (1976). Thoroughly familiar with, and much influenced by Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) landmark text on processes of class reproduction[12], Willis links this perspective to a cultural account of the expressive forms a group of boys give to their material existence. The end result is a highly sophisticated deviancy study that bears more than passing comparison with a classic Howard Becker ethnography of 'outsiders'.

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[12] See Mills and Gibb (2001).

The reader is presented with a representation of social reality that articulates a sociological explanation highly sensitive to the complex and often contradictory relationship between social structure and human agency (Anderson 1989: 251). Through the analytical lens illuminated by the ethnographic method, Willis viewed the working-class 'lads' who were his research participants as more than just 'cultural dummies' deluded by a dominant ideology, or 'false consciousness'. Instead they are empathetically portrayed as creative social agents, well aware of the structural boundaries restricting their social mobility and responding, at least partially, by penetrating those barriers through 'popular' cultural forms. Paradoxically, it is these 'partial penetrations', expressed as resistance to the dominant school culture of credentialism, which 'self-damns' them to "the foothills of human development" (1977: 38), a future of factory labour as ready-made replacements for the previous generation.

Learning to Labour attracted enthusiastic endorsement and fairly heated criticism in roughly equal measure. For some, it became "one of British sociology's most successful exports" (Davies 1995: 662), achieving classic status by "radically altering the way many scholars would begin to think about ethnographic research" (Quantz 1992: 456). For others, criticism revolved around charges of male bias (McRobbie 1978), exaggeration (Hargreaves 1982), and the romanticisation of pupil resistance (Walker 1986). Meanwhile, Watson (1993: 187) accused Willis of "ill-chosen theoretical borrowings" and a propensity for "studying subjects who were the exception, not the norm; the 'deviant', not the conventional"[13]. The impact of Willis's book was however

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[13] For commentaries on Willis's work, see Marcus (1986); Fernandes (1988); Sultana (1989); Carspecken (1996) and Gordon et.al. (2001). In Dolby and Dimitriadis (2003), Willis offers his own assessment of the legacy of the book, and what use it offers in the 'current conjecture' (2003: 168).

undeniable, and in its wake more studies soon followed that attempted to dig further into this rich seam of school culture (Robins and Cohen 1978; Corrigan 1979), a situation that continued for most of the next decade[14].

Moreover, an important strand of critical research was to arise directly from the internal critique mounted by Angela McRobbie and other feminist scholars (CCCS 1978). This led, in 1985, to Christine Griffin's *Typical Girls?*, a deliberate ethnographic riposte to Willis that identified adolescent female experience to be firmly located within a doubly subordinated social world. By underlining what they saw as the neglected importance of patriarchy in organising the material existence of young women, Griffin, McRobbie, and the CCCS gender studies group more generally, challenged some of the weaknesses of the new critical perspective and opened it up to feminist inspection. Indeed, following this intervention, a continually developing influx of feminist theory would become one of the most pervasive and influential features shaping critical ethnography in years to come[15].

Ethnographies of 'Race' and Gender

Despite the huge influence Willis's study had on educational research, the defining feature of 1980s sociology of education was not in fact the mounting of a sustained critique of class-based inequality. Instead, qualitative educational enquiry in the UK shifted its attention away from research focusing on class and moved towards highlighting 'race' and gender in constructing unequal power relations. Early studies by Fuller (1980) and Furlong (1984) encouraged further

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[14] Studies were often framed largely as a response to Willis, albeit one critical of the exclusive attention paid to 'working-class kids'. See Brown (1987) and Aggleton (1987).

[15] See Haraway (1988, 1991); Smith (1987); Stacey (1988); Lather (1986, 1991); Skeggs (1994, 1997).

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examination into black pupil's experiences and Mac An Ghaill (1988), Gillborn (1990) and Mirza (1992) all carried out ethnographic work that revealed a deep disparity in the way that white and black pupils experienced schooling.

Significantly, there is an underlying and unmistakeable trace of reproduction and resistance theory clearly evident in this body of work, partly due to its ethnographic intent, but also because it adopts the kind of critical edge that had previously been sighted exclusively on unearthing class-based inequality and was only now targeting concurrent processes of 'race' and gender disadvantage[16]. Another common feature of these enquiries, and indeed educational research more generally in the 1980s, was a shift away from focusing exclusively on 'the kids as underdogs', to a broader interest in teachers[17].

Nonetheless, Becker's influence was still clearly apparent on researchers such as Peter Woods (1979), whose inclusion of teachers in his own analysis of classroom interaction had been signalled through two edited collections (Hammersley and Woods 1976; Woods and Hammersley 1977). This trend intensified in later years as researchers increasingly probed the ideologies and practices of the teaching profession. Indeed, it could be argued that the negotiation of power in classroom settings began to emerge as a major theme during this period, and several ethnographies concentrated their attention on

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[16] See Mac an Ghaill (1991) for confirmation of these points.

[17] See Eggleston (1974, 1979).

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those initial encounters where rules and norms are established between teachers and pupils[18].

Here it was convincingly argued that while it was not easy gaining access to these situations because teachers were understandably reluctant to be observed, it could prove highly revealing as, at such times, "teachers cannot hide behind routines, they must establish them" (Benyon 1985: 2) and thus normative frameworks are made explicit. Although introduced primarily as a means to widen the analytical frame of classroom ethnography, research on teachers subsequently fragmented into sub-fields focusing on a diverse range of teaching related activities. These included the historical intersection of curriculum studies and biographical research[19] along with work aimed at improving teaching practice in a changing classroom context[20]. In the 1990s, concern shifted again to the effects of policy on teaching practice and a number of studies investigated the rationalisation and standardisation of teaching in both the United States and the UK (Ball 1987, 1990, 1994; Mac An Ghaill 1992).

Unlike research on teachers, which, it has since been argued, became overly technicist by adopting a "regulative managerial role" (Siraj-Blatchford 1995: 218), those working within a gender perspective remained acutely aware of the need to exercise a critical framework in delineating the differences in girls' experiences of school. Groundbreaking ethnographic research appeared in Deem (1980), Delamont (1980) and Arnot (1981), while Walker and Barton

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[18] See Davies (1983); Measor and Woods (1984); Ball (1984a); Benyon (1985); Delamont and Galton (1986); Hammersley (1990).

[19] See Goodson (1983); Goodson and Ball (1985); Goodson and Walker (1991).

[20] See Hargreaves and Woods (1984); Hargreaves and Reynolds (1989); Hargreaves (1994).

(1983) and Arnot and Weiner (1987) brought together numerous pioneering studies documenting how schools convey messages about the inferior status of girls. Education was shown to be transmitting both classed and gendered messages and thereby reproduced specific historical, situational and institutional processes (Riddell 1992). Much of this research was guided by an emphasis on discriminatory practices, pointing to the differential treatment of boys and girls, but gradually this homogenising tendency gave way to a more nuanced approach that concentrated on differences among girls and among boys (Gordon et.al. 2001: 194).

The growing interest in postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking in academic circles had a huge impact on later work on gender, 'race' and ethnicity (Paechter and Weiner 1996). This developed in response to challenges posed by new social movements associated with feminism, anti-racism, gay rights and disability, forming a politics of identity that fundamentally rejected notions of fixity in favour of diversity within and fluidity between rigid social categories (Weiner 1994: 64-66). This has led to a research agenda that reflects the movement from 'difference between' to 'difference within', requiring an ethnographic interrogation of identity politics that draws heavily on the post-structural turn in continental social theory (Foucault 1977, 1978, 1980).

While examples of this work will be cited later in this review, I want now to move on to discuss parallel developments in research undertaken outside the confines of this island. However, before doing so, I wish to reiterate a point made earlier in the introduction. Alongside the predictable marginalisation of social class matters encouraged by 'cultural restorationist' (Ball 1994: 27-30)

elements of the New Right in the 'Thatcherite' political climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s, ran a concurrent flowering of postmodernist ideas involving social complexity, cultural diversity and the proliferation of a multiplicity of identities. Unintentionally, this caused social class concerns to be sidelined, leading it to be consistently underplayed in favour of emphasising instead processes of individualisation and the pursuit of subjectivity and 'voice'. What this meant in terms of the research carried out, and how it eventually led to calls to 'bring class back in', I shall return to in due course, following our brief sojourn to distant climes.

The View from Overseas

Just as social class was being displaced on the UK research agenda, in the United States, educational researchers were being positioned for the critical possibilities inherent in school ethnography by the introduction of continental thought in the work of Michael Apple (1979, 1983, 1986, 1993) and Henry Giroux (1981, 1983a, 1983b). Apple drew theoretically on ideas derived from Bourdieu, Bernstein and Willis to highlight the culturally variegated responses to school-based structures of order and control, while Giroux constructed a theory of 'critical pedogogy' much influenced by Freirian thought. Collectively, although in slightly different ways, they sought to harness feminist and postmodernist insights to promote a thoroughly politicised and liberatory educational project.

From Apple's University of Wisconsin base, a series of investigations drew inspiration from the burgeoning 'reproduction and resistance' school forming around the work of Willis and Bourdieu. Beginning with an edited collection (Apple and Weis 1983), these researchers acknowledged the persuasiveness of

reproduction theories, but also went further in seeking to emphasise the need to explore the complexities involved in the cultural dynamics of school. As they put it:

> "If schools are part of a 'contested terrain' ... part of a much larger set of political, economic and cultural conflicts ... then the hard and continuous day-to-day struggle at the level of curriculum and teaching practice is part of these larger conflicts as well. Promoting progressive elements within it becomes of great consequence". (Apple and Weis 1983: 22).

Jean Anyon's (1980, 1981) early efforts proved highly influential in popularising critical ethnography in the United States, while Everhart's (1983) study of four schools conducted over a seven-year period generated the distinctly Marxist conclusion that "the learning that takes place through opposition to classroom management parallels the making of class relations in the workplace" (1983: 189). For Weis (1985), 'race' added an extra dimension to her study of black students at an inner-city community college, shedding light on the racial domination that intersected with capitalist relations in shaping their cultural responses. Meanwhile, Valli (1986) charted similar territory to Christine Griffin by situating the contradictory nature of adolescent female career choices in their material conditions of patriarchal capitalism.

McNeil's (1986) study of school administrative practices revealed the extent to which critical theory was starting to have a broader appeal outside the narrow confines of those directly involved in its development. Indeed, a formalised

rapprochement between the two camps of symbolic interactionism and cultural studies eventually cemented this cross-disciplinary dialogue in later years. This was enabled in no small measure by endorsements from Howard Becker himself (see Becker and McCall 1990) and another leading interactionist scholar, Norman Denzin (1992), who usefully recast the politically enhanced aims of 'critical interactionism' by astutely invoking iconic figures like Robert Park and C. Wright Mills in these terms:

"It is one thing to understand, as Park did, how masks get put in place. It is another thing to change the conditions that produced the masks in the first place ... to assist those groups in which personal troubles are transformed into demands for a greater stake in the public good" (1992: 167).

Critical ethnography also made an impression in a number of other countries, including Australia, New Zealand and Canada. A leading example came from Australia in the form of *Making the Difference* (Connell et.al. 1982), a joint study that recognised the analytical appeal of 'reproduction theory' but found that the crucial interplay of class and gender had more significance in mediating the educational aspirations of working-class children[21]. Roger Simon, based in Ontario, Canada contributed significantly to the wider dissemination of critical ethnography through his methodological writings (Simon 1983, 1985, Simon and Dippo 1986), while Canada was also the location for one of the most original and challenging explorations of social and cultural reproduction of the 1980s, Peter McLaren's *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (1986).

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[21] See also Connell (1985) and a later study carried out in an Australian Catholic school by Angus (1988). For pioneering work in New Zealand, see Lankshear (1987).

McLaren's use of ideas from symbolic anthropology, and particularly his deft deployment of Victor Turner's notion of 'ritual performance' brought a much deeper and considerably more sophisticated social scientific understanding to bear on this study than had generally been found in educational ethnography up until this time (but see also Lesko 1988). Its lasting legacy perhaps, is in signalling a move towards theories associated with semiotics and postmodernism that would, in due course, presage a 'textual' turn that, in concert with other critiques of this period[22], put pressure on educational ethnography to embrace a greater degree of reflexivity in order to fulfil its stated commitment to foreground a transformative emancipatory agenda[23].

Before turning our attention to the different responses that have evolved in confronting the increased complexity involved in conducting educational research in the 'postpositivist' era, this might be an appropriate moment to spend some time reviewing the situation in Ireland. Here, an established tradition of ethnographic research does not really exist as such, but the recent output of a critically oriented Research Centre in Dublin is claimed to be making headway in remedying this situation. In the discussion that follows, I draw extensively on the work of Kathleen Lynch, the Director of the aforementioned Centre for Equality Studies, one of the foremost educational researchers working in Ireland today, and a leading advocate of participatory frameworks through which to generate 'emancipatory' knowledge.

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[22] See Marcus and Cushman (1982); Marcus and Fischer (1985); Clifford and Marcus (1986).

[23] McLaren (1991) contains personal reflections on this issue.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN IRELAND:

FROM 'EQUALITY EMPIRICISM' TO 'EQUALITY STUDIES'

To say that substantial change has defined the Irish experience in recent history would be a gross understatement. Indeed, the move from being what William Crotty (1998) has characterised as one of Europe's 'poor cousins' to a situation of soaring affluence found this scholar expressing sheer incredulity at the depth of the transformations so recently undergone. "Such a prospect after Independence in a rural, resource-poor and farm-based, non-industrial economy would have seemed unimaginable" (1998:1). Nowhere else in Europe have the benefits of EU membership been more demonstrably achieved than in Ireland, where, from the early-1990s, there has been a remarkable series of economic and social developments that have had a massive impact on the Irish population. Current economic indicators show it to be a surprisingly wealthy country whose citizens, for the most part, enjoy a higher standard of living than almost anywhere else in the EU (O'Toole 2003). However, while it enjoys one of the fastest growing economies in Europe and is even claimed to be "a role model for development" (Bradley 2000: 22), there is also evidence that inequality remains a deep rooted and persistent problem, with a sizeable minority of people continuing to live in poverty even as the economy was booming (Callan et.al. 1996).

According to figures quoted by Jackson and Haase (1996: 61) for this period of unprecedented growth, at least 20% of the Irish population continued to be classed as economically poor, with two-thirds of these living in rural rather than urban areas. In common with postcolonial states elsewhere in the world,

Ireland never developed a large, indigenous industrial base and, while foreign investment is running at an all-time high, these multinational companies tend to demand a high level of educational attainment and technical competency in their staff (Fitzgerald 2000). Moreover, many workers in this sector are employed at a semi-skilled level, with a high rate of over-qualification at entry (Drudy and Lynch (1993). Therefore, in the absence of industrial opportunities and a very competitive labour market, educational qualifications become the primary determinant of wealth, status and power, as a strong association exists between education and labour market outcomes. Indeed, as an important research report baldly stated:

"Young people in Ireland who do not achieve educational qualifications are disproportionately likely to experience labour market marginalisation in terms of unemployment, insecure jobs and/or low pay" (Smyth and Hannan 2000: 125).

Placing this situation in its social, political and economic context requires an analysis of the Irish literature on inequality in education. What stands out immediately is that, prior to the mid 1960s, education in Ireland was viewed as a private good rather than an economic investment for the nation (Coolahan 1981: 131). This was in no small way due to the fact that educational provision was largely managed and controlled by the various churches on behalf of the state, which consequently did not feel the need to intervene in the minutiae of schooling (Drudy and Lynch 1993: 137). However, in common with the precedent set in the UK during the 1960s, and no doubt influenced by the economic expansion being countenanced at the same time, state involvement

in educational provision steadily increased during this decade, along with a concurrent research focus on the relationship between social class and unequal educational outcomes (see Brown 2004: 235-45).

Again, as in the UK, much of this work epitomised a preoccupation with realising the liberal goal of formal equality of opportunity, usually expressed as social mobility, and, in Ireland, this group of 'equality empiricists' have subsequently dominated the policy agenda in education[24]. However, Kathleen Lynch (1999a: 46) argues in slightly more trenchant terms that other factors may be involved, such as the fact that "this has been the only type of research to receive substantial grant aid". Indeed, from Lynch's more radical perspective, Irish research on education has been guilty of neglecting the subject of class, in anything other than normative terms, for a number of years.

"Unlike debates about other equality issues in education, including gender, 'race' or disability, especially over the last ten or fifteen years, there has been no indigenous class-based analysis of educational inequalities" (1999a: 46).

Despite the hint of overstatement here, one can understand why the impression persists that other issues appear to rank much higher on the list of priorities in the quest for research funding. However, with the benefit of distance, it might also be viewed as equally attributable to the somewhat singular nature of the Irish education system. Gerald Grace (2002: 108) has observed that the degree of control and influence the Catholic Church in particular exerts in Ireland is

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[24] See Clancy (1982, 1988, 1995); Hannan et.al. (1983); Breen (1984); Greaney and Kellaghan (1984); Whelan and Whelan (1984).

"probably unprecedented in contemporary Europe", and the main structural consequence is that many Irish schools are still single-sex institutions, with 42% of second-level (11-18) students continuing to attend single-sex schools. Most of these are girls, where the figure rises to 48% of those in second-level education (DES 2000).

The gender segregation still found in many Irish schools is a legacy of the distinctive denominational traditions espoused by the variety of Catholic religious orders that established schools across the country in the nineteenth century. Segregation of school populations by gender, in accordance with traditional Roman Catholic doctrine, became a major feature of the structure of second-level education from that period (Curry 1998). Although a vocational sector was established in the 1930s and these were joined by the introduction of co-educational community (comprehensive) schools in the 1960s, the gender-differentiated nature of a sizeable minority of Irish schools has understandably led to a great deal of research attention since the 1980s. While adding the caveat that this data has "a certain lack of theoretical adventurousness", Tovey and Share (2000: 172) nevertheless point out that a considerable range of analyses are now available in Ireland, confirming the wider claim made by Arnot and colleagues (1999) that gender is now probably the most researched subject in education[25].

For critics such as Lynch however, while acknowledging that the work undertaken by the 'equality empiricists' has been carried out in good faith, its major shortcoming is that, by focusing on the distribution of chances within an

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[25] See Hannan et.al. (1983); Hannan and Boyle (1987) and Hannan et.al. (1996). Cullen (1987) and O'Hara (1998) contain historical analyses, while overviews are detailed in Drudy and Lynch (1993); Ryan (1997); Lynch (1999b) and O'Connor (1999).

existing unequal, hierarchical system, it fails to confront the broader structural issues of poverty and class inequality (Lynch and O'Neill 1994). The dominant model of meritocratic individualism tends to ignore the "generative forces of action" (Drudy and Lynch 1993: 50) embedded in the system that marginalizes those who lack the necessary economic and cultural capital to do well in it. Criticism is also directed towards the fact that this research, usually emanating from the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute), fails to engage in any meaningful way with the experiences of the working class community it purports to know. This is, therefore, an interpretation of the world from the viewpoint of the 'expert', or the 'outsider', situated in such a way as to claim objectivity, but nonetheless still suffused with the 'domain assumptions' of the researcher. As Lynch (1999a: 47) concludes:

"The research has been written about 'the Other' from above, outside and beyond. ... in terms of the social relations of research production, it has reproduced a system of unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched".

Lynch's critique of Irish sociology of education's lingering preoccupation with positivism is part of a broader project involving the establishment of an Equality Studies Department based at University College Dublin, which is committed to research employing a co-operative and change-oriented agenda drawing heavily on critical social science. This is intended to encourage a dialogue between the academy and the wider community that will involve them in an ongoing basis in planning, monitoring and commenting on research (Lynch 1999b: 60). Favouring ethnography as a research strategy here has the added

advantage of allowing these studies to move beyond the 'culture of objectivism' that is so dominant in Irish research and begin to probe instead the insiders' 'passionate perspective' (Van Maanen 1988: 77) in a more genuinely multifaceted way. By this means, educational research in Ireland is currently undergoing what Tovey and Share (2000: 181) term "a reorientation in approach" as the failures of the existing system concentrates the minds of social scientists on what it is about that system that leads some to fail while others succeed[26].

Irish Schooling and the Global Imperative

The wider backdrop to this reinvigorated emphasis on class inequality in Ireland is an international context in which economically conservative neo-liberal policies in countries such as the US and the UK have swept across Europe in the last decade of the twentieth century. In educational terms, this has led to an increase in patterns of class-related inequality. Studies across several countries, including Ireland, indicate that despite educational interventions, life chances have changed little between social classes (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Erikson and Jonsson 1996; Clancy and Wall 2000). Indeed, there is mounting evidence that education is now becoming a net contributor to class inequality rather than a net detractor as middle-class groups maintain comparative advantage through the educational marketplace[27].

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[26] See O'Neill (1992); Lynch and O'Riordan (1998); Lyons et.al. (2002); Lodge and Lynch (2000); Lynch and Lodge (2002). Although extremely rare, Irish-based school ethnographies can be found in Fagan (1995) and McSorley (1997).

[27] See Kerckhoff et.al. (1997); Smith (1999) and Ball (2003) for analyses and Glyn and Miliband (1994); Mortimore and Whitty (1997) for suggested policy solutions.

In the light of these shifting circumstances, it comes as no surprise to learn that, in the period since the 1980s, there has been a rapid expansion in educational participation among young people in Ireland. Plainly, they and their parents have learned, as they did in the UK, that schooling is both a scarce resource and golden opportunity that enables one both personally and occupationally (Connell 1993). Thus, the numbers staying on to take the Junior Leaving Certificate (equivalent to a GCSE 'O' level) had risen to 81% by 1997, an increase of over 20% since 1979 (Smyth and Hannan 2000: 115).

However, the argument that inequality would eventually be reduced by the 'saturation' effect of higher participation rates (see Raftery and Hout 1985) has been found to be groundless as the Irish governments' own policy statements and reports seem to have accepted that education, under the present circumstances, has definite class effects (HEA 1996; DES 2000). Recent studies also show that virtually all those leaving school with no qualifications are from working class or small farm backgrounds (Eivers et.al. 2000), while only 20% from these groups go on to third level (university) education, compared to nearly 80% from the middle classes (Clancy and Wall 2000). Although the situation is slightly better in the newer vocationally oriented Institutes of Technology (which, predictably carry much less prestige and status than the old established universities and thus little parity of esteem), overall the disparities are still enormous, with obvious consequences when these differentiated outcomes are transferred into the labour market (Archer 2001: 206).

At this juncture it might be useful to summarise in order to assess the situation as it currently stands. Although Ireland is a relatively prosperous country with

very high rates of educational participation, inequality is a deep-seated structural feature of the system and this has increased during the rapid growth of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy (O'Hearn 2003). Educationally, Ireland now finds itself experiencing a similar process to many other countries in Europe, like the UK, where in simple distributive terms, the groups most advantaged are the upper and middle classes, while those most disadvantaged are from relatively unskilled working class households. Studies recently conducted in Ireland confirm this by showing conclusively that education is a classed project and a major force in realising and maintaining social position (Ryan 1999; Smyth and Hannan 2000; Archer 2001).

At the same time, official discourse on Irish education elides the issue of class inequality by adopting a language of 'disadvantage' or 'socio-economic-status', thereby shifting discussion away from its economic context and into a discursive register that individualises and pathologizes in targeting the presence of 'weak students' of 'low ability'. This is very much in line with the Blairite project in the UK, in which 'middle-classness' is normalised and anyone deviating from this standard is deemed responsible for their own individual failure. As Savage (2003: 536), describing the UK situation, tellingly puts it, this is a "middle-class politics that does not speak its name, in which middle-class self-interest is couched as a universal good".

So here we find a situation similar to that encountered in England, and the challenge now for Irish researchers is to produce findings that explore the dynamics of these institutionalised social relationships so that they can be used to counter what Lynch and Lodge (2002: 39) term "the New Right ideologies

about the sacredness of the market" and the "new national project of economic growth". Rather, in advancing a project promoting equality for all (Baker et.al. 2004; Lynch and Baker 2005), they hope to shed light on specific contexts for action and change, and fulfil their commitment to an agenda of transformation.

CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN A 'NEOLIBERAL' AGE

The burgeoning popularity of ethnography across a whole range of contexts in the 1990s should be seen as both a logical consequence of, and ironic response to, the 'crisis of representation' of the late 1980s. Following the devastating postmodernist and poststructuralist critique of foundationalist meta-narratives of reason and truth, interpretivism became a means by which the credibility of an otherwise positivist research project could be substantially bolstered. Turning to ethnography at this time however, was rather like running back into a burning building, as the "profound ruptures" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 16) caused by the assault on ethnographic authority had repercussions well outside the research community as well as within it.

Under conservative rule in both the UK and the United States, educational research funding became almost entirely dictated by the needs of policy, and the sociology of education itself was largely marginalised as 'irrelevant' or viewed as dangerously subversive in the theoretical study of education in initial teacher training (See Reay 2006). Thus, while ethnographic researchers adopting a critical perspective had succeeded in throwing light on continued asymmetries in school-based social relations, in doing so they suffered "a pyrrhic victory" by becoming "victims of their own success" (Dale 1992: 203),

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effectively removing themselves from the policy-making arena. Here, it was viewed as politically threatening and fatally tinged with a 'redemptive' view of education that was fundamentally at odds with the free market ideology of the conservative agenda.

Where ethnography was being carried out, in areas such as 'race' and ethnicity, it provoked intense controversy within the discipline, sparked by wider debates surrounding the relationship between research methodology and politics, the interpretation of evidence, and the plausibility of generalising findings. Wright (1986, 1992) and Gillborn (1990, 1992, 1995) both found their work subjected to a series of attacks, initially by Foster (1991, 1992) and then latterly by Hammersley and Gomm (1993). Collectively, Foster, Hammersley and Gomm claimed that there was insufficient evidence of racist practices in the schools studied by Wright and Gillborn, and that an underlying political motive had coloured both research enquiries.

This critique broadened in the course of a lengthy period of scholarly debate into one that pointed a suspicious finger at any qualitative research findings perceived to be harbouring political motives. Thus, the partiality of the ethnographer was essentially being questioned, but in a debate where the deployment of qualitative methods were never explicitly criticised (Coffey 2001: 107). Space forbids a more detailed explication of this longstanding controversy but the point here is that such debates characterised a period when, on the one hand, feminist researchers like Lather (1991) openly encouraged declarations of political commitment, while on the other, the very idea of ethnography came under serious threat from those who argued that it displayed a political bias that

made it irrelevant in policy terms (see McNamara 1980 and Cox and Marx 1982 for early examples of this discourse).

This is not to say, of course, that ethnographic research was entirely subsumed within an evaluative framework as single-site studies continued to be undertaken. However, the field became extremely diverse, reflecting the fragmentation of interpretive perspectives available in directing the ethnographic gaze (Delamont et.al. 2000). A prolonged exposure to postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism and postcolonialism multiplied the trajectories of ethnographic engagement (Van Loon 2001: 275), with much of it primarily attentive to the fragile and fundamentally fluid nature of identity construction, within the discursive terrain of forces constituting power relations which both structure and enable actions and intentions (Foucault 1980). Thus, in challenging the traditionally monolithic portrayal of girls and boys in schools, many studies have sought to portray how intersecting 'race' and gender categories figure prominently in shaping emergent subjectivities among relatively boundaried groups of children[28].

Alongside this, the continuing influence of feminist thought gave rise to a growing interest in sexualities in schooling, with the heterosexist structure of school relations providing rich scope for exploring how boys struggle to inhabit certain class-inflected masculine identities. Here, Bob Connell's (1987, 1995) influential theorising of masculinities and Mairtin Mac An Ghaill's (1988,1994) exemplary studies of 'race' and gender formation paved the way for a burgeoning array of feminist and pro-feminist research documenting the highly

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[28] See Davies (1989); Grant (1992); Thorne (1993); Abraham (1995); Epstein (1996); Hey (1997a); Sewell (1997).

complex interweaving of social class, gender and ethnicity in shaping pupil cultures and school-based subjectivities[29]. However, the critical nature of these interrogations tended to locate them outside the mainstream, whereas UK published monographs including Cortazzi (1991), Blackman (1995) and Phitiaka (1997) continued to show surprisingly little change from the structure and content established in Hargreaves (1967). A notable exception to this trend in the UK to routinely downplay the influence of "classifiable practices ... and classificatory judgements" (Bourdieu 1986a: 169) has been the 'critical policy sociology' pursued throughout the 1990s by Stephen Ball and colleagues at King's College, London.

Their ethnographically informed analysis of 'markets' and 'choice' in UK education marks a theoretically sophisticated and fully committed attempt to delineate the social class practices that are enacted in various forms of 'capital activation', while at the same time always keeping in frame the material bases of class inequality in contemporary society[30]. US-based critical ethnographers similarly show no sign of losing interest in confronting the particularity of everyday school experience and the vulnerability of this experience to ideological inscription. Such work undermines what appears normal and questions what appears obvious by:

"unpack[ing] culture as a complex circuit of production ...

dialectically reinitiating and mutually informing sets of activities

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[29] See Nayak and Kehily (1996); Epstein (1997); Connelly (1998); Gilbert and Gilbert (1998); Martino (1999); Gillborn and Youdell (2000); Skelton (2001); Benjamin (2002).

[30] For key examples of this work, see Ball (1993, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 2003a); Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995); Bowe, Gewirtz and Ball (1994); Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1995, 1996); Reay and Ball (1997, 1998); Ball and Vincent (1998); Ball et.al. (2002); Reay et.al. (2002).

such as routines, rituals, action conditions, systems of intelligibility and meaning making" (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000: 302).

Annette Lareau's (1987, 1989, 1999) work on 'cultural capital' advanced our understanding of how middle class families deploy intense involvement and participation to secure 'home advantage' over working class parents, while Weis (1990) and Foley (1990) also drew on Bourdieu and Willis to portray how racist, sexist and 'pro-family' discourses associated with the 'New Right' were actively incorporated into working-class male subjectivities. McLeod (1995) updated *'Ain't No Makin' It'* (1987) with new empirical material from the 'Brothers' and the 'Hallway Hangers', Kozol (2005) carried out similar work revisiting the themes of *'Savage Inequalities'* (1991), while Fordham (1995) employed a poststructuralist approach to document resistance through conformity among African American students, who are also the subject of Hemmings (1998) study. Finally, a more optimistic rejoinder to McLaren (1986) arrived in the shape of Fr. Thomas Oldenski (1997), who provides a radically different account of what Catholic schooling looks like if informed by the Freireian insights of liberation theology and critical pedagogy (Grace 2002: 89).

And so to bring us right up to date, we return one last time to the UK, the setting in which we began this review, where a prevailing educational landscape of 'standards' and 'accountability' set within a policy process of 'privatisation by stealth' has increasingly drawn attention to what Savage (2003: 535) terms "the mutual constitution of markets, classes and individuals". Therefore, an ongoing concern with social identity reflecting theoretical advances made during the

1990s has led to a rekindling of interest in the individual dimensions of social class ascription and subjectivity that recognises the 're-working', rather than the obliteration of differentiating practices based on social background[31]. And as Savage (2003: 536) definitively asserts, "These new kinds of class relations demand a new kind of critical social science". Heavily influenced by the conceptual tools provided by Bourdieu (1986a, 1986b, 1990, 1993) and feminist dialogue with this work (Reay 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Adkins and Skeggs 2005), a renewed emphasis on the everyday 'ordinariness' of class looks beyond the purely economic to foreground the cultural nuances that underpin what is universally considered 'normal' and 'respectable' and to which moral worth can be normatively attributed (Sayer 2002, 2005a, 2005b).

In contrast to mainstream educational 'policy engineering' (Shostak 2000), this 'new sociology of social class' (Reay 2005: 913) draws extensively on feminist work by educated working-class women whose subsequent theorising highlights the affective dimensions of classed experience utilizing a cultural framework. In doing so, it offers a fresh perspective on the generative influence of feelings in shaping processes of class distinction[32]. And although not strictly educational in focus, Charlesworth's (2000) powerful ethnography of working-class life in Rotherham was also influential in highlighting the emotions of guilt, shame and dispossession associated with belonging to a 'polluted' class. Savage also, along with colleagues (2000, 2001, 2003) and Power and associates (2003) are developing conceptualisations of the middle-classes that promise to trace the emergence of internal fractions within this normalised social grouping.

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[31] See Devine and Waters (2004); Devine et.al. (2005) and single-authored offerings from Devine (2004); Wilkinson (2005).

[32] See Mahony and Zmroczek (1997); Reay (1998a); Lawler (2000); Plummer (2000); Walkerdine et.al. (2001); Skeggs (1997, 2004)

Without wishing to end on too sombre a note, to date, there has been little sign of any impact on the current state of an educational policymaking agenda that is argued to be New Labour's response to 'middle-class electoral pressure' (see Thrupp 2001b). The result is that, in a social climate of stigmatisation and collective finger-pointing at anyone who, for whatever reason, fails to meet this universalised middle-class norm (Gewirtz 2001), perhaps Diane Reay (2006: 290) best sums up why we need once more to resurrect a critical approach to the study of class, as within such analyses:

"class is seen as everywhere and nowhere, denied yet continually enacted, infusing the minutiae of everyday interactions while the privileged, for the most part, continue to deny or ignore its relevance to lived experience".

SUMMARY

Ethnographic research in schools strives to produce rich descriptions of social reality in those spaces where social structural and institutional constraints meet and sometimes collide against individual and collective intentions. Considerable theoretical advances have been achieved in the last two decades, with the introduction of more sophisticated and multifaceted understandings of cultural processes. Critical ethnographers' interest in social and cultural reproduction have been empirically reawakened, but now with efforts increasingly being directed to problematising the resistance/conformity binary, focusing instead on

cultural hegemonies and the manifold accommodations made to dominant identifications and cultural formations.

The cultural dimension therefore remains of vital importance if we are to delve deeper into the concrete reality of 'real' people living 'real' lives. However, the insights provided by postmodernism cautions us against trusting the ideal of objective ethnographic accounts, and critical theorists seeking to integrate this perspective have subsequently outlined an ethics of engagement and 'research humility' in trying to work towards more dialogic styles of writing and representing those being researched. But this reflexive textual awareness should not be allowed to 'dematerialise' the empirical unmasking of what Leslie Roman (1993: 282) identifies as "underlying structures, material conditions and conflicting historically specific power relations and inequalities".

In the course of this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate the ongoing utility of bringing a critical orientation to educational ethnographic research in order to 'lift the lid' on the 'black box' of school. The development of critical ethnography as a challenging response to the 'naturalised' logic of global entrepreneurial capitalism (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000: 304), suitably informed and overhauled by the plethora of 'post'-discourses in the last twenty years, has reinvigorated a tradition that was in grave danger of being incorporated into the policy-making framework of the state. The stance demanded by critical theory requires us, therefore, to reacquaint ourselves once more with the fact that the state, education and capital have long had a symbiotic relationship.

The progressive merging of cultural pedagogy and the productive processes of advanced capitalism witnessed in policymaking throughout the UK and advancing relentlessly across Europe have not as yet taken as firm a hold in Ireland's schools as they have elsewhere. But in a fast expanding economy powered by untrammelled consumerism, similar processes are already discernable in a country that has unreservedly embraced the European, and indeed global, neo-liberal project. How Irish education, and specifically Irish schools, imbued as they are with a deep-seated and singular Catholic tradition, learn to deal with the resultant shift in values is something that ethnography is uniquely placed to capture. For if, as Gerald Grace (2002: 236) argues, one of *the* central challenges for Catholic education is the "renewal of spiritual capital through a critique of the secular world", then one of the main countervailing institutions against the hegemony of market materialism is surely to be the Irish school.

It is here that the consciousness of a generation of working-class Irish adolescents will be fought over, with the humanistic ideals of virtue and service for the common good ranged against materialism, individualism and the values underpinning global economic capitalism. Comparing the distinctive tradition of Irish Catholic Education with the dominant 'market' model now firmly entrenched in England may provide an instructive lesson in the ways that pedagogic voices can explore with pupils a self-understanding of social reproduction, "to render more conscious for them what is unconsciously rendered in their cultural practices". (Willis 2003: 413).

Learning from the Irish experience might indeed bring into view for us a 'discourse of possibility' with which to confront and challenge the contemporary disciplining of labour in what Paul Willis has called the 'long front of modernity' (2003: 390). But before we begin to explore in some ethnographic detail our two case study schools, and given the emphasis I placed on the movement towards greater reflexive awareness in the preceding pages, I shall now broach the subject of how this research was undertaken by presenting an 'account' of that most important (and self-validating) of anthropological topics, my fieldwork initiation.

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'Back in Class'?

Reflecting on Research in an English School

Having now set out the theoretical groundwork and methodological orientation decided upon for this study, I want to turn to a discussion of the practical consequences of these decisions, in terms of what it meant to actually go out and conduct such an investigation. For it is undoubtedly the case that any qualitative study intending to employ ethnographic techniques has been designed with the explicit intent of allowing the researcher to become personally and professionally involved in the everyday life of a particular community, and in so doing, engage his or her own inquiring experience as the focal research instrument (Ely et.al. 1991). The prime objective underpinning such an approach is to immerse oneself in the lived realities of the research community in order to acquire a sufficiently deep level of 'cultural' familiarity such that this will shed light on the values and beliefs that undergird social action.

Accessing this level of understanding, according to Flick (2002: 226) requires that "qualitative research is multimethod in focus", and while this could be construed as revealing a lack of methodological clarity, it should in fact be viewed as more in keeping with a determination to secure data by whatever method is necessary in order to achieve 'warrantability', in acknowledging that "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 4). For

while ethnography has become an increasingly popular feature of social scientific research over the last quarter century, ongoing debates regarding the analytical utility of developing a typology or developmental schema of 'traditions' such as that outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) highlight an enduring "methodological or epistemological strife" (Atkinson et.al. 2001:6) that persists to this day. However, notwithstanding these differences, there are some commonly defining features that comprise core research activities (Emerson 2001: 352). These are based first and foremost on a commitment to explore at first-hand the experience and meanings associated with a specific social and cultural setting, through prolonged observation and participation.

Clearly though, participation on its own would be of little value without the accompanying interaction and dialogue that flows from the ethnographer's presence in the company of 'others', who over time are gradually transformed into respondents or 'co-researchers' (Atkinson et.al. 2001: 5). Participant observation involves therefore not only 'immersion', but alongside this the simultaneous interpretation and subsequent production of written accounts and descriptions that act to bring versions of this world to a wider audience. Indeed, the daily writing of fieldnotes has been identified as a central practice of ethnographic fieldwork (Sanjek 1990; Atkinson 1990; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), with Geertz's (1993: 19) confession that "the ethnographer inscribes social discourse" amounting to a belated recognition that the act of inscription is a process of contingent interpretation, "caught up in history, politics and the imperfect arts of writing and translation" (Clifford 1990: 53).

Following the postmodern critique of ethnographic writing (Marcus and Cushman 1982; Clifford and Marcus 1986) there has been a steady stream of work dedicated to demonstrating how language and rhetoric are used to establish authority and authenticity in research texts, leading to what Shacklock and Smyth (1998: 1) describe as "the primacy of the reflexive moment". This is the point at which one acknowledges the futility of pursuing the positivistic goal of 'objective' and 'neutral' data uncontaminated by 'researcher bias'. Most notably in the context of this study, much of this theorising has emanated from feminist writers concerned to mount a sustained critique of the established authority granted to 'malestream research', and the contribution of this body of work is to inform much of the discussion that follows.

However, even from a more established ethnographic viewpoint, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 16) too assert that searching for this kind of 'empirical bedrock' is pointless as there are "no privileged views on uncovering the truth in the generation of research problems, processes and accounts because these things are, like the researcher, socially situated". This assertion leads them to reject the idea that such research is possible, "in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher ... its findings unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics" (1995: 16).

In an early discussion of the implications this might have for the practice of ethnographically oriented educational research, Roman and Apple (1990: 55) proffer a view of reflexivity as being grounded in a "self-critical stance towards the ethics and politics of the power relations between the researcher and the

researched in the constitution of social subjectivity". Stressing the need for an acceptance of the historically embedded role of the researcher in shaping the textual production of research findings, they urge a willingness on the part of the researcher to be prepared to 'come clean' about the situated character of research accounts, rather than simply perpetuating "the phenomenon of the missing researcher" (1990: 50). Most importantly, the personal nature of interpretation should be made explicit in the writing of ethnographic texts, including disclosure of the interests, subjectivity and non-neutral character of the relations between producer, process and product (Shacklock and Smyth 1998: 7). Ultimately then, rather than attempting to eliminate researcher bias through recourse to scientifically-derived authority, it is argued that we need instead to furnish a deeper level of understanding of the way that subjective positioning fundamentally shapes the research enterprise, "bringing the image of the researcher into parallel with the people studied, as actively making sense of the world" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 19).

Once again this underscores the centrality of the 'researcher as instrument', in 'actively shaping' the process of discovery that lies at the core of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Therefore, in what follows, my intention is to produce an account of my 'early days in the field' that is sensitive both to the purposeful nature of such a task and yet strives to be frank and honest about how it felt to embark on such a protracted and complex enquiry. Of particular pertinence here is the decision taken at the outset of this project to 'study at home', and conduct ethnographic research in an educational establishment just a few short miles from the site of my own secondary education. This kind of 'common locality' fieldwork, referred to by James Clifford (1997) as 'subway ethnography',

undoubtedly had the effect of reconfiguring my subsequent efforts at ethnographic representation, as elements of biography and personal history combined to assist me in my stuttering early attempts to carry out participant observation. It is for this reason that the focus of this chapter is fixed on those 'early days', when I learned important lessons that proved invaluable throughout the remainder of the study.

Coming Clean about the Emotions of Fieldwork

Ethnographic research in schools has had a long and distinguished history in social scientific investigation, and for anyone contemplating a qualitative inquiry of this kind, fieldwork is an integral part of this process. However, actually carrying out ethnographic research in a school can be a daunting prospect for an uninitiated first-time researcher. Assignments of such a personally demanding nature carry with them a heady mixture of anticipation and foreboding at the prospect of long-term involvement in a social world that most of us, through our own memories of school, retain a degree of familiarity with, but that nevertheless now holds an unbounded potential for extended periods of stress and anxiety.

Given what is at stake in undertaking such an enquiry, in terms of future career opportunities and the requirement to complete an acceptable study, it is little wonder then that, until fairly recently, ethnographic accounts of school-based research were conventionally couched in cautious terms, concentrating in a pragmatic way on the value of 'research roles' in 'managing' research relationships to facilitate data collection. It need hardly be added that this, of course, left unspoken any serious attempt at disclosing the subjective

experience of the researcher, less this should be seen in some way as detracting from the 'scientific' credibility of the findings.

Even today, when personal narratives have attained a common currency in qualitative research and reflexivity is encouraged following the 'crisis of representation' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), there remains a distinct air of hesitancy and circumspection about self-disclosure, especially among apprentice researchers newly embarking on academic careers. One possible explanation for this lies in the field of academic production itself, where a vestigial positivism lingers in the strict contrast made between the 'literary devices' of rhetorical persuasion and the iron-clad certainties of the 'scientific method', casting a discourse of objectification over the design of many initial projects (Atkinson 1990: 175). The inevitable result is a view that continues to prevail that personal feelings must inevitably 'obstruct' one's capability to report reliable fieldwork findings[1].

This is paradoxical as, just down the corridor, metaphorically speaking, there is now a growing trend for established scholars to revisit key personal milestones through 'confessional tales' (Van Maanen 1988). Usually appearing long after the event, and acting as a kind of 'auto/ethnographic' (Reed-Danahay 1997) penance for the memorialised inadequacies that, nonetheless, bore fruit in gaining access to academia, these scholarly reminiscences instil in the reader a

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[1] For an insightful discussion of 'methodological conservatism' see Smith and Hodkinson (2005).

heightened flavour of the traumatic ordeals that must be endured in establishing a sustained academic career[2].

While undoubtedly intended as a vicariously enjoyable insight into the 'messy business' ethnographers typically find themselves embroiled in, and often tinged with a humour rare in academic convention, these biographical 'mementos' nevertheless construct a judiciously crafted and distanced reading of the self (Pearson 1993), thoroughly mediated by time and the automythologising processes of memory (Spencer 1992). Denying the usefulness of these nostalgic (re)collections in providing an entertaining primer for the novice researcher would, I readily concede, be somewhat uncharitable. However, I would raise concerns about how the unspoken moral of these stories sometimes appears to be that digging too deep into the complexities of emotional attachment is something probably best left until one has securely climbed what Dick Hobbs (1993: 46) knowingly dubs "the slippery pole".

For there is, it seems to me, an element of inconsistency in proclaiming reflexivity as a response to the legitimation crisis posed by postmodernism and poststructuralism (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 19), while at a practical level handing down professional furtiveness like pollution beliefs to the next generation of fledgling ethnographers. In considering how I myself might want to navigate these potentially treacherous waters, John Van Maanen's (1988: 93) admonition about research accounts being "a dialectic between experience and interpretation" had a particular resonance. For it is now widely asserted that choosing to bracket off the wildly fluctuating emotions experienced during

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[2] Whyte (1981) [1955] is the standard text here, but see also Burgess (1982; 1984, 1985); Shaffir and Stebbins (1991); Hobbs and May (1993); deMarrais (1998); individual efforts include Delamont (2001) and Walford (2001a).

extended periods of fieldwork effectively denies the intersubjective character of the ethnographic encounter between self and 'Other'. Nowadays judged far too redolent of the kind of androcentric positivism long consigned to one of Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) previous 'moments', it has been supplanted by a feminist inspired perspective[3] that eschews the illusory attractions of detachment and objectivity to purposefully foreground 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988).

Drawing on Arlie Hochschild's (1983: 17) proposition that "from feeling we discover our own viewpoint on the world" prompted feminist theorists to advance the notion of utilising emotionality, in attempting to "rescue emotion from its discarded role in the creation of knowledge" (Fonow and Cook 1991: 11). Interrogating the assumptions underpinning 'hygenic research' (Stanley and Wise 1993) by "working the ruins of postmodernism, science and, finally, ethnography ..." (Lather 2001: 477) served to unmask the essentially social nature of research representations, recasting knowledge production as a dialectic that fundamentally favours the researcher (Stanley 1993).

Meanwhile, in exercising a "playfulness of mind" (Mills 1959: 233) on my own fieldwork writings, which, as Amanda Coffey (1999: 136-7) observes "is one of the central ways in which the emotionality and passion of the fieldwork are enacted", I was forcibly struck by how relationships in the field setting had played a key role in shaping the work I had eventually done. The harsh reality was that conducting ethnographic research had left me unable to gaze objectively from outside the society under study and I therefore could not do other than but bring that social world into being by drawing on, and indeed

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[3] See Roberts (1981); Smith (1987); Haraway (1988); Cohen (1992); Reinharz (1992); Stanley and Wise (1993).

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utilising, my own subjective experience (Gordon 2003: 82). The realisation dawned that research activities tell us interesting things about ourselves, as well as those we study, if only we are prepared to listen, for the point where process and product interweave raises interesting questions about self-positioning in relation to all aspects of social inquiry (Sparkes 1998). Intrigued by the process of self-discovery engendered by this perspective, in the pages that follow I intend to provide 'accountable knowledge' (Stanley 1990) of my personal 'first days in the field' (Geer 1964). These reflections draw closely on my first few days and weeks of fieldwork carried out at Bridgepoint High school, a local secondary school in my own home city of Crownport, where, in the first week of October 2003 I embarked on an enquiry that would eventually take until May 2005 to finally complete, in yet another school, only now located in the Republic of Ireland.

My purpose in this endeavour is to reflect on subjective research experience by choosing this present time rather than later to relate a reflexive account of my fieldwork apprenticeship, and how that experience reshaped my thinking on the nature of the ethnographic enterprise. Doing so now, from my perspective as a middle-aged white male will, I hope, add in some small way to current debates surrounding when and what point the self can be textually revealed. Thus, in what follows the personal takes centre-stage rather than be banished to the periphery, and I will concentrate my attention on the process itself, rather than the data collected, which I shall reserve for succeeding chapters.

For those already fearing that this is to be yet another example of 'navel-gazing' self-indulgence, I can only apologise in advance and beg forbearance in staying

with me for the relatively brief duration of this particular segment of the journey undertaken for this study. For, it is my intention that, rather than electing to simply reiterate a standard male narrative of conquest and withdrawal (Leatherby 2003: 6), I hope instead to engage with, and build upon, writing that represents something of a counternarrative to such tendencies (Carter and Delamont 1996; Hey 1997b; Reay 1997), by adding my own modest contribution to this debate. In so doing, it stands as this particularly situated male ethnographer's attempt to "invert the hidden equation" of feelings = weakness (May 1993: 76) and is offered as one further step on the road to genuine reflexive awareness.

For as a male researcher, I recognise that traditional approaches taken by men writing about these matters usually precludes an honest acknowledgement of the process through which we write/produce ourselves academically as we produce/write our texts (Giddens 1979: 43). However, it was undoubtedly my own working-class background growing up and attending school on a neighbouring estate in the city that formed an important factor in my decision to conduct this research, in a classic example of 'studying in one's own back yard'. In a very real sense therefore, my ambivalent class positioning bore directly on the investigation, as I subsequently revisited the long forgotten schooldays of my youth, through the life experiences of my teenage research participants.

This gave rise to considerable emotional confusion over personal and professional loyalties, echoing at once the discomfort articulated by established scholars from working-class backgrounds such as Diane Reay (1996, 1997), highlighting for me too the feelings generated by "the difficulty of reconciling

socialization into academic culture with a subjectivity that still draws powerfully on working-class identity" (Reay 1997: 18). Nevertheless, treading the well trodden path first ventured down by William Foote Whyte enables me to 'come clean' about errors and mistakes I made, and speculate as to their possible repercussions, before moving on to explore political and ethical dimensions of the field, and why this caused me to reconsider the conditions of possibility for ethical ethnographic research.

Finally, by consciously extending these discussions beyond 'corridor talk' with colleagues, where they act as 'war stories' that bolster an academic and professional identity already laden with personal contradictions, I readily concede that in "playing back the tape" (Van Maanen 1991) on my fieldwork initiation, I am, however reflexively, still participating in the social relations of academic production. And yet, I have chosen to do so without the 'safety net' of intervening years, job security or tenure. For my 'outsider' status, "condensed in the dis/location between accent and vocabulary" (Hey 1997b: 142), is, in any case, unlikely to be diminished by conforming to an academic culture where I experience daily the troubling ambiguities of complicity and betrayal that, for me, characterises the deeply fraught nature of class transitions.

THE RESEARCH BARGAIN[4]

The days when "a polite but vague letter asking to see the Head" (Delamont 1984: 24-5) would gain a researcher access to a school now seem long gone, as I quickly discovered upon finding myself one sunny late spring morning

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[4] In what follows, I draw on ideas first presented in Smith (2007a).

having to make an energetic 'sales pitch' to a Headteacher on my potential usefulness to them as a 'visiting ESRC researcher'. For the reality is that research sites rarely issue invitations, teachers are just too busy for such distractions and education is now a highly sensitive and politicised arena where there have been a number of previous instances where research has 'spoilt the field' by 'fouling the nest' (Punch 1998: 177). These factors were weighing heavily on my mind that morning, as, having finally obtained an interview following two unsuccessful approaches elsewhere, I sought to convince a primary gatekeeper that I had something to offer in return for the opportunity to conduct an ethnographic enquiry in the school.

This painstaking period of access negotiation has therefore to be seen as integral to the research process, and also the point where the terms of the research 'bargain' are struck (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991: 28), rendering this a fundamentally political terrain. And should the very idea of having to 'sell' your research proposal sound more like sales and marketing than social anthropology, then learning to embrace this ritual opening exchange is only the first of many instances of reciprocity which become more acceptable once one appreciates that "fieldwork entails a subtle kind of exchange, one that often involves gifting across cultural boundaries where exchange rates may be ambiguous, or one wonders what to offer in exchange for intangibles such as hospitality ..." (Wolcott 1995: 91). Luckily for me, I received a warm reception from the Headteacher, and started work the following term. But this, of course, is not the whole story.

More experienced colleagues had taken the time to prime me to be fairly vague about my enquiry, and to avoid elaborate and counterproductive theorising or jargon. Thoroughly prepared, and thus cautiously assertive, I negotiated an introductory position that would provide an easily understandable, non-technical identity that could then be presented in initial 'front-work' (Goffman 1959: 32) in school, while pressing for the freedom to do justice to the holistic, dynamic and discovery-oriented approach that characterises ethnography (Woods 1992: 338). Accessing a sufficient level of cultural intimacy to carry out this kind of work requires first that a measure of social intimacy is quickly established, so consciously constructing a radically simplified research persona hastens this process, although LeCompte and colleagues (1999: 13) cut forthrightly through the scholarly justifications and quite candidly label it a 'cover story'.

It has long been noted that the solitary nature of ethnography is reflected in the highly individualistic and deeply personal character of fieldwork experience (Killick 1995). While a plethora of research methods texts exist to steel oneself for the transformative rigours of the 'fieldwork ordeal', reading alone cannot provide a customised model of fieldwork practice, so Stephen Ball (1984b: 71) is probably justified in asserting that it is "in many respects like riding a bike: ... there is no real substitute for actually getting on and doing it". The residual trace of solo anthropological research is also apparent in the lack of consensus on working practices, resulting in a markedly idiosyncratic approach Hobbs (1993: 62) describes, with only the merest hint of cynicism, as "a veil of eccentricity". This practical dilemma arises from the fact that, as anthropologists have long understood, every field situation is unique and therefore almost certainly non-replicable (Wolcott 1995: 167), while Roy Ellen (1984: 69) simply states that the

activity has always been "a matter of personal style, based on individual characteristics, philosophical presuppositions and the nature of the problems to which the research is addressed" (1984: 69).

However, Harry Wolcott (1995: 161) mischievously draws satisfaction from this lack of methodological prescription. "We should rejoice that we are not encumbered by the Scientific Method ... even while we may feel a bit of envy in recognising how convenient and self-validating such recipes might be ...". Thus, it seems that 'going it alone' in this slightly 'sink or swim' atmosphere is clearly meant to involve an elusive and constantly disturbing combination of theoretical orientation, creative insight and sustained physical presence, as vague theoretical ideas and a willingness to doggedly record as much as possible eventually somehow coalesce into a qualitative study simply by being "designed in the doing" (Becker 1993: 219).

In this section I have briefly touched on a number of themes that recur throughout the fieldwork process. A flexible approach and the ability to project a friendly demeanour while maintaining a smokescreen of generality around one's research intentions (Hockey 1996), coupled with a mounting uneasiness at the exploitative potential inherent in every research relationship you are about to form. In the next section, I explore how these methodological uncertainties were practically resolved in the field, raising ethical questions concerning issues of trust, confidentiality and privacy.

Entering the (School) Field

I can say with some certainty that the most memorable aspect of my first day of ethnographic fieldwork was that I almost got sent home early for being improperly dressed! My excuse, which at least has some academic grounding though with hindsight not much practical sense, is that, in diligently preparing, I took particular note of those authors who counselled considering self-presentation and clothing carefully when working in schools, as most initial assumptions about 'strangers' are usually based on their appearance[5]. I therefore decided, not unreasonably I thought at the time, that I needed to think about how I might differentiate myself from teachers, especially in the eyes of the pupils, who would be my main 'audience'. So it was that, on my first morning, attempting casual but smart and dressed I thought quite presentably in blue shirt and denim jacket and jeans, I experienced a curious mixture of satisfaction and frustration as the Headteacher led me into his office.

> *"Well, we can't really have you wearing that I'm afraid.*
>
> *You couldn't wear a suit could you?"*

Needless to say, further negotiations ensued and after a long conversation with the Headteacher, I agreed to go home at lunchtime, returning in the afternoon in the same shirt but now giving a rare outing to the only suit I owned. I did however, remain tie less, the Head conceding this point on the symbolic grounds that at least now I might be distinguished from the male teachers, who, to a man, all seemed to be sporting loosely fastened neckwear of a rather florid

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[5] See Delamont (2001); Measor (1985).

nature. There is a footnote I would like to add to this little vignette. It was ethnographically significant that there was a marked change that occurred in the way people responded to me when I returned following my lunchtime quick-change act. A couple of incidents should illustrate this transformation.

I had spent the entire morning with the Headteacher, walking the corridors as he took his turn carrying out supervisory duty, or 'SD1' as it was known throughout the school, until radioed instructions from the 'admin'-Office, which acted as a central point for relaying messages, despatched us to a particular classroom. As we approached, I could hear the sound of a teachers' voice being raised, followed by about twenty teenagers jeering and whistling in response. I waited outside while the Head entered the classroom to try to restore calm. At this point I was confronted by a solidly built youth, slightly taller than myself, leaning against the wall next to the door. Feeling very conscious that this was my first morning and that I should try to be as sociable as possible, I gave him my most cheerful *"morning"*. He looked me up and down thoughtfully before asking, *"A'you a teacher?"*. When I replied *"no"* with a shake of the head, he looked rather pleased with himself, turned to face the corridor and said, while inspecting his muddy trainers, *"din't think so"*.

In contrast, later that same day, newly besuited and again accompanying the Head while he patrolled the play area near the front gate shortly before afternoon registration, our attention was drawn to smoke rising from a house across the road and the sight of literally hundreds of pupils pouring out of the gates, gleefully shouting *'fire'* as they rushed to get a closer look. Politeness personified as ever, the Head quickly excused himself and immediately strode off purposefully across the road to retrieve the rapidly emptying contents of his

school while I hung around outside watching events unfold. About five minutes later, pupils started returning back across the road in small groups, clearly having been sent back by the Head, but still discussing in a quite animated way the possibility that someone might have died a horrible death in the house fire. Many were keen to share their thoughts on this exciting incident with me, and without exception they all addressed me as 'sir' while explaining at great length various aspects of the fire. Indeed, by the time everyone returned to school, I had probably been called 'sir' more times than I had previously in my entire life, which is a remarkable achievement for what is really a fairly unremarkable blue suit. More seriously though, it was also a pointed reminder to me of the power and authority conferred on an individual by the symbolic legitimacy vested in a particular set of clothes. While no doubt amplified by the difference in our ages, changing into my one and only suit had nonetheless effectively enacted a powerful rite of institution, the consecrating effects of which Bourdieu (1991: 119) cogently sums up:

"the symbolic efficacy of rites of institution, that is, the power they possess to act on reality by acting on its representation ... really transforms the person consecrated; first, because it transforms the representations others have of him (sic) and above all the behaviour they adopt towards him (the most visible changes being the fact that he is given titles of respect and the respect actually associated with these enunciations) ..."

Gatekeepers and Emotional Labour

I spent the next few days hanging around the staffroom in a mounting state of anxiousness, trying to somehow instigate meetings that might lead to productive work. This however proved immensely difficult, partly because my main sponsor, the Headteacher, had not actually notified anyone else of my presence in school. Robert Burgess (1991) argues that Headteachers play a pivotal role as both sponsor and gatekeeper in educational research, as they have influence over information to which access is granted. However, he also suggests that this influence is rarely all encompassing and that, in his own research, "I had to establish my credentials informally with staff to gain access to different dimensions of the school" (1991: 47).

While my own breakthrough finally came at the invitation of a teacher I did in fact meet while hanging around the staffroom[6], it soon became clear that I would also would have to constantly re-negotiate with secondary gatekeepers who, within the institutional context, held keys to specific areas, events and situations. Martin Hammersley (1984), displaying a candour as refreshing as it is rare in these accounts, relates how he abandoned initial fieldwork in school after just five days, with a "mounting sense of my own incompetence" (1984: 44). And I have to admit that my fieldnotes of this time record that I too felt like quitting at the end of the first week, and now also look back on my first few days as "a voyage of discovery ... [where] ... much of the time was spent at sea" (1984: 42).

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[6] Closely mirroring Stephen Ball's (1981) experience at '*Beachside Comprehensive*'.

Given that these feelings of "inadequacy and self doubt" (Davies 1999: 83) are said to be fairly common in the early stages of fieldwork, not surprisingly, there has been a sustained reluctance among male ethnographers to reflect on the emotional costs involved in fieldwork (although the collection edited by Carter and Delamont 1996 is a notable exception). Once more this is a hangover from the "lone ranger" (Geertz 1995: 103) approach to field research, in which a heroic lone ethnographer secures authority for (what was usually) his account, through a standard narrative of traumatic arrival and manful struggle for acceptance, before promptly vanishing from the scene. As Kulick (1995: 3) dryly notes, "the biography and position of the researcher did not matter. Textually, ethnographers achieved this pose by making themselves invisible". In my case, I can honestly say that I actually did feel invisible, stranded as I was in a huge organisation where hardly anyone knew me, or indeed what I was doing there, a situation that generated considerable disquiet.

A major source of this 'emotional anxiety' derived from my attempts to be as open as possible with everyone, resulting in the sort of stress generated through continually being 'on-stage' in the field setting. And it must be said that the performative aspects of impression management involved in exhibiting an ethically conscious model of social research exacted an unexpectedly wearying toll. Much of this anxiousness arose through repeatedly having to justify my presence by reference to the legitimated status of 'academic researcher'. Significantly, this was mainly in relation to staff, where it often acted as the only badge of credibility I could plausibly muster, although even then it proved to be not universally accepted by everyone.

But having to claim some kind of 'expert status' in order to facilitate viable working relations with teachers, and carry it through in our ongoing daily encounters, was a discomfiting experience, as I often felt troubled in representing myself as such when there seemed little basis upon which to make these assertions outside the context of my institutional affiliation. My ambiguity regarding these authority claims made me particularly sensitive to the unexpected platforms encoded in the performative enactment of a research identity (Springwood and King 2001: 408). On the other hand though, early interactions with pupils proved far less problematic, as they tended to be much more engaged by the fact that I had been to school on a nearby estate and that we shared the same accent, which for them carried far more symbolic weight than my expensive university education.

Further aggravating this personal sense of uneasiness, my overt stance in answering questions from both teachers and pupils regarding my purpose for being in school soon manifested a distinct downside that I had not foreseen. My motives were continually interrogated by teachers, and not always in the friendliest of terms. For a significant number, I quickly came to be viewed as an unwelcome 'stranger' who had suddenly materialised with no clearly defined reason for appearing among them. If this did not render me ambiguous enough to be perceived as a dangerous threat, as all 'matter out of place' tends to be construed (Douglas 1966), then this categorical confusion was compounded by received understandings of what social research is supposed to be about. These imaginings are generally circumscribed by ideas revolving around "a solitary white male in a starched laboratory coat, ... administering tests to people in clinical settings" (LeCompte et.al. 1999: 6).

My presence as a solitary white male, even without the white coat, along with my genuine efforts to be honest in answering queries from staff, resulted in a kind of 'sincerity fatigue' that often left me feeling guilty about being worn down by the constant pressure to be a pleasant, socially gregarious resident 'expert'. In addition, remaining passive and non-judgemental amid the casual racism and homophobia that was a pervasive element of the school culture was also, I am convinced, a significant factor in exacerbating such emotions, highlighting the personal difficulties of confronting on a professional level the familiar fieldwork predicament of 'making friends with the enemy' (Kleinman and Copp 1993). This demand to maintain 'collaborative distance' would be taxing enough in more conducive circumstances, but suspicions persisted, confirming the longstanding resistance documented towards 'outsiders' who are afforded little respect because "you'd only really know what it's all about here if you had to teach here" (Hammersley 1984: 49).

In relating my personal feelings about how I was perceived by many of the staff during the initial phase of fieldwork, some may sense that I am about to launch into yet another round of that well known 'field' sport of 'teacher bashing'. That this is not my intention can be adduced by the fact that I went on to spend over eight months working alongside many of them, gaining valuable insights into the structural contexts and constraints teachers have to work under, and the sort of pressures that often inform their social relations with young people. But given the perpetual state of uncertainty that currently reigns in the city's schools, which have for years loitered at the wrong end of the Performance League Table, something of a siege mentality exists among rank and file staff.

It was into this atmosphere of mistrust that I inexplicably appeared, leading a significant minority of teachers to surmise that my presence represented yet one more surveillance technique aimed squarely at their teaching performance, with me cast as the "technician of behaviour" (Foucault 1977: 294) parachuted in to individualise even further the "terrors of performativity" (Ball 2003b). Viewed in this light, their lack of trust was entirely understandable, and something that my overt research strategy in due time did begin to address, although for some their attitudes remained dismissive and quite hostile, reflecting an entirely warranted discomfort at my intrusion into the minutiae of their working lives[7]. However, my overriding purpose in conducting this ethnography was to critically explore processes of educational disillusionment among working-class adolescents, and as such this was always destined to place my work in a problematic position in relation to teachers, largely ruling out the kind of collaborative investigation that they might have felt merited more attention. These tensions in educational ethnography, aptly summarised by Sleeter (1998: 56) as "wanting to be fair to people, and wanting to see schooling done differently" formed a constant backdrop to my time in school.

Maurice Punch (1998: 163) helpfully points out that researchers "may suffer by being seen as extensions of their political sponsors in the setting". How much I wish I had read, and taken heed, of this advice before embarking on fieldwork, for in retrospect, I now realise that it was a serious error on my part to accompany the Headteacher so often in the early days of the study. This included being personally introduced by him to the Senior Management Team

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[7] An extreme example is documented in chapter 3.

at one of their regular weekly meetings, from where word soon trickled down the chain of command that *"he's brought in someone that observes and reports on everything"*, leading to the obvious conclusions being drawn. Someone with whom I subsequently spent a considerable amount of time, and who had been at that meeting later informed me that *"we all just assumed that you had been brought in by Andy"*, confirming that this was indeed the case.

But probably the most assertive and forthright questioning of my motives came from a teacher who was in fact an unapologetic critic of the current leadership. *"How's the research going?"* he asked casually one day, and I replied that I was still trying to find my way around. Warming to his task however, he quickly got to the point. *"So a'you 'ere to stitch us up then or what?"*. Taken aback somewhat, I impressed upon him that it was not my intention to stitch up anyone, teacher or pupil. I don't know how convincing I was during this conversation, and I remember being aware that my credibility was being seriously questioned, but we parted on good terms and he seemed satisfied by what he heard. And something positive did result from this exchange. In a small way, it helped to clear the air a little, as the same teacher went on to become a key sponsor in persuading some of his colleagues to view me in a slightly less suspicious light.

MANUFACTURING 'TRUST' AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC 'CONCEIT'

As time passed and I began to establish recognisable membership roles in different areas of the school, participants increasingly saw me in my role occupancy rather than my initial designation of researcher (Ellen 1984: 112), bringing an improvement in my social status as the insider/outsider distinction

faded[8]. Burgess (1991: 49) suggests that this has as much to do with one's personal characteristics – age, sex, ethnicity – as with the perceived status of the membership role, and I am sure that as a middle-aged white male with a strong local background I garnered certain advantages over other researchers carrying out similar recent work (Russell 2005) that evened out the difficulties I experienced with some teachers.

So while my gendered status as a man gave me access to the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2000: 25) on offer in the aggressively 'macho' culture of the school, it also proved a source of potential conflict when, as occurred on more than one occasion, I demonstrably failed to be sufficiently 'tough' in controlling pupil behaviour. Being a man in this culturally heteronormative setting brought with it certain advantages in terms of how I was viewed by some staff, but it was goodwill that had to be cemented by proving myself to be the 'right' kind of man, one that was capable of displaying characteristics judged proper in this overtly masculine environment. The establishment and ongoing maintenance of trust therefore, is largely about signalling common interests and being able to rely on each other, something that takes time to secure, it never being assumed until demonstrated in practice (Van Maanen 1991: 39). As the fieldworker role lacks these qualities, trust has to be 'manufactured' by "getting one's hands dirty ... with all the interactional devices at [your] command" (Norris 1993: 132-3).

The presumption that normative standards of conduct could be expected of me in classroom situations made research ethics a recurring feature of my daily life in school, as this tended to be the main arena in which my 'character testing'

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[8] Duties included Learning Support Assistant and providing learning resources for Citizenship courses.

took place, typically during 'heat of the moment' instances of conflict where the boundaries of loyalty were most demonstrably capable of being enacted. Acting ethically on a day-to-day basis therefore, while adhering to a professional code of research ethics, became a constantly shifting process of contingent negotiation and compromise (Burgess 1985: 158), testing my resolve as an ethically conscious researcher and foregrounding the difficulties of maintaining principles in a complex and frequently contradictory social world. Indeed, having experienced this process at first hand, I now fully understand why so many have concluded that ethnography is an "interactionally deceitful practice" (Ditton 1977: 10; see also Norris 1993; Punch 1998).

Keeping 'Confidences' in a Crowded School

So much of this type of work rests on one's personal abilities and presentation skills in forging relationships that I would contend that it is a conceit to believe that deception is not just as much a part of field research as it is everyday social life. Ellen (1984: 146) makes the important point that "all participant observation may contain a covert element" and while this is contrary to accepted research ethics, my own view is that, whatever ideals one takes into the field, a degree of mendacity is almost certainly unavoidable, and in some cases it will be obligatory.

'Boundary spanning' is a concept LeCompte et.al. (1999) coin to describe the cultivating of relationships with teachers and pupils, oppositional constituencies that continuously competed for my attention, and my loyalty too, in respect of their perception of the other grouping. Conflicts between them, especially once I started working closely with particular groups of pupils, often resulted in my

being expected to act as a cultural broker or intermediary, in explaining one group's actions and motivations to the other, with pupils in particular casting me in the role of advocate in grievances with their teachers. Moreover, becoming the repository of so much 'inside' information gleaned from both sides threw into even sharper relief this fundamentally liminal 'betwixt and between' position (Turner 1969: 95), making unguarded interaction a tricky proposition guaranteed to induce high levels of anxiety.

To give just one brief example, teachers frequently left me 'in charge' of classes, placing me in management situations that raised obvious tensions with my aims as a researcher. Strategies in these instances had to be spontaneous and finely tuned to the particular moment, in the hope that order might be maintained while simultaneously avoiding conflict with any of the pupils. As a result of being put in this awkward position, on the one hand I have been physically challenged by a number of strapping fifteen and sixteen year olds eager to show their peers that they could 'face down' the 'one who say's he's not a teacher', and on the other, engaged in countless embarrassing conversations about why I drive such an 'old' car, and whether it is really true that I am only present in the class because I am the teacher's 'boyfriend'.

But things occasionally escalated into more serious incidents. One time, left alone with a boisterous group of year 10 boys, I had to intercede between two fifteen year olds intent on causing each other serious physical harm. Dealing with this confrontation involved restraining them while complaining loudly in earshot of the entire room that they'd get me into trouble if they started anything while their teacher was away. Fortuitously, this acted to take the heat out of the

situation, but only because the would-be combatants knew me and trusted me well enough to believe what I said. But this incident was troubling, for did I abuse their hard won trust by lying to them, and if I did, was having to maintain good relations with the teacher an ethically justifiable reason for doing so? At such times, the line between observer and participant becomes fluid and constantly in danger of shifting, not always easy to detect until one crosses it at an inopportune moment.

Another potential pitfall is the pressure exerted by participants to disclose your true persona, freely express opinions, and more fully reciprocate in the unfolding social process that underpins your mutual acquaintance. This requires anything but passivity, needing instead the active recasting of the biographical self to construct culturally competent performances that are acceptable to participants (Wolf 1991). Toiling to this end, and with the added disadvantage of age hardly on my side, whatever biographical resources I could credibly claim were deployed in my mixing with teenagers, and consequently remnants of former selves were resurrected and at opportune moments pressed into service as I, like Hobbs (1993: 51) "explored two cultures: one working-class ... the other academic".

A conscious decision to emphasise my local background when talking to teenagers I spent time with proved especially fruitful, and certainly helped them feel more relaxed during our conversations, especially given our common vernacular. Later, spending more time with a specific group of year 11 boys and their classmates, foregrounding my local identity once more assisted as I presented a recognisable biography, in idiomatic language, that they were

culturally familiar with, something that particularly helped with the girls I came into contact with through my time observing their lessons. For my ability to 'chat' and swear convincingly in estate argot gained me the confidence of many of these young people, who had initially exhibited extreme wariness towards me. I can still vividly recall the look of astonishment on one young man's face when I used some fairly ripe language in conversation with him for the first time. It instantly distinguished me from all the other adults he was surrounded by in school and broke down the air of brooding suspicion he had previously exuded.

Confidentiality and anonymity are standard tenets of ethnographic practice (Ellen 1984: 148), but in my experience such assurances are far easier made than maintained in evolving situations where conflicting views are often held. As working relations with teachers eventually stabilised, I was often asked to 'keep an eye' on certain individuals while observing in their classrooms. I was also told quite early on by one year 9 girl whose lesson I had been observing that her teacher had told them that I was *"there to watch their behaviour"*. Hearing this, and many other statements of a similar nature, one is left with a sense of irreconcilably divided loyalties and the realisation that there are going to be many of these small acts of betrayal, and this seemed to characterise my faltering attempts to placate the needs of one group while respecting the confidentiality of another. Yet these dilemmas are rarely resolved by reference to a codified set of predetermined rules or procedures (LeCompte et.al. 1999: 52). Rather, it is a balancing act, with you as the tightrope walker, trying to act in good conscience, while constantly feeling guilty over the many minute acts of treachery that punctuate your working day.

'Freely given informed consent' (BSA 2006) is another standard trope that sounds perfectly reasonable until tested in circumstances where there are literally hundreds of potential participants, all under the age of sixteen. How exactly is this supposed to work within the context of a shifting population in a crowded secondary school numbering well over a thousand pupils? The contingent nature of consent complicates this further, along with the fact that it can be given at one moment and then abruptly withdrawn at another (Eisner 1998: 215). One is left pondering how often should consent be sought - every day, every week, or retrospectively for every item of data?, - for bargains struck in the heat of the moment come with no guarantee that they will endure beyond that point in time.

Similarly, recording controversial or personally offensive views are central to ethnography (Kleinman and Copp 1993: 38), but who subsequently makes the final decision on what is selected or omitted? It is extremely unlikely that data collected on the basis of written consent forms would be 're-validated' if the participant knew that it cast them in an unfavourable light. Yet this is the very stuff of critical ethnographic insight, for, as Springwood and King (2001: 412) observe, "People who are well positioned within empowering landscapes are not likely to respond well to ethnographic readings that implicate their daily practices within networks of oppression and privilege". Again, this is a question of finding a conscionable middle ground that minimises the risk of harm, while knowing that it is impossible to get every decision right. As Robert Burgess (1985: 148) notes:

"fieldworkers are constantly engaged in taking decisions in *both* 'open' and 'closed' research; they are involved in arriving at some form of compromise whereby the impossibility of seeking informed consent from everyone, of telling the truth all the time and of protecting everyone's interest is acknowledged" (author's italics).

An interesting aspect of fieldwork with young people is their infinite capacity to surprise, and their stubborn refusal to be grateful for the lengths one is prepared to go to in following guidelines by protecting their anonymity (DeLaine 2000: 93). What exactly is the proper response when young people one has been talking to for months insist that they want their real names to figure prominently in the 'book' that is being written about them? Having carefully explained the reasons for protected anonymity, I was nonplussed when they refused to countenance the idea of being given a pseudonym, even when I told them they could choose their own false names! Of course, their motives in this are entirely status oriented, and directed at boosting their standing in the local peer hierarchy. But, even allowing for this, surely I am exercising the power of academic authority in this situation by denying their wishes to be 'in print' and any potentially beneficial outcomes they may perceive (Francis 2003: 57). Indeed, am I not effectively undermining my own emancipatory intentions by deciding that I know what is 'best' for them, thereby privileging my author/ity over how they wish to be represented in the text?

This persistent assumption that 'we' know better than 'they' do reinscribes what Lal (1996: 185) terms "the essential division between 'Self' and 'Other', or between the knowing subject (the researcher) and the known, or soon to be

known, object (the researched)". Issues of power embedded in the asymmetries of research relations affect every aspect of the ethnographer's time in the field, and as I discovered, an emancipatory approach only throws a more unforgiving light on the self-deceptions we use to justify our "brief flirtations with the terrible immediacy of life among the lower orders" (Hobbs 1993: 62). Confronted with a succession of mirror images of my own youthful self, it caused me to feel a deep sense of frustration and guilt (and not a little anger) spending time with girls and boys who seemed brighter, more knowledgeable and much more aware of what was going on around them than I ever was at their age, and yet know that for the majority, their experience is unlikely ever to extend far beyond the immediate environs of the estate where they live.

Clearly, this can make fieldwork a disconcerting and sometimes dispiriting experience, one that requires a measured self-presentation that can be sustained in all your relations with the research community. Unfortunately, while this may sometimes go against your stated research aims, we have but little choice, as an ill-mannered, disrespectful and opinionated fieldworker rarely gains access to any meaningful data, leading Wolf (1991: 212-3) to proffer this advice:

> "If you offend people, they will certainly not let you into their world, nor will their information be accurate ... don't even consider ... participant observation ... where you are unable to at least empathise with your subjects on a personal level".

Concluding Reflections

It must be abundantly clear that my feelings towards ethnography have altered substantially since the day when I first entered the field. One constant remains though; I still believe it is unethical to deliberately mislead simply for the purposes of research. Despite the slightly jaded and some might even say cynical tone evident in my remarks on the possibilities for ethical ethnographic practice, my intention in this chapter has been to draw on my own experiences to make a broader and more general point. For ethnography is probably unique in its uninvited intrusiveness into the specificities of people's lives and is, therefore, fundamentally forged out of the political intrigues of human intersubjectivity.

Such activities, usually carried out in time-pressured, extractive and inquiring modes of social conduct, inevitably places heightened emphasis on precisely those personal presentation skills and 'dark arts' of persuasion that we all deploy in easing our passage through the daily working day. Maurice Punch (1998: 180) has argued that a "manipulative element" exists in every field relationship, and that it is this that makes dissimulation unavoidable. However, rather than view this as a one-way process, I would also want to wholeheartedly concur with his balancing assertion that ethnography is often a 'two-way street' of mutual deceit, where "the subjects are conning you until you gain their trust and then when you've got their confidence, you start conning them" (Punch 1989: 189).

Whether one agrees with the sentiments expressed here or not, what I find most striking is that it shows with some clarity that the plots, strategies and ongoing negotiations that typify fieldwork encounters hinge on processes of intersubjectivity. Shared investments, mutual engagements and particular vested interests undeniably shape the collection of fieldwork data, and the emotional significance attached to that process is necessarily bound up in a series of problematically transient, highly contingent and fluid personal relationships. Managing these relations is a challenging experience as, like all relations, they are shot through with the effects of power, reciprocity, trust and betrayal. Nontheless, deal with them we must, for as Jean Gearing (1995: 209) states:

"In fieldwork, as in all life, sensation, emotion and intellect operate simultaneously to structure and interpret our experiences of the world. Our emotional reactions, and those with whom we interact, guide our analyses of life 'at home' as well as 'in the field'" (Gearing 1995: 209).

The dilemmas emerging from cultivating these relationships cannot be eradicated by rules, regulations or codes of conduct, anymore than by claiming male authority in manipulating our research texts. Indeed, the more prescriptive and standardised these strictures become, the more fieldworkers will once again be forced to draw a furtive veil of 'selective omission' over how they came by their data.

Throughout this discussion, I have presented a reflexive account of my fieldwork apprenticeship that is relatively unmediated by the distorting effects of

memory. And, given my marginal and tenuous position in the academy, there is little capital to be gained in producing one more 'confessional tale'. For me, the real reward is the greater understanding I gained about the nature of social inquiry and the 'secret histories' that profoundly influence our subsequent written representations of these long term investigative encounters. My prolonged engagement with youngsters undergoing a secondary school experience bearing marked similarities with my own less than glittering school career as an 'underachieving working-class boy' taught me a fundamental lesson about the value of emotional attachment in achieving a "conscious partiality" (Mies 1993: 68). Ultimately, this reflected lingering identifications with a past that became vividly reanimated in the stark reality of the present.

So, rather than reserving reflections of 'how it was for you' until it can be artfully veiled in humour and handed down from a safe perch on the academic ladder, from where it reinscribes yet another form of objectifying distance, I would argue that 'coming clean' at the outset provides the kind of critically reflective methodological training that every qualitative researcher should participate in. It has been said that we cannot shed the self, and that consequently, it should become a central focus of our writings (Cesara 1982: 2). More talk, discussion, analysis and debate with colleagues, students and, importantly, those we study, can only aid us in furthering dialogue about recognising our emotionality as women and men, and utilising it as a prime faculty to draw upon in our work.

Such a process, carried out while 'being here', might just persuade us to produce clearer, more insightful, and considerably richer pictures of what it was really like to fully experience 'being there'. This closes the opening section of

this thesis, and sets up in Part Two the presentation of the case study chapters of the study. I have chosen to structure this section in the chronological order in which the research was carried out, so Chapter 3 explores the English case study setting, while Chapter 4 is devoted to introducing and describing the Irish national context and educational research site. But before travelling to Ireland, first we must acquaint ourselves with Bridgepoint High school, and it is to this setting that I shall now turn.

PART TWO

TWO SCHOOLS, ONE ETHNOGRAPHER:

SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND

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Schooling in England.

Current attention among scholars with an active interest in education revolves around a series of continuities and discontinuities that are being played out at the level of government policy output and rhetoric, amid the unparalleled national debate concerning the future direction of UK schools. Indeed, for many commentators, the defining feature of the current administration's term of office has been the ease with which policies inherited from previous Conservative governments have not only remained in place but, in their carefully calibrated intensification, considerably strengthened the drive to tie educational standards and curricula much more closely to the volatile and unpredictable demands of an 'anarchic' global market economy (Gray 1998: 74).

Of equal significance have been the discontinuities that have attracted attention though; chiefly at the level of what Stephen Ball calls "policy discourse" (1994: 23), along with the concrete legislation and its subsequent ground level effects that have arisen from this shifting discursive agenda. These realignments, which for those broadly in favour of such changes have been an important ideological justification for reconceptualising the state's role in contemporary society, nonetheless quite pointedly highlight certain fundamental contradictions deeply embedded in the apparent incompatibility of balancing these very different approaches as part of the process of implementing educational reform.

In order to keep the analytical lens of this study firmly focused on school processes as they operate at the basic level of everyday interaction, it is crucial that, while we remain cognisant of the macro-structural forces intervening in people's lives in school, it has to be recognised that this provides only a limited portrait of what is really happening in secondary education today. Fleshing out a view where only rigid frameworks and the 'dead hand' of policy are made visible requires from us a deeper exploration of the micropolitics of social practices and teacher-pupil relations in order to answer fundamental questions about how reform is reshaping young people's experience of education. More specifically, the focus here will concentrate on why exactly it is that in an era marked by repeated calls to more fully embrace the worldwide drive towards inclusive education (see Booth 1996; Booth and Ainscow 1998; Vitello and Mithaug 1998; Booth et.al. 2000), practices characterised by their capability to exclude remain unchecked and continue to proliferate in UK schools.

To that end, this chapter opens by reviewing where we are in policy terms in the current UK educational landscape, firstly in order to provide a contextualised backdrop for the empirical data that will follow, and secondly to try to provide some sense of how, and more importantly why, we came to arrive at this particular juncture. I will then set the scene for the rest of the chapter by sketching out a picture of the city and estate in which the school chosen as a research site is located, utilising information from a range of statistical sources along with my own local knowledge as someone who was both born and raised in the city. This should begin to illustrate in some detail the realities of life on the estate where this research was carried out and help to underpin the ethnographic material that will subsequently be presented.

'Education, Education, Education': A New Labour Obsession?

Schools, it appears today, are a fundamental source of concern for the population of the UK. Rarely does a day pass when there is not a 'story' featured in the news media about some aspect of schooling, usually involving a politician or government minister assuring the public that their latest policy intervention is directed towards 'raising standards' while providing extra support for those 'less fortunate' in society. Through such saturation coverage, educational matters now occupy centre stage in attracting the scrutiny of the public at large and the undivided attention of the New Labour government. According to Norman Fairclough (2000: 3), these developments constitute the 'mediatisation' of government, through which a "new form of control from the centre ...[becomes a] ... promotional means for managing consent" (2000:4-5).

Since 1997, when the then newly elected Blair administration made education a top priority for 'modernisation' (DfEE 1997), New Labour's interventionist agenda to transform UK schools has enlisted the media as willing recruits to obsessively monitor every aspect of the system. This has ensured the discursive prominence given to key concepts such as 'choice', 'diversity' and 'lifelong learning' in recomposing the relationship of school and society. Here we see how timely interventions by an increasingly politicised global news media (Cockerill et.al 1984) shapes the discursive terrain of policymaking, setting up the conditions of possibility in which policy can be enacted. In a more cumulative sense, this also influences the widespread dissemination of policy as discourse in popular understandings of certain concepts and phrases,

making it perfectly understandable why there is now a perception that "the presentation of policy is as important as the policy itself" (Franklin 1998: 5)[1].

Indeed, the significance of these processes should not be underestimated in terms of their potential for forms of symbolic control, prompting Pierre Bourdieu (1996: 73) to conclude that "Popularity confers a type of democratic legitimacy to the market model by posing in political terms what is cultural production and illusion". So what are the broader issues implicated in this unparalleled interest in education, on the part of both the government and the public at large, and what impact, if any, have the changes brought about in the last decade actually had on those who form the ultimate focus of all this determined deliberation, the young people with which this study is chiefly concerned?

A avowed commitment to 'standards not structures' has been the defining principle of the Blair government's term of office, as the mantra of the Japanese-derived 'kaizen', or 'continuous improvement' (Morley and Rassool 1999) has further solidified an embryonic 'standards agenda' previously initiated by the Conservatives (Ball 1994). Thus, clear continuities were soon identified between the neo-liberal orientation of the 'New Right' economic agenda (Coffey 2001: 18) and New Labour's pursuit of a managerialist regime of accountability and effectiveness to even more closely regulate an educational marketplace structured along business lines to improve competitiveness in the global economy[2].

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[1] See also Franklin (2001).

[2] See Allen et.al. (1999); Chitty and Dunford (1999); Muschamp et.al. (1999); Burden et.al. (2000); Fergusson (2000); Poynter (2004).

So, League Tables, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspections, SATs (Standard Assessment Testing) and the 'naming and shaming' of failing schools have all been retained and extended (Tomlinson 2005: 95), along with business-derived models of 'best value' and 'cost effectiveness' that have intensified and normalised the battery of surveillance techniques through which schools (and their staff) are set standards that must be continuously improved. Evaluative auditing practices throughout the public sector made possible by the ideological shift to forms of 'entrepreneurial governance' (Osbourne and Gaebler 1992) reconfigured entire modes of existence as fundamentally economic in nature (Gordon 1991: 43). For schools, this has transformed them into 'commercial enterprises' and those within them, like teachers and pupils, into subjects for individualising self-scrutiny and improvement (Ball 1998a).

However, the government has also shown itself to be extremely attentive to the sensitivities of public opinion, and especially the core constituency of middle-class 'swing' voters occupying the crucial centre ground of UK party politics in the post-Thatcherite era. Further ideological justification for this more 'caring' attitude could be found in the 'Third Way's' casting aside of traditional dichotomies of 'old left' and 'new right', now deemed outmoded in an increasingly fragmented and diverse globalised world (see Giddens 1994, 1998, 2000). Indeed, this approach insists that certain forms of 'democratic renewal' are a necessary facet of the 'modernising' process, involving something much more fundamental than simply updating services to match the expectations of the 'modern consumer'. Rather, it represents a basic rethinking, and reformation, of the key relationships between the economy, state and civil society (Clarke and Newman 1997), in which competitiveness and social justice

are viewed as entirely compatible and mutually achievable goals, with education targeted as a key arena in which intervention is urgently required (Naidoo and Muschamp 2002: 146). However, adopting a more critical stance, Janet Newman (2000: 47) offers us a cogent summary of its expected consequences:

"It offers a particular conception of citizen (empowered as active, participating subjects); of work (non-antagonistic and homogeneous); and of nation (setting out Britain's place in the changing global economy). Viewed in this context ... it is a fundamentally political project, to which the rhetorics, narratives and strategies of managerialism are harnessed".

The key discourse underpinning these realignments is that of the 'stakeholder' society, a quasi-Durkheimian model of communitarian social cohesion judged by those having an early influence on New Labour policy like Etzioni (1995) and Hutton (1995), to be a viable alternative to the vagaries of an unfettered market economy. It is this model of social integration that Tony Blair repeatedly espouses in evoking the notion of 'one nation, one community', the almost evangelical style of delivery bearing witness to the strongly moral and ethical flavour contained within it (Rawnsley 2001). In effect, this is no less than the Blairite vision of the future in which we are all urged to invest, resting as it does on the individual stakeholders' level of 'social inclusion'. It is important to note though that inclusion here is unequivocally predicated on one's wholehearted involvement in paid work, and thus a thoroughgoing engagement in the circuits of global capitalism, as persuasively explained by Hutton:

"The firm is not only at the heart of the economy; it is at the

heart of society. It is where people work and define their lives;

it delivers wages, occupation and status" (1995: 99-100).

Now, it must be said that viewing participation in work as a crucial factor in combating social exclusion, and providing a sense of accomplishment and both material and emotional well-being is, in many ways, something that is difficult to argue against, although a narrow focus on employment does tend to attach little value to forms of social engagement outside paid work, such as community involvement and local activism (Clasen et.al. 1998; Evans 2002). But even if we concede the importance labour market participation has for young people, social scientists have suggested for years that the scarcity of real jobs caused by economic restructuring has disproportionately affected working-class youngsters to a far greater degree than other sector of the population, a situation current research continues to highlight[3].

So to contend that work of *any* kind is capable of lifting young people out of conditions of economic hardship and automatically imbue them with a renewed sense of social responsibility is surely to ignore the persistent inequalities that continue to polarise the social landscape of the UK[4]. Instead, we must conclude, along with Hyland (2002) that however the message is presented, "references to moral and social values are merely subordinate, and that economic considerations have overriding priority" (2002: 248). Pursuing global competitiveness by 'economizing' education is claimed to be vital in attracting

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[3] See Willis (1986); Bates and Riseborough (1993); Wynn and White (1997); MacDonald (1997); Webster et.al. (2004); MacDonald and Marsh (2005); Furlong (2005).

[4] See David Byrne's (2005: 92-8) incisive discussion of 'poor work'.

scarce employment opportunities with 'footloose' multinational companies. But education is about so much more than economic restoration that we are in danger of forgetting its role as an intellectual and moral touchstone in promoting a democratic society, something that Dewey (1916) argued requires democracy in education. And as we shall see later on, there are educational settings where the demands of global capital have yet to undermine a belief that schooling should concern itself with a broader canvas than one confined merely to 'training'.

Nevertheless, the UK government's repeated protestations about the need to increase social inclusion, and the none-too subtle causal relationship constructed through its association with paid work, have allowed it to 'economise' education in a deeper sense than even the previous administration (Clarke et.al. 2000: 22). Starting out from the debatable premise that structural insecurity and precariousness in the jobs market are inevitable consequences of the forces driving globalisation[5], leads seamlessly to the idea that individual security, both as a responsible, 'active citizen' and as a member of one of Blair's archetypal 'hard-working families' (Tomlinson 2005: 167), is exclusively to be earned through the attainment of 'employability' (Levitas 1998).

In this ultra competitive scenario, it is naturally incumbent upon individuals themselves to acquire the necessary work skills for a viable future in the highly flexible, knowledge-based economy that the modernising project envisions, and it thereby follows that failure to fulfil this obligation is seen to reside in a lack of personal responsibility, individual deficiency and the imputation of 'moral

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[5] For critical assessments, see Hirst and Thompson (1996); Green (1997); Held and McGrew (2000, 2002); Stiglitz (2002).

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condemnation' (Baumann 2005: 78). This conjures up a Foucaultian vision of governmentality in an advanced liberal democratic state, with Edwards (2002: 357) underling the primary concern to be:

> "fashioning conduct based on certain cultural norms and values, wherein individuals are taken to be active subjects and not passive objects. In particular, these norms and values take the forms associated with responsible consuming and enterprise".

Thus, within the institutions and practices of governing, individuals are positioned as active subjects in reshaping subjectivity through an ethos of enterprise. Rose (1999: 154) offers the definitive summation of these processes:

> "The enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximise its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself".

Viewing contemporary state schooling in this economistic sense as 'work in progress' justifies the practice of dividing and individualising school subjects and reconceptualising them as entrepreneurial self-improvers, as exemplified in the 'Excellence in Cities' (DfEE 1999) initiative. Under the terms of the new regime, that longstanding target of 'New Right' rhetoric, 'the failing inner-city

school' became the refocused object of an "inspecting gaze" (Foucault 1980: 155) as key stage indicators and 'benchmarks' of pupil performance like the five A*-C grade GCSE's set standards for defining 'school effectiveness', outlining the optimal model of the subject 'successful' pupil through the introduction of the 'gifted and talented' scheme (Benjamin 2002: 35). The document seemed unwilling to countenance the notion that context had any relevance here, baldly stating that "excellence must become the norm" (DfEE 1999: 2), this brief quote amply conveying the redemptive tone adopted in this unwavering policy pronouncement:

> "There are children, schools and other educational services which perform well … they overcome what others would tell them are childrens' disadvantages in income, language or experience. We must create a climate in which this 'can do' approach can prosper. We must learn from those who succeed and spread their culture and achievement more widely" (DfEE 1999: 5).

The coercive tone evident here in the repetitive use of 'we must' subsumes structural factors within an individualising discourse urging those described as 'disadvantaged' towards the obvious path to 'success', a conscious alignment towards 'their culture'. The material constraints of local circumstance are also disparaged as 'what others tell them', undercutting the reality that what prevents people from being 'good' consumers of education are the very conditions in which they live, rendering the notion that everyone has the freedom to be 'voluntarily' included fundamentally difficult to sustain. This however, has not

prevented action being taken against those deemed to be 'recalcitrant volunteers'.

The means by which the education process increasingly segregated pupils gathered pace, with a massive expansion in Learning Support Centres and Pupil Referral Units amid steeply rising rates of school exclusion (Cooper 2002). Categories of disruptive behaviour and 'special needs' provision proliferated to manage 'challenging' and 'less able' children who, in deviating from the prescribed 'norm', were in danger of impacting negatively on League Table performance and school effectiveness measurements that became all important, especially to institutions in areas with low social and economic circumstances. How exactly this furthers social inclusion has yet to be satisfactorily explained. Through such practices, and the more direct indictment on the system made in the overt choices of many pupils to physically absent themselves by truanting[6], there is a deepening sense that, as Stephen Ball warned back in the early 1990s:

> "the implementation of market reforms in education is
>
> essentially *a class strategy which has as one of its major*
>
> *effects the reproduction of relative social class (and ethnic)*
>
> *advantages*" (1993: 4, author's emphasis).

Moreover, the revitalisation within the educational arena of social processes rooted in classed aspirations and affiliations have had serious consequences for New Labour's broader political project of widening social inclusion for all young

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[6] Mizen (2004: 44) argues that school absenteeism is grossly underestimated, through fear of recriminations from Ofsted. Milner and Blythe (1999) suggest that anything up to 500,000 young people are absent from school each week.

people. For some, the 'intensification' of the learning experience has ever more effectively served to underpin their domination of the examination framework that allows access to the uppermost rungs of the higher education ladder.

Many others meanwhile are 'disqualified' for lacking the socio-economic and cultural resources to capitalise on education's reproductive tendencies (Mizen 2004: 48). So while there is a notional commitment to social inclusion at national level and much rhetoric is expended in declaring the government's backing for processes of inclusion in schools, the larger political and policy context operating at the present time has been judged by many leading scholars to be fundamentally antithetical to inclusion (Thomas and Loxley 2001: 88). Indeed, in placing schools at the mercy of a market-oriented system of education that relies for its legitimacy on concepts like 'parental choice', and the paraphernalia of league tables and inspections that sustain this public narrative (Riddell 2005: 238-9), we should scarcely have expected little else but that existing sources of inequality would be reinvigorated, as Ball (1993: 17) indeed went on to attest, arguing that "in effect, we have to understand the market [in education] as a system of exclusion".

However, New Labour's politics of change and democratic renewal has proved extremely adept at aligning itself with much broader trends occurring on a global scale in relation to sustained calls for greater social justice in widening participation in education for all young people. As the notion of inclusion has made the swift but only relatively recent transition from the radical margins of 'special education' into the very centre of educational policy debate, there is a perception that 'inclusive education' has been deployed strategically in the

political arena to add a surface gloss to the standards agenda, by reconfiguring regimes of surveillance within a prevailing 'therapeutic' discourse of care and concern (Slee 1998). This has a particular pertinence in schools situated in low-income areas that generally constitute the bottom strata of the quasi-market, where the demands of 'continuous improvement' present almost insurmountable pressures in a highly competitive 'game' played on what can only be described as a far from level playing field.

Promoting a brand of social inclusion that is largely geared to delivering economic competitiveness in a global marketplace has marginalized what Alexiadou (2002: 73) terms "the effects of governance structures on the production and distribution of opportunities (education, employment etc.)". Attributing blame and deficiencies firmly in individual life choices therefore diverts attention away from the specific labour market conditions operating in a particular setting and the inequalities that inevitably structure it to construct a voluntaristic argument about exclusion that rests on a dualistic model of cultural (and therefore moral) distinctions between the deviant and the conforming (Levitas 1996).

In such a scenario, inclusive education, as currently practiced in the UK, whether in the 'inclusive' policy of diversifying schools through a panoply of 'specialisms', creating an ever-expanding list of 'special needs', or through the proliferation of 'enclave' units to manage 'challenging' pupils, ultimately manifests itself as a motor of differentiation continually excluding as it ostensibly practices policies of 'inclusion'[7]. Thus, the contradiction at the heart of the

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[7] See the critique of the 'Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners' (DfES 2004) in Harris and Ranson (2005).

market mode of schooling is that enhancing consumer sovereignty is achieved at the direct cost of social justice, social competition overriding the notional commitment to equality, formally recognised in the demand to 'perform or perish'. This, albeit summarised in fairly cursory fashion, is the current policy context in which this study was carried out, and I will now move on to set the scene further by discussing the research location, and the social, cultural and economic circumstances as they existed during the period of enquiry.

Bridgepoint Estate: The Research Setting

The Bridgepoint estate lies on the north-eastern periphery of Crownport, a once thriving coastal city in the north of England that over the last twenty years has struggled to come to terms with the loss of a north sea fishing industry that is now only a faded memory. In addition to this calamitous loss, which decimated an entire industry in just a few short years, there is also the familiar story of deindustrialisation and the widespread experience of redundancy that inevitably accompanied it, chiefly in heavy engineering and shipbuilding, but also on the once heavily populated dockyards, where containerisation and privatisation curtailed secure employment in one of the more longstanding occupations in the city.

Like other northern cities traumatised by the debilitating effects of economic restructuring, Crownport has attempted to renew itself through a series of regeneration projects, including the gentrification of city centre housing developments and a plethora of former industrial sites now given over to warehouse-scale out of town retail 'parks', where leisure now comes with its own price tag attached. But urban regeneration too, is a competitive business in

what was the industrial heart of England, and the quality of leadership in the city, politically and strategically, has often suffered in comparison with the more forward thinking civic leaders who have transformed the public image and economic fortunes of larger northern cities such as Leeds, Manchester or Nottingham. As a consequence, a recently published government report found the city to be among the most deprived districts in the whole of England (ODPM 2004).

At the time of writing, Crownport occupies an unenviable position in educational terms too, mired deep in the relegation zone of the Ofsted National Performance League Table, seemingly unable to 'raise standards' sufficiently to clamber over the other economically disadvantaged LEAs it competes with in these contentious and controversial ratings. While it must be conceded that the LEA's current position has in fact marginally improved over the last two years, it should be noted that this upward trend was built on an ignominious ranking of bottom place for the whole of the UK, lending an air of incredulity to the somewhat triumphalist announcements made in the light of recent modest improvements. Thus, despite provoking years of impassioned and sometimes heated debate, a series of new, high-profile appointments by the city council and the belated injection of much needed extra state funding, educational services across the city continue to be a key area where the local authority's oft repeated and heavily promoted claims for 'top ten status' signally fail to match the reality experienced by the majority of Crownport's citizens.

As is often the case with large housing developments built in the post-war period around northern industrial cities, the Bridgepoint estate has a distinctive

identity all of its own, partly born of its geographical isolation from the rest of the city, but also due to its particular characteristics as a readily identifiable district within the city boundary. But Bridgepoint's main claim to a unique identity rests substantively on its sheer size, as it has often been described as the 'largest housing estate in Europe', with a population that has grown to over 35,000 citizens, the vast majority of them living in council-owned properties built between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. More recently, newer private housing estates have also been developed on the northern and southern fringes of the council estate, boosting the population still further and attracting some badly needed infrastructure investment into the area as a whole. However, in spite of this latest rise in the number of people living on the estate and its environs, aside from the ubiquitous out-of-town retail park, there are little in the way of job opportunities available locally for those residing in this expanding conurbation.

For Bridgepoint is an area that throughout its history has suffered high levels of social and economic deprivation. This is a longstanding and endemic situation brought about by the absence of replacement economic opportunities available to the large number of families rehoused on the estate from the traditional West Crownport fishing community when their houses were demolished, not long before their livelihoods suffered a similar fate. Further exacerbating these high levels of structural disadvantage has been years of industrial decline in which there are less and less jobs of *any* kind in the city, resulting in a faltering local economy that is now largely dominated by the consistently low-waged food processing industry and, most depressing of all, a woeful record of extremely low levels of educational attainment by young people growing up on the estate.

And while it would be dangerous to generalise these circumstances of socio-economic disadvantage across the entire population of the estate, it is clear that those relatively few Bridgepoint inhabitants who are making a comfortable living are far outweighed by a majority who survive in the most precarious and insecure reaches of the labour market or, even worse, exist in a long term state of welfare dependency.

Even the most cursory perusal of some of the more recently available statistics issued by the local government authority provides us with at least a flavour of the level of disadvantage found on the estate as a whole. The figures quoted in the discussion that follows draw extensively on these documents (Local Knowledge 2004), and as Bridgepoint consists of two electoral wards, I have averaged the two scores throughout to give a composite figure for the entire estate unless otherwise stated. Clearly, on an estate such as Bridgepoint, the access to jobs and the waged economy is a key indicator of the financial prosperity or otherwise in this overwhelmingly working-class environment, and thus provides us with a useful initial snapshot of the kind of general level of income enjoyed across the adult population. What the document tells us in fact, is that the labour force participation rates of the resident working age population are low enough at just under 46% to place Bridgepoint in the bottom five per cent in the whole of England and Wales, with an averaged ranking of 8538 out of 8850 electoral wards surveyed nationally.

An even bleaker picture emerges when we factor in the quality of local jobs on offer, as this gives us more detail about the actual level of wages earned, and here the estate ranks in the bottom ten per cent nationally of areas containing

knowledge-based industries such as IT, business and finance or aerospace. Indeed, even when comparisons are made with the rest of the city, Bridgepoint's average standing is 20th place out of the 23 wards in the table. Looking in yet more detail at the proportion of adults residing on the estate who, despite the dearth of local opportunities, are employed in what are termed 'knowledge intensive occupations' reveals a catastrophic ranking of 8844 out of the 8850 wards listed nationally, a figure that finds the estate rooted in bottom place among the 496 wards surveyed across the region, with a similar ranking among the 23 electoral wards in the city.

However, the indicator that really puts some flesh on the bones that these figures provide, and gives us our first real insight into the kind of educational context in which this study is intended to throw some light, is the 'skills and qualifications' profile of the local working population. With a frankly disturbing figure of nearly 74% of working age adults on the estate having only NVQ1 or no qualifications at all, Bridgepoint ranks 8818 out of 8850 electoral wards in the country, and this desperate finding is mirrored both regionally (492 out of 496), and at the city-wide level, where even in a city with more than its fair share of educational challenges, the ranking is 21st of 23 wards.

As if the grim realities festering somewhere underneath these raw scores and rankings were not enough to provide anyone with a fairly graphic picture of the kind of physical and psychological damage that is surely taking place every day on the Bridgepoint estate, local government authorities are now also encouraged, under what Strathearn (2000), in another context, has dubbed 'the tyranny of transparency', to produce a helpful index of 'deprivation' measuring

inequalities in relation to the country as a whole. Taking into account a range of indices including education, employment, income and health issues as well as crime, housing and the living environment has allowed statisticians to compile yet another league table, this time of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK.

In a nationally compiled table that contains 7931 entries, the Bridgepoint estate's eastern electoral ward stands in 68th place, with the western ward faring only slightly 'better' at 108th, and it is at this point that one is forced to search away from the national context and focus on the regional picture to try to discern some sense of hope that might be garnered by filtering out the inevitable asymmetries caused by including comparisons with 'the beautiful south'. This, however, is a ploy destined to end in grave disappointment, upon the discovery that the estate as a whole ranks 487th out of a regional count of 496 entries, a telling statistic that speaks volumes about the real levels of inequality that still exist in substantial areas of urban populations in the first decade of the twenty first century.

In a setting like this, where structural inequality is an ever present condition of young peoples' lives, the provision of secondary education must clearly play a hugely important role in aiming to reverse these processes and shape in a more positive way the educational destinies and eventual life chances of children from such profoundly disadvantaged backgrounds. On the Bridgepoint estate, this phase of educational provision is represented by two schools, both of which are large, comprehensive-style state schools catering almost exclusively for children in the immediate catchment area, with little commuting in from outside by pupils living in other parts of the city.

The most recently built of these two schools, Queensmead High, is located in what was once a fairly isolated position in the far north of the estate, but is now being increasingly incorporated into the rapidly expanding private housing development that has sprung up in the last decade to occupy the largely agrarian landscape that surrounded the school previously. Initially touted at the time of its construction as a 'flagship' educational establishment for the city, Queensmead was constructed to a futuristic-looking design that was claimed to make it the most 'vandal-proof' school in the country, with the all too predictable result that it quickly found itself targeted for repeated acts of serious vandalism soon after opening. However, the culmination of a difficult opening chapter for Queensmead came when it was placed under so-called 'special measures' for a short period before being completely closed with the removal of the existing Headteacher.

Shortly after, like the proverbial phoenix from the flames, the school reopened with a brand new name, a new, specially imported 'super' Headteacher, and a huge injection of capital facilitated by its newly designated status as an EAZ (Education Action Zone) institution. Queensmead currently has a school roll of about 1,200 pupils and an ongoing and well-developed support network of partnerships with a group of surrounding primary-age 'feeder' schools, which together form the circle of influence of the EAZ area[8]. I will have little more to say about Queensmead High in the course of this study, except where its presence impinges upon the other much longer established and considerably larger secondary school on the estate, Bridgepoint High, which is to be the central focus of my subsequent attention.

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[8] Education Action Zones have received less than enthusiastic reports. See Riddell and Tett (2001); Garminikow and Green (1999); Gewirtz (1999); Easen (2000); Plewis (2001); Dickson et.al. (2001).

The actual buildings Bridgepoint High currently occupies originally date back to the late 1960s, a time when the core of the estate was still being constructed and it was felt that the school would be a central component in this burgeoning new community, hence its prominent positioning on land running parallel with what was then the main road into the very heart of the estate. During this period, the local education authority ran separate junior high (age range 9-13) and secondary institutions, and the new estate school began life by focusing on the education of 13-18 year-olds. Following the reorganisation of Crownport's education system in 1988, the school was rebranded as Bridgepoint High and a decision was taken to concentrate resources on the 11-16 age group, resulting in the closure of the sixth form and the abandonment of post-16 education at the school.

In 2000, Bridgepoint High was awarded Technology College status, bringing with it £100,000 in extra money for refurbishments and £360 per pupil over three years for new IT equipment. Significantly, one of the main conditions attached to this extra funding was that the school should work on building stronger links with the surrounding community. As I began fieldwork at Bridgepoint High in late 2003, plans were well advanced for a total rebuilding project, but alas, this plan was turned down and both the staff and the pupils were forced to confront the prospect of soldiering on in what is realistically a rather dated, somewhat overcrowded, and in many respects quite unsatisfactory school campus.

Bridgepoint High is a large school, even by English standards, easily the biggest in the city with around 1,650 pupils on roll during the time I spent there.

The vast majority of children attending the school live within a one mile radius of the campus and generally journeyed in on foot, although a small number came from the nearest private estate and tended to rely more on parents and family members to drive them in and pick them up. Another striking feature of the school, one that mirrors that of the estate itself, is its ethnic composition, which is 99% white English, something that speaks volumes about the cultural homogeneity of the estate population and its relative isolation from the city in general, where a historically low ethnic minority presence has in recent years been swelled by the arrival of refugees dispersed from elsewhere in the UK, as well as economic migrants from eastern Europe

This homogeneity, and the sense of cultural insularity it inevitably fosters in the residents of the estate, derives at least in part from successive generations of family members consciously choosing to settle in nearby houses as the estate gradually mushroomed and spread out geographically. This process operates as a way of sustaining familial kinship networks, often under conditions of severe economic dependency. A common theme here, something mirrored in recent research on the formation of adolescent working-class subjectivities, is the need to 'keep close' (Pugsley 1998), framed in terms of what Archer and Yamashita (2003: 63) describe as "family relations and the safety of familiarity – knowing people and being known". However, there is potentially darker side to this intensely territorial aspect of estate culture, something Kearns and Parkinson (2001) identify as a 'limited horizons' outlook on that which is not familiar, arising from a combination of a fear of the unknown made even more compelling by the security found in 'knowing one's place'.

I will have much more to say later on in Part Three (see Chapter 5) about some of the effects such an inward looking and uniform culture has on the transmission of values and norms to the younger members of these estate families. But for the moment it will suffice to say that their continued presence, and abiding influence, on the contemporary culture of the estate is made powerfully visible when one visits, as I did regularly, the local shopping centre, known colloquially as the 'cenner'. It was here that I found myself continually surprised at the number of times one would see three, and often four generations of the same family, out for a 'look around the shops'. In doing so, they were affirming in that most public of arenas the unyielding significance such familial ties constitute as indispensable social networks, providing a positive sense of identity in the face of socially and economically constrained lives (MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 156).

This necessarily brief portrait of the Bridgepoint estate and its residents has admittedly tended towards a 'broad brush strokes' approach and been apt to some generalisations, something that is difficult to avoid when describing the characteristics of such a distinctive living environment and its tens of thousands of residents. Having entered this caveat, I will now attempt to redress the balance by turning to the main body of the chapter and present an ethnographic description of my extended encounter with Bridgepoint High. This in many ways 'ordinary', 'average', or as someone once pejoratively put it, 'bog-standard' English secondary school, far from being amenable to the kind of totalising and ultimately facile evaluations that tend to be arranged under binaries such as successful/failing or effective/ineffective, should instead be acknowledged as constituting a "recalcitrant reality" (Ball 1997a: 317).

Recognising that Bridgepoint High defiantly escapes 'easy' explanations or analyses therefore reveals that the repeated enunciation of such simplistic evaluations only serves to mask an infinitely more complex 'truth'; that "what counts as good or bad ... rests on what qualities of institutions are valued" (Ball 1997a: 329).

Difficult Entries and Anxious Early Encounters

The first thing that strikes one about Bridgepoint High as you enter its reception area and are issued the photocopied school map that all newcomers receive, whether as a pupil, teacher, or indeed, as in my case, ethnographic researcher, is the sheer size of the place and the bewildering number of buildings that constitute the school campus. Encompassing at least twelve separately identified indoor structures as listed on the school plan, clustered centrally on a campus that also boasts a large multi-purpose sports hall, gymnasium, all-weather outdoor floodlit area, tennis courts, netball courts; extensive playing fields comprising three football pitches, three rugby pitches, two cricket squares, a specialist athletics area and, last but not least, a dedicated indoor heated swimming pool, it is with a palpable sense of trepidation that one embarks upon initial attempts to navigate routes within and around the school.

To add to this early atmosphere of confusion, there are five 'house', or year blocks, all assigned their own names, situated in amongst these various buildings, with some occupying spaces within the same structure, leading to a situation in which one building actually holds three 'blocks', and thus three separate 'house names', while another single structure contains two year cohorts and the corresponding two names assigned to them. Each year cohort

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numbered around three hundred pupils and the blocks served as a warm, dry refuge in inclement weather, so rainy lunchtimes and break times found large numbers of pupils noisily enclosed in these areas.

The air of barely controlled chaos at such times would be further underlined by the tension etched on the faces of the teachers charged with supervisory duties keeping a watchful eye for potential flashpoints. This was made quite evident to me on only my second day when, after enquiring where I might buy a sandwich at lunchtime, I was directed to the year 8 block, which necessitated negotiating an exit through one door and entry through another, both of which were policed by key-holding teachers who were there to maintain 'lockdown' in this informal mid-point in the day. Having purchased a rather dreary looking cheese salad roll, I then had to repeat the whole process once again through a heaving mass of young people clearly enjoying the opportunity to socialise with their classmates outside the constraints of the formal school timetable.

Having already discussed in considerable detail my early experiences of fieldwork at Bridgepoint High, I do not intend here to go over the same ground for fear of restating what has already been more than adequately addressed. Instead, I will confine myself to drawing attention to some of the more general early impressions the school made on me as I began the process of trying to find ways to immerse myself in the daily round of classroom activities. As previously mentioned, the size of the school itself, with its many different buildings and maze-like network of corridors that sometimes quite unknowingly took one into another block, presented a multitude of early problems. These

were undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that, unfortunately, I have absolutely no sense of direction and all too easily get lost in even familiar surroundings!

In their insightful discussion of the productive processes involved in ethnographic fieldwork, Emerson and colleagues (2001) observe that among the most common early strategies researchers often choose to employ is to take jotted notes openly in order to establish a 'note-taker' role that is clearly visible to participants. Having already experienced real difficulties finding anywhere in the school in the first few days (one particularly embarrassing fieldnote passage from this period describes 'asking directions to the staffroom'), I hit upon the idea of simply sitting in the main reception area during one afternoon and taking notes on the various comings and goings as they occurred in what, to all intents and purposes, is the fulcrum of the whole school.

For nearly two hours I jotted down observations as pupils came and went, sometimes sent by teachers because they were feeling unwell, or as a result of some infraction that required the attention of a more senior management figure, who would subsequently emerge from one of the adjacent offices and quietly beckon them inside, stirring uncomfortable resonances with some of my own less than exemplary school experiences. This period of observation produced a number of interesting insights, chief among them being that while the young people who came to sit in the chairs arranged around the circular reception area seemed unperturbed by my presence, one or two even engaging me in friendly conversation, the reaction of teachers was altogether more interrogatory and questioning of my motives.

During the lesson changeover that occurred at the halfway point in the exercise, a number of teachers, none of whom I had met at that juncture, stopped and gave me a quizzical glance as they handed over registers or other administrative material into reception, clearly wondering what exactly I was up to scribbling in a notebook for no discernible reason. This did not seem a particularly unusual reaction given that I was unknown to many of the staff and taking into consideration the fact that, while surveillance is now woven into the fabric of teachers' routine daily life (Gewirtz 1997; Helsby 1999), they are likely to be used to dealing with it on a formal procedural basis, in which a certain amount of notice and preparation time is allowed. But it made me wonder how I would have felt had I been a parent sat waiting for an appointment and feeling rather intimidated by being back in an institutional context in which memories were almost exclusively of failure. And this is not as unlikely a scenario as it sounds, for a great many of the parents I subsequently met through my contact with young people had in fact attended Bridgepoint High themselves, another frequently overlooked aspect of the cultural continuity of the estate that does not necessarily reflect positively on the school.

Towards the end of the exercise a more pronounced enquiry took place when the Deputy Headteacher, a bluff northern Irishman whom, along with the rest of the senior management team I had been introduced to only a few days earlier, came out of his office and, spotting me as he set off on some unknown task, promptly changed direction and strode over to where I was sat. "So you're here to study us are ye? What's the subject of your research?" Feeling quite nervous in what was still my first week of fieldwork, I rather guardedly muttered something about studying the culture of the school and its effects on pupils'

school experience. My notes record that the Deputy's response was a kind of half-frown and the parting remark that "maybe you should be looking at their individual attitudes to school and how good that is", before rushing off to his intended destination. This early indication of a tendency among teaching staff to locate deficiencies in individual pathology later became a recurring theme as "permutations of ... character deficiencies" (Willis 1997: 123) became "explanations-in-use" (1997: 125), conflating intelligence, motivation and behaviour in such a way that it shaped their subsequent expectations of pupils (Gillborn and Youdell 2000).

It would however, be grossly unfair to characterise all of my early encounters with staff as less than gracious as a number did go out of their way to greet me on friendly terms, including a Faculty Head, George Clinton, who from the outset was enthusiastic about the research and, as Head of Citizenship teaching at the school, expressed a keenness about getting me involved in supporting its delivery throughout all five year groups. Another senior teacher and one of the five Year Heads, Rod Munn, also extended a cordial handshake and warm welcome when I engaged him in conversation out on the sports field at the end of my first week. Whilst supervising a games period involving a football session, he and I chatted amiably for a while as he shouted encouragement to the group of boys playing, who, with all due respect to them, did not look as though they would be challenging for starting places in the school team in the near future. What they lacked in natural flair however, they more than made up for in effort, so I found it highly significant given the point made above that when he gestured with a wave of the arm over towards them

at the start of our impromptu meeting, he introduced them by announcing casually "these are all year 10 lads, low ability, but a nice bunch really".

It appeared that ongoing debates over the relative merits of mixed ability teaching versus whole school setting and streaming, as outlined in classic studies by Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981), had long been settled at Bridgepoint High, just as they have in most formerly 'comprehensive' schools under New Labour's imperative to 'raise standards' (Docking 2000; Phillips 2003). These evaluative frameworks for differentiating pupils, based on what Cremin and Thomas (2005) have termed 'contrastive judgements' and here matter of factly articulated by someone I came to know as a highly experienced and genuinely committed teacher, result in hierarchically ordered categorical ascriptions being "reinforced, stabilised and amplified" (Thomas and Loxley 2001: 86). Such judgements are projected into far reaching and sometimes only loosely connected aspects of pupil identifications, effectively fabricating "the disciplinary individual" (Foucault 1977: 308).

The practice of labelling pupils according to their perceived 'ability' was a visible reminder of just how deeply the influence of 'market-oriented performance pedagogies' (Arnot and Reay 2006) has penetrated into the 'regulative discourse' (Bernstein 2000) of school organisation in institutions where 'standards' are closely scrutinised. Nonetheless, in a generous gesture, Mr. Munn kindly invited me to join him over at his year block the following week to talk in more specific terms about sitting in on some classes and I agreed to the appointment thinking with some hope that this marked something of a breakthrough in my attempts to initiate 'first contact' with the pupil population.

Bright and early on the prearranged morning and time, I turned up outside Rob Munn's office keener than ever to see what he might be prepared to offer in the way of a viable 'research role', well aware that my efforts thus far elsewhere in the school had failed dismally to produce opportunities for classroom observation (see chapter 2). Finding his office door locked and the whole block unoccupied just minutes into the first period, I discovered an adjacent door open which led into an empty staff common room, one of which was located in every year block for use by teachers as an alternative to the main staffroom. Reluctant to stand outside Rob's office in a draughty corridor, I elected instead to take refuge in the common room and wait for him to arrive. Minutes later a woman entered the common room and appeared startled to see me sat quietly waiting for the Year Head. An attempt at a cheery "morning" accompanied by a broad smile did not seem to do much to put her at ease, and, after appearing slightly hesitant about what to do, she turned to me and said "I don't know you, who are you and what are you doing in here?".

I politely told her my name and the reason why I was there, already by now becoming accustomed to repeatedly having to introduce myself and provide a potted explanation of why I was spending every day attending Bridgepoint High. But this only seemed to ratchet up her growing anxiety even further, and she then more or less accused me of lying, saying "how do I know you're who you say you are?", repeating that she did not know me and had never seen me before. I remember having a distinct sense at this point that things were getting a little out of hand here, and that there was more than a little overreaction in this woman's demeanour. After all, while it was true that we had never actually met, something that was equally the case for about ninety five per cent of the staff

given that this was only my second week, I did recall having seen her on a number of occasions in the main staffroom, talking to middle and senior managers who knew all about my presence in the school and the work I was engaged in.

Desperately thinking of ways to prove to her that there was nothing to fear from me and that indeed we might soon even be working together, I tried placating her by proffering my name badge, which had been given to me by the Headteacher on my first day, and on which was prominently displayed the standard school name and logo as well as my name and the words 'visitor/researcher'. How glad was I at that moment that I had decided to keep it pinned on my jacket and not follow the example of the male teachers I had met so far, who all seemed to keep their name badges in their pockets, from where they could be strategically brandished at times of their own choosing. However, rather than mollifying the situation, this gesture only seemed to make this teacher feel even more insecure, possibly because she was now starting to sense her justification for challenging me in such an abrupt fashion was beginning to dissolve.

Her eyes flicked nervously around the room as she quickly reviewed her options. "Anyway, you shouldn't be in here ... I'll be leaving soon and you can't stay here on your own". This was an interesting observation given that, in contrast to the Year Heads' office, the door to this room had been open for anyone to wander into and plunder as they pleased, and this in a school that I had already found to be obsessive about locking doors not just to rooms but to whole buildings as well, even when they were crammed with people! However,

not wishing to add to this woman's obvious discomfort at my presence, I raised myself from the chair, picking up my bag as I did so and rested the strap on my shoulder. "Would you like me to leave?", I said, indicating towards the door which she happened to be obscuring. "I didn't say that, you're being confrontational" she now declared, the edginess clearly audible in her voice, although there was also a noticeable shifting of position away from the door. "Excuse me", I replied, straining to retain a calm exterior as I opened the door and left, relieved at being able to breathe fresh air as I walked out into the open, but struggling to comprehend exactly the reason why I had effectively been thrown out of an empty year block!

I have recounted this incident, which in itself was of minor significance and did not have any long term bearing on the work I was to eventually engage in during my time at Bridgepoint High, for two main reasons. The first is that, certainly at the time it occurred and even now with the benefit of a period in which to reflect, this encounter seemed to symbolize the highly ambiguous and problematic way that my presence was perceived by many of the staff in the school. While admittedly representing an extreme example of the wariness and thinly veiled suspicion with which I was viewed by a good many teachers, it was only but one of a series of more subtle questionings that took place in the early weeks of fieldwork as people responded cautiously to my attempts at establishing working relations that would impact on their professional routine. This is, to some degree at least, perfectly understandable, as secondary school teachers are incredibly busy people, saddled with a workload that denies the possibility of fitting everything in to what those in the wider working population would usually consider a 'normal' working week.

However, I would argue that there is something more insidious going on here than simply a case of a group of overworked teachers being inconveniently resistant to the imprecations of an academic researcher armed with a methodological agenda that, despite my best efforts at explication, seemed barely comprehensible to them. Thus, my second reason for relating this vignette is that, as exemplified by the aforementioned teachers' general attitude in our brief social encounter, hidden beneath this mountain of 'intensified labour' (Smyth et.al. 2000), much of which is generated by the 'rituals of verification' underpinning the 'audit culture' (Power 1994), lies the source of a much deeper malaise that has profoundly destabilised the ontological security that was once grounded in teachers' professionalised status and identity (Lawn 2000).

For while there is an abundant body of research attesting to the drastically 'deprofessionalizing' processes set in motion by educational reform in the last decade[9], teachers at Bridgepoint appeared doubly disenchanted by working as an 'entrepreneur of oneself' (Gordon 1991: 44) in the midst of an atmosphere of tension, anxiety, stress and discontent that seemed to pervade both staffrooms and all of the communal spaces in and around classrooms. A possible explanation for the palpable air of dissension running through the school was indirectly given to me very early on by none other than the Headteacher himself, who, in characteristically honest fashion, quite openly described his educational establishment in these blunt terms:

"I think this is a very challenging school to be honest with you

... and that's a nice word for it, y'know ... and I suspect the

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[9] See Woods et.al. (1997); Harris (1997); Helsby (1999); Bottery and Wright (2000); Smyth et.al. (2000); Mahony and Hextall (2000).

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teacher with thirty periods a week would call it a really tough

school ... with a capital F probably ..."

Compounding the perception among teachers that here was a school that would

not provide an 'easy ride' whatever the extent of one's experience was a related

concern over the essentially transient nature of the teaching population that has

become one of the defining features of schools positioned at this level in the

local market. For it soon became apparent that Bridgepoint suffered a

disturbingly high rate of staff turnover, the main consequence of which was little

evidence of *esprit d'corps* among teachers or loyalty towards the organisation

from staff members who had not ascended the higher reaches of the

management hierarchy.

This air of cynicism, largely directed towards the quality of management at the

school, was commonplace among the 'rank and file' staff. However, it was more

often voiced, at least in public, by those occupying lower echelon positions in

the vertical chain of command, who, while fulfilling various managerial roles, still

considered themselves full-time teachers as opposed to those they viewed as

managers that had more or less relinquished teaching duties. It was a feeling of

resentment and sometimes quite open hostility that I frequently heard being

justified in relation to the lack of support given to "them who actually 'ave to do it

every day" from the SMT (senior management team), of whom of course, the

Head was predictably the prime target for criticism.

These adversarial attitudes, perhaps the most obvious manifestation of what

has been claimed to be the 'proletarianisation' of the teaching profession (Apple

1986), are being made even more pointed by the emerging impact of more recent school reform. For the kind of moral imperative that is implicitly contained within contemporary managerialist regimes under which schools are now forced to comply (Merson 2001), places a much greater emphasis on 'personal responsibility' on the part of teachers to continuously improve themselves in ways appropriate to the systems' needs, however difficult that may actually be to achieve (Gleeson and Husbands 2003: 502-3). This seemed to me to give rise to what Bronwyn Davies (2003: 93), writing in the context of higher education, describes as:

"a lonely kind of responsibility and one that is driven by the almost subliminal anxiety and fear of surveillance rather than a sense of personal value within the social fabric".

So the very conditions under which teachers worked fuelled a heightened resentment against the multiplied gaze of an institution so big that one was constantly encountering new faces, as people drifted in and out of the institutional milieu, any sense of permanence or familiarity visibly undercut by the sheer contingency that underpinned many of one's social relationships among this shifting population of hierarchically differentiated staff. Andy Hargreaves (1994), commenting in an era when the reform agenda was mounting a sustained attack on teachers' professional identities, was highly critical of the shift towards forms of 'contrived collegiality' perceived as an inevitable response to the recasting of teaching in technical-rationalist terms.

A decade on though, even this degraded form of collegiality was found to be in relatively short supply at Bridgepoint High, as instrumentalism and a studied disengagement from the 'emotional labour' associated with teaching characterised the attitudes of many, though by no means all the staff, as they unapologetically deployed what Woods (1984) long ago identified as 'survival strategies', both for practical and for personal reasons. Partly, these tactics are pursued to afford some protection from the negative feelings of self-worth that arise in inevitably failing to live up to one's 'personal responsibilities'. But pragmatic acceptance and knowing when to adapt to local conditions is equally important, for here it must be remembered that teachers are trained to be rigorously practical in their preparation (Bottery and Wright 2000: 120). As Woods concludes:

"Teachers are stuck, and must do as best they can. What is at risk is not only his *(sic)* physical, mental and nervous safety and well-being ... but also continuance in professional life ... they cannot change the social order, they therefore must adapt. They must accommodate these problems. Where these problems are numerous and intense, accommodation will prevail over teaching" (Woods 1984: 50).

In such circumstances, research at Bridgepoint High was largely bound by the kind of relationships I could establish with this heterogeneous body of teachers, some of whom proved receptive while others saw me as just another form of externally imposed surveillance. What the consequences were of having large numbers of these anxious, over-worked and often extremely disgruntled

teachers delivering lessons to a pupil population with high levels of learning disadvantage soon became readily apparent, as I shall demonstrate by describing what I found upon entering classroom life at Bridgepoint High.

'It's mad in 'ere in'it sir! Staffrooms and classrooms

The first classes I attended at Bridgepoint were music lessons, involving girls and boys from years 9 and 10, following a personal invitation from Ellen Harker, who said that I might find it 'interesting' if I joined her during these timetabled periods. Ms. Harker was one of that growing band of people featuring ever more prominently in 'bottom strata' secondary schools, a technically unqualified supply teacher who was nonetheless working as a full-time teacher at Bridgepoint High. Talking in the staffroom immediately prior to setting off for our scheduled first lesson, she explained to me how she came to be working at the school:

> **E. H.** ... I signed on with the agency in August and within a
> week they told me I'd be here for the beginning of the year
> (September 2004). After about two weeks they asked me if I
> wanted to stay for the rest of term and that's why I'm still here.
> Ah suppose I'm kind of ... full-time supply if y'like, I have a full
> timetable and a tutor group ... but not actually employed by
> 'em. Mind you, ah would if they offered me it, I love it really ...
> an' apparently there's a really bad shortage of music teachers
> so y'never know ...

With a degree in music but with no formal teaching qualification, Ms. Harker was a prime example of what critics see as the 'casualisation' of teaching in this country, as private sector agencies compete to provide less qualified and unqualified staff to schools on a day by day basis, with none of the terms and conditions that are attached to full-time employment. This sector has expanded massively in recent years and is now a routine feature of the lower reaches of state education, provoking heated debate over the rising costs associated with using agency- provided supply teachers and claims from teaching unions that it results in a drastic lowering of teaching standards[10].

Certainly, there was a widespread reliance on supply teachers at Bridgepoint, primarily for the reason that has long been identified as particularly prevalent in estate-bound schools with largely working-class populations (Becker 1971). The problem here, as alluded to in the quote above, is the chronic shortage of teachers who are prepared to work at the school, and its desperate problem in recruiting and retaining staff given its location in the centre of an estate with a forbidding reputation. When one factors in the additional pressures of working in conditions of more or less permanent understaffing and the difficulties associated with 'carrying' a significant number of supply teachers every day, it is hardly surprising that levels of absenteeism were also high, which of course only accelerates the spiral by introducing yet more supply teachers into this volatile and stressful environment.

Among the ameliorative steps taken to offset this long-term systemic problem of teacher retention, which effectively constitutes a fundamental structural

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[10] See Grimshaw et.al. (2003).

disadvantage for schools like Bridgepoint, included a regular influx of PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) students invited in for their Teaching Practice to encourage them to return once qualified and apply for a full-time post. It was significant however, that far more energy (and resources) seemed to be flowing in the direction of the GTP scheme (Graduate Teaching Programme), whereby the school recruits its own trainees and pays them a salary while they are trained as teachers under the tutelage of in-house ASTs[11]. This, in fact, was how Bridgepoint generated most of its incoming teachers, and it was certainly true that without it the school would have had a major shortfall in staff levels during the period I was present in the school.

The programme was not without its own problems however, as I later discovered at one of their monthly meetings with the GTP coordinator, Ann Logan (from whom I received the invitation to attend), and in subsequent conversations with some of those present. The meeting, described at the outset by the coordinator as "a chance to discuss with your peers issues relating to teaching", quickly became a forum for various individuals to complain bitterly about control and management problems they were having with classes they regularly taught. A particular bone of contention were the regular daily patrols carried out by senior managers around the school, complete with two-way radios that linked them to the reception office, where messages could be relayed requesting assistance from classroom teachers[12]. The gist of their complaints seemed to be that the patrol hardly ever responded promptly enough, if they arrived at all, and often when they did, it was only to override a

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[11] This is the new grade of Advanced Skills Teacher, 'teacher' of teachers. See Smyth and Shacklock (1998: 154-191) for an illuminating critique.

[12] See also Chapter 2.

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teachers' decision and reintroduce a pupil that they had just excluded from the classroom.

The coordinator, a supremely self-confident and assertive woman with over twenty years teaching experience in both the United States and the UK, patiently explained to the group that the patrol was not there for their sole benefit, and indeed that it did not, in fact exist anywhere else in the city, nor possibly at Bridgepoint for much longer! Later, in her office, Ms. Logan expressed dismay at her charges' inability to exert sufficient control in their classes, suggesting to me that the supervisory patrol was an ill-advised 'crutch' they were using to mask their deficiencies as teachers. The tone of her remarks conveyed the definite impression that, at Bridgepoint High, classroom control and the exercise of what she termed 'behaviour management' topped the list of priorities in the training of their GTP teachers, with consequently much less weight being given to more holistic conceptions of education that place a pedagogical primacy on building relationships with pupils that can enhance both teaching and learning (Pomeroy 1999).

Importantly though, it offered initial clues as to the kind of socialisation processes being undertaken in relation to the schools' fledgling teachers and, in the way that certain normative standards were selectively valorised over others, provided a momentary glimpse of the wider teaching culture as it existed in the school, as well as the nature of the values and beliefs that underpinned it. I will be returning to this issue in a later chapter in which I demonstrate in much more depth the paradoxical effects this 'cultural ethos' had on school-based relations between teachers and pupils. This brief

enthusiastic attempts to interest the pupils in some basic music theory were well-intentioned, such as a lesson the class responded well to, in which she conducted a 'pub quiz' playing musical extracts while the pupils tried to guess from a list which 'genre' they were listening to. But it was significant that this class marked an act of compromise on her part, as the more formal lesson plans she started out with were soon ditched in favour of activities that, as she put it to me, "at least keeps 'em quiet". Adaptations therefore, as highlighted in other recent research (see Lupton 2004), arose out of a need to exercise control and avoid the major disruption that disengagement often results in.

Over the following weeks, the need to 'keep 'em quiet' took precedence over any effort to engage the young people in participatory or interactive forms of learning, to the extent that worksheets and wordsearches became the only activity presented to these classes, although ironically, they were almost always accompanied by music! For it was not at all the case that the pupils did not like music, or were unwilling to participate in talking about it, far from it in fact, but it was the way it had been presented to them that had caused them to disengage. Ms. Harker's dutiful attempts to deliver an academically oriented form of 'musical appreciation' had foundered precisely because it rendered music into a sterile theoretical topic, something the class had collectively been unable to recognise. In effect, it had turned music into just another subject among all the others that these young people had evidently been finding little that was worthwhile or meaningful in.

J. S. 'Ow does this compare to the other lessons y'do then ...
d'ya get wordsearches to do in them as well?

digression on the dominant form of 'teacher subjectivity' exhibited at the school has been necessary in order to highlight the teaching approach generally experienced by pupils in the classroom setting, an apt point at which to return to Ms. Harker's music lessons and a revealing snapshot of how this plays out in practice when what is taught appears to hold no relevance for its intended audience.

Over the remainder of the winter term, I regularly attended classes involving a large, mixed group of year 9 girls and boys, along with another smaller group of year 10 pupils held later the same morning. The year 9 class were an extremely boisterous group with a clearly identifiable cadre of dominant boys sat across the front row of desks and a smaller circle of girls who always made a point of sitting together. The really striking thing that quickly became evident as I observed a number of these lessons was just how disengaged many of these young people (average age 13-14) already were by the idea of learning and thoroughly disenchanted with the prospect of spending their day at the school. This manifested itself in a number of ways. It would usually take the teacher anything up to ten or fifteen minutes just to establish sufficient order to actually begin her lesson, such was the girls and boys' reluctance to participate in the class.

Nothing too surprising there, one might suggest, just young people being typical teenagers in testing the formal boundaries of the conventional classroom situation. And if this had been Maths, English or Science, I would have to agree, but this was not one of those core academic subjects - it was music, taught by someone who was passionate about the subject. Ms. Harker's

Ben. Yea, a lot of 'em we do, but ther' better than 'avin t'copy out 'a books all the tarme coz that's really borin' ... all them notes we 'ad t'copy an' stuff ...

John. We get t'listen t'music 'ere though, so it's better than some 'o the other stuff we do ... at least Miss let's us 'ave CD's on ...

Danny. (interrupting) Some 'o the others just want 'ur t'sit quiet an' not say 'owt!

Ben. Yea, it's mad 'ere in it sir ...

This exchange occurred in the course of a lesson in which these boys had spent long periods talking among themselves and to me about the music that was playing in the background, and yet they had shown no enthusiasm for Ms. Harker's lesson plans that centred on musical notation or the formal structures of orchestral music. Nor was this about any lack of capability on the part of the teacher, who seemed professionally competent and knowledgeable about her subject. Rather, the gap, as it appeared to me, seemed to be in the 'strong framing' (Bernstein 1990) of pedagogical knowledge that offered little discretion for pupils to learn through a mode of engagement that carried meaning in an appropriate cultural context. Learning about music, in the context of this curricula format, had been constructed as separate and not to be confused with examples of current popular cultural forms, such as the latest chart hits, as though one could only learn about the subject through classical or traditional

forms, with popular culture appropriated as background 'musak' to perform an essentially 'babysitting' function. The alienating nature of centrally prescribed technicist forms of subject-based school knowledge, even transposed to something as sensuous and emotionally affecting as music, had failed to connect with these youngster's working-class experiences and identities. And as Bob Connell (1994: 140) has noted:

"Each particular way of constructing the curriculum ... carries social effects. Curriculum empowers and disempowers, authorizes and de-authorizes, recognizes and mis-recognizes different social groups and their knowledge and identities".

However, it would be quite wrong to attribute this to the professional qualities of one particular teacher. For the pressure placed on Ms. Harker to deliver highly circumscribed curricular objectives in terms of the form and content of lessons had been made clear to me quite early on, as we often had coffee together between classes on this particular day. The Head of Department, she told me, had been insistent about issuing strict instructions on what was to be covered in the course of the term, and as a casual/full-time member of the team she was in no position to quibble about the matter in any way, shape or form. In addition, she also confided that the Department Head had picked out certain pupils from her own classes and placed them in Ms. Harker's group, a process that simultaneously removed all the most challenging or lowest performing pupils from her teaching load and 'dumped' them in the supply teacher's lap.

Nor could the Department Head be entirely castigated for acting in a way that merely mirrored the school's own desperate efforts to comply with government expectations regarding learning. And although one might question the practice of 'screening' one's own classes for 'undesirables', I later found that this was also a fairly common practice within individual subject areas, and something that supply teachers in particular were all too aware of in making up the majority of the groups they would be teaching. Thus, lower 'sets' more often appeared to be taught by NQT (newly qualified teachers) or supply staff, while 'top sets' tended to be the domain of the senior teachers, a natural enough tendency for 'like' to attract 'like' that actually, without any intentional malice, consigns those most in need of experienced teaching to those least capable of providing it. The net effect, as Linda Milbourne (2002: 330) has noted, is that:

"The least advantaged are the greatest losers. They enter

the education market on unequal terms since they have

fewest social and learning advantages and they leave at

greater disadvantage".

SUMMARY

In this final section I have chosen to provide an account of a series of music classes that I would argue were broadly representative and set the trend for many of the lessons I observed while working at Bridgepoint High. As such, they offer an opening snapshot of classroom experience from the pupil's point of view that adds to the earlier discussion of the culture of teaching and the

kind of approach taken in delivering school-based subject knowledge. Apart from these classes, I also attended lessons right across the curriculum for Years 8, 9 and 10 and by and large most classes would consist of the same relationship patterns and features betraying a basic antagonism between teachers and pupils that prevented any degree of understanding to develop. By this I mean that most of the lessons I sat in on were characterised by a similar mixture of boisterousness arising out of boredom by many pupils along with a struggle for control of the classroom that often flared into heated verbal exchanges and not infrequent physical confrontation. An aggressive tendency towards conflict and abusive behaviour marked the relations that structured classroom life, resulting in an authoritarian management style designed to maintain authority amid what often seemed to be a surrounding atmosphere of chaos.

This authoritarianism, mirrored in didactic teaching styles that persistently produced boredom and increases in disruptive behaviour, encapsulated a belief that control was paramount and that if only they could 'get control' everything would be all right. In reality however, the reverse was actually the case, setting in train a spiral of intolerance and basic lack of trust or respect that only served as justification for repeated calls to strengthen the regime That this was not a pleasurable or fulfilling experience for either party did not require much in the way of analysis, for one could see it in the faces of even experienced teachers after an especially difficult lesson, and in the resentment of the young people who felt that they were not being afforded any input into decision-making regarding their learning. In fact, I was hardly the only person to have drawn this

conclusion, for George Clinton too articulated his own awareness and concern over the potential for conflict it in the course of a subsequent interview.

George, who has worked at Bridgepoint High for nearly twenty years and is, like myself, a lifelong Crownport native, started out as a History teacher before throwing his considerable energies and intellect into developing the Citizenship curriculum across the whole school as principle AST for Citizenship. This is a role he is eminently qualified to handle as he also acts as an LEA consultant advising the city's other secondary schools on the delivery of Citizenship courses, putting him in a unique position to comment on how he read the situation at Bridgepoint. Thus, I feel it is worth concluding with this teacher's thoughts on what he saw as difficult times ahead. For the experience of rolling out a completely new curriculum area had provoked a questioning on his part of the established way that things were being done, and whether it continued to have any relevance in the current context which we find ourselves in:

> **G. C.** I think that things like Citizenship, that are asking the kids
> to think independently, and by that I mean independently of
> necessarily everything the teachers says, are massively
> different from the diet most of them undergo in lessons .... most
> of it is teacher-directed stuff, where the teacher has a very high
> ego-state and comes in and says 'well, here's what we're going
> to do' and steers every step of the lesson ...

> **J. S.** Y're saying chalk and talk is still the preferred method in a
> lot of cases?

G. C. Erm ... well, preferred by who, yea ... preferred by a lot of the teachers I don't doubt ...when the pupils have a chance to input teaching and learning styles then things are gonna change. I'm almost thinking that we, in this school, ought to completely stop everything that we're doing and look again ... I don't think that a school in this position where we can't avoid these league table things, to go on doing it like the other schools in the pelaton ... we can't go on doing that ... not trying to bodge along the way we are.

Clearly, major issues surrounding how education was being conceived at Bridgepoint High resulted in a school 'ethos' that was obsessively geared to the monitoring and driving upwards of exam performance, leading to approaches and styles of teaching that reflected institutionally context-specific anxieties felt over the 'pressure to perform'. The reverberations caused by this relentless imperative to 'continuously improve' manifested itself on a daily basis in heated and contentious classroom relations, something quite evidently acknowledged at least by some of the more experienced teachers at the school. And while I have only just begun to scratch the surface of what this meant for the young people of the Bridgepoint estate, in Part Three I intend to explore in more detail how these processes impacted on older pupils as they approached the uncertain prospects faced upon leaving school. However, before doing this, it is high time we shifted the focus to another national setting, by moving overseas for the next stage of this ethnographic journey, located in the very different cultural context of the Republic of Ireland.

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Schooling in Ireland

The movement to introduce more inclusive school practices into state education systems is an international, and indeed global phenomenon, with the emancipatory vision of bringing previously excluded children into the remit of ordinary state schooling continuing to be a dominant theme on the international political stage. Perhaps this is because it is now widely understood that not investing in education is an extremely short-sighted strategy and that spending on schooling is the single most effective way of improving the living standards, health and economic prospects of the whole population (Mittler 2000). Indeed, the economic and developmental imperative to embrace an inclusive orientation was explicitly underlined in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), which declared that inclusive education provided the most efficient and cost effective model of state schooling yet devised.

Social scientists working in education therefore display a growing interest in the degree to which the basic citizenship right of a comprehensive and thorough education are extended to all, regardless of differences based on 'race', class, gender or disability (Armstrong et.al. 2000a: 1). But inclusions, and its obverse of social exclusion, are not uniform categories; they are shaped by historical, cultural and contextual influences, the complexity of which must be explored in each individual case. One way of gaining an insight into these complexities is to

look at how things are done elsewhere, by adopting a comparative lens to investigate how neighbouring countries utilise varying approaches that take account of local meanings and practices (Booth and Ainscow 1998).

This is particularly useful in Western Europe, where the dominant presence of the European Union acts as a constantly harmonising (and thus discursively homogenising) force that can give the impression that there is only one national perspective, giving rise to a set of 'one size fits all' practices that are generalisable across a diverse range of countries. But one of the primary purposes in conducting a comparative study is to look beyond the national level of policy and detail the nuances of culturally specific contexts, and the meanings and practices arising from them. The real power of such a perspective is to provoke a reconsideration of 'why things are they way they are', by making the strange familiar and thus making what is familiar strange (Delamont 1992).

In the case of this enquiry, the use of an analytical frame of this nature held a particular attraction as the UK element of this research study had been carried out somewhere I, as an individual, was only too familiar with, a school that, in many respects, was just like the one I attended myself during my own compulsory state education. Making something this 'familiar' strange would have to involve conducting research somewhere else entirely, somewhere that could offer a different point of view that would nevertheless still stand up to meaningful comparison. Moreover, accumulating data elsewhere holds out the promise of providing insights into the way that basic concepts like education, inclusion, social justice or even childhood itself are attributed different meanings

that are culturally and contextually bound. This offers a further possibility for explanatory processes to be revealed, in analysing why certain practices vary in otherwise similar institutional settings.

The Republic of Ireland was thus chosen as a suitable research destination for a number of reasons. As fellow members of the EU, Ireland, like the UK, enjoys the same trading conditions and benefits as all other member states, but is unique in having experienced massive economic expansion in the two decades since its initial entry, culminating in an economic growth rate between 1995-2000 of 10% compared with the EU average of 2.5% (Lynas 2004). But while marvelling at the Republic's extraordinary recent ascent into the front rank of leading financial players, we should also remember that the prosperity of the 'Celtic Tiger'[1] economy sprang from an extremely low economic base that reflected the huge disparities in power and influence that were the ongoing legacy of a longstanding colonial relationship.

One of the most potent legacies of colonialism that has proved remarkably resistant to change is the continued dominance of the English language, which has increasingly marginalised the official first language of Irish despite its foundational status in Irish cultural nationalist ideology[2], and a successive government commitment to retain it as a core educational component in the state curriculum. But even an expenditure currently estimated to be around five hundred million euros a year in Irish schools seems unlikely to diminish the enduring 'national uncertainty' over the language (Holden 2005), or halt Irish's

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[1] See Sweeney (1998) and MacSharry and White (2000). For more critical accounts, see Waters (1997) Allen (2000) and Coulter and Coleman (2003).

[2] See O'Tuachaigh (2005).

terminal decline in the face of a globally hegemonic English language media network beamed direct into Irish homes twenty four hours a day.

As a result, only one per cent of the population, mainly in the fior-Gaeltach (Irish territory) regions, today use Irish as a first language, and this figure itself is falling with an increasing rate of rural-urban migration. Thus, proximity to the more populous neighbour means that England remains a highly significant and pervasive influence on Irish popular culture nearly a hundred years after the formation of the Irish Free State. And much of this media onslaught is, of course, commercially oriented, with the Republic now a burgeoning cash-rich target for transnational companies, having become what Terence Brown (2004: 184) dryly terms "a willing recruit to the consumer society". No longer can Ireland in any sense be regarded as the 'poor relation' perched on the periphery of Europe, with negligible spending power and little in the way of disposable income.

Today, things are indeed very different. Ireland is presented, and presents itself, as the success story of the European project, in its willingness to change and adapt to new ideas and enthusiastically embrace the potentially problematic notion of 'European-ness'. At the same time, the country has relentlessly exploited significant markers of Irish identity in marketing 'Ireland' as a 'branded cultural artefact' (Brown 2004: 400) throughout the global consumer marketplace. Thus, the contemporary image of Ireland as a vibrant young entrepreneurial state, completely at ease with itself and its headlong gallop into late modernity at the forefront of a new Europe, contrasts strongly with the UK's apparent reluctance to cast off its imperialist past, typified by a persistent

reticence on the part of the population to commit to the consequences of monetary union. In fact, it is in no small measure as a reaction to this deep-seated contrast in attitudes towards Europe that many Irish people now feel a considerable sense of pride in the knowledge that their country is now ranked as one of the wealthiest in Europe (Coulter 2003: 3). For some, this is a vindication for many of the privations and sacrifices made in the long distant, and more recent, past. Articulating this 'traumatic memory' (Gibbons 2002: 97) in order to fully appreciate the good times is a reflection of an Irish society that is so enamoured of its rise to international prominence that it draws heavily on what Joseph Cleary (in Brown 2004: 403) describes as "invocations of the darkness of the past to validate its sense of its own enlightenment".

However, Ireland does have one thing in common with the UK that it is less likely to be congratulated upon, something that casts a long dark shadow over its widely celebrated economic success. As the country has maintained the pace of growth and expansion first seen in the early 1990s, distributions of wealth and income have become increasingly uneven as rising inequalities have signalled a shift in the location and intensity of social and economic disadvantage, exacerbating demographic trends already set in motion (Allen 2003). From a historical situation of widespread rural poverty, a rapid process of urbanisation focused concern on a worsening situation in which urban deprivation, drug use and criminality had quickly become endemic on the vast housing estates surrounding Dublin, Limerick and other major Irish cities (Fennell 1983; O'Malley 1983).

For some commentators, this deepening social exclusion, which for a number of years has disproportionately affected children and households with a single adult (Walsh 1997), is a direct consequence of the neo-liberal economic policies followed by successive Irish governments, who have ruthlessly pursued rapid economic growth rather than enhancing the social welfare of the whole population[3]. And as Denis O'Hearn (1998: 146) has presciently noted, this does not bode well for the prospects of confronting the problem of social exclusion in the early years of the twenty-first century:

"The final indictment of the 'Celtic Tiger' is that economic growth may have provided the resources to begin to really tackle poverty, yet the policies that brought economic growth have made Irish policy makers *less* rather than more able to address poverty even by its more moderate definitions" (authors italics).

In its rapid ascent to the top of the European pecking order of youthful, thrusting entrepreneurial nations eager to enjoy, and exploit, the full range of opportunities afforded by membership of the continent's new elite, Ireland has acquired on its way a few of the structural problems found in its larger and more heavily populated neighbour. For behind the triumphant headlines announcing irrefutably that Ireland has finally arrived on the world stage, there are many unreported stories waiting to be published detailing the widening disparity between those who have done well, and those who, having not been invited to the party, did not partake in the economic 'miracle'[4]. As an example, recent figures suggest that nearly 23% of the Irish population of just over four million

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[3] See O'Riain (2000); Cantillon et.al. (2001); Kirby (2002); Allen (2003); O'Toole (2003).
[4] See O'Toole (2003).

are officially classified as 'at risk of poverty' (CSO 2003), according to OECD criteria. On the urban peripheries, just as in the UK, these numbers rise steeply as the combination of unemployment and alienation spreads through 'ghetto' like estates that have also been found to have Europe's lowest allocation of resources and facilities (Power 1998).

In this kind of social context, education has a even more crucial role to play in preventing Irish children from suffering forms of social exclusion that arise from a lack of sustained engagement with the school system. This is of the utmost importance in working-class urban areas especially, where, as we have already seen, young people are substantially more at risk of experiencing the sort of economic disadvantages that can impact directly on their chances of grasping the educational opportunities offered by schools (CSO 2003). Such a situation would appear to demand that an inclusive approach to education is adopted, for, in a country where religious divisions have traditionally occupied far more attention than those based on social class, it is only through embracing the needs of all pupils that newly emerging asymmetries can be confronted and eventually challenged. In investigating the possibility of finding research sites where attempts are being made to forge inclusive practices in a way that directly addresses the problematic nature of working-class education, I suppose I hoped to stumble upon something that looked, and felt, like a different kind of schooling, something that might just provide some answers to the questions posed by researchers like myself.

Urged on by those like Len Barton (1998: 84-5), who argues that "Existing school systems, in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching

expectations and styles ... will have to change", we are curious to see for ourselves what such a process might look like from the point of view of the staff and pupils experiencing it. So, having identified a school in a similar social environment and comparable geographical location to that found at the English school studied, I embarked on a journey of discovery not really certain what I would find. The only certainty would be that, in learning more about how Irish education plays out in schools, I would also gain a deeper insight into the 'familiar' territory of schooling in England.

A Note on Method in Ireland

Conducting ethnographic research requires deploying practices that allow participants' perspectives and knowledge to emerge. This then shapes the development and formulation of subsequent research interests and the practices pursued in further efforts to gain greater understanding. The mode by which I intended to access these perspectives, as it had been in England, was to be my own physical presence in the school, a presence undeniably replete with personal and professional history and the associated emotions, reflections and responses bound up in that particular trajectory. The research conducted at St.Oliver's therefore, which encompassed almost the entire school year of 2004-5, is thoroughly infused with my own 'positive presence' (Coffey 1999) and my interpretation of relationships, interactions and events as they unfolded. In concentrating on a specific area of study, adopting a particular theoretical position, and enquiring and analysing in one way rather than another, I have to accept ultimate responsibility for the social practices deployed in 'creating' this world through representation (Usher 1996: 34-5).

But my involvement would have been little more than perfunctory, and probably unremittingly tedious, without the wholehearted participation of the research community in my extended participant observations, by unconditionally accepting my sustained presence in their school. When, at the invitation of Ian Miller, the School Principal, I made an initial two-week visit to St. Oliver's Community College in May 2004, many of the teaching staff I met at that time expressed some curiosity about what I would actually be doing when I rejoined them later in August at the start of the new school year.

My response was to tell them that I would be fully prepared to do whatever they wanted me to do, get involved in anything they wished me to get involved in, and generally participate in anything they asked, simply to become immersed in the day-to-day life of the school. I am happy to report that, displaying considerable acuity and sharpness of memory, they took my remarks quite literally at face value, and subsequently showered me with invitations to every kind of activity connected to St. Oliver's, and one or two only tenuously so. "Just come along to any of my classes whenever you're free … you don't have to ask first … just turn up". This quote, made by a senior teacher in my first week at school, could be multiplied many times over, and exemplifies the relaxed and collegial attitude shown towards my prolonged intrusion into their daily routine.

Nor should I exempt the pupil population in this regard either, as they proved to be extraordinarily tolerant of my persistent 'loitering with intent' and uninvited interjections into their informal conversations, characteristically displaying a disarming mix of outgoing assertiveness, affability and genuine good humour throughout my time in their school. How perceptive did one female teacher

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prove to be, when, in responding to my expressed wish to devote time to conversing with pupils, she replied "Oh, you won't have any problem getting them to talk to you ... it's getting them to stop that's usually the problem ...". The net result of this congenial working atmosphere was that I was able to play a full part in the life of the school, and not only through the passive observation of classroom interactions and social relations.

For as Judith Okely (1992: 16) reminds us, "Participant observation does not mean mere observation, but often shared labour", and many of the staff and pupils allowed me the freedom to adopt a more active role as a teaching assistant in their classes, as well as inviting me along to accompany them on a variety of outings and excursions in and around the city, as well as further afield. Many afternoons were therefore spent shivering on rain swept Irish sports fields cheering on 'our' soccer, hurling or football teams, while visits to Art galleries, museums and leisure centres (along with a frankly unhealthy number of fast food outlets) also featured heavily in my regular weekly duties. I also colluded with a staff member who acted as fellow conspirator in carving out for myself a hurriedly instituted role as 'refreshments supervisor' during 'after hours' open evenings and parent-teacher meetings, which offered me a fantastic opportunity to meet and talk with many of the parents of the young people I spent the school day with.

Through these, and a myriad other unashamedly 'opportunistic' ethnographic practices, I laboured long in the field of ethnographic fieldwork, to piece together a picture that reflects the contingent reality of life in St. Oliver's during the time I spent with its staff and pupils. And it is to me that the task of interpretation now

ultimately falls as the opinions, statements of 'fact' and spontaneous utterances of my research 'others' are sifted and perused to bring some kind of coherence to the tale I wish to impart. Naturally, this means the personal perspective once more comes to the fore, just as it has throughout the entire research process. But to claim otherwise, or simply feign ignorance of the implications of such a stance, would be to fatally undermine the plausibility and veracity of the account that follows, and furthermore, do a serious injustice to my co-workers' and their unstinting efforts to assist me in getting to know their world just 'a small bit' better.

By way of introducing the substantive topic of this chapter, the next section consists of a brief description of the school in question and its surrounding environment, in order to provide a contextualised backdrop for the material that follows. By pointing out some of the similarities and differences between the two research sites at this early stage, my intention is to begin to sketch out the grounds on which comparisons can be made, while recognising at the outset that every school has its own unique circumstances, and an equally singular set of assets at its disposal with which to confront them.

THE SCHOOL AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

St. Oliver's Community College sits on the brow of a steep hill, nestled unobtrusively within the confines of a large housing estate situated high up on the north side of the major Irish city of Cove. Gazing out from the school affords one a scenic vista combining green rolling hills and the sharply contrasted

urban landscape of the city as it spreads out down below. From here, the panorama is dominated by the gaggle of construction cranes that tower over the city, these vertical interruptions in the skyline a telltale sign that there is a building boom currently underway in what is one of the largest urban centres in Ireland. However, the sense of place one gets from this viewpoint very much reflects the attitudes of locals towards their 'urban' neighbours down in the centre of the city, something convincingly articulated to me by a resident with a deep knowledge of the recent history of the area. As she put it,

> "they've never considered themselves part of the city ... I mean, from the bottom of the hill it's only ten minutes walk from the centre of town, and yet they never considered themselves city, they always considered themselves rural ... had more in common with the rural".

The school itself is small by English standards, compact and considerably less imposing than Bridgepoint's High school's somewhat 'brutalist' high-rise blocks. An interlinked line of neat, white-painted, single story buildings topped with unusual asymmetrical slant-roofing sit adjacent to the road, separated from a large, gently sloping sports field by an oval-shaped tarmac driveway encircling a small car park. As one might expect given the school's smaller scale, the population of this Community College is far less than that found at Bridgepoint High, numbering around five hundred pupils during the period of the study. This is a figure that has been on the increase over the two years prior to my arrival, following a prolonged period of dwindling school rolls, in which the pupil population fell from a peak of over seven hundred to a low point of around four

hundred and fifty. I quote these figures not simply of out thoroughness, but because their significance extends well beyond the mundane ebb and flow implied in a straightforward reporting of pupil numbers, and tells us something important about the recent history of the school that will have both material and expressive ramifications in much of what will follow.

The first aspect of significance is that the school's recent success in getting the registered population over the critical five hundred mark has triggered the release of funding that had been denied it during the years when the roll slid beneath that magic number. This is beginning to have a number of positive benefits for the whole school, as attracting such resources is very much a circular process, with rising numbers tending to free up more funding, which in turn makes the school a more attractive proposition for local families eager to avail themselves of those resources. St. Oliver's 'stock' therefore, to employ the argot of the financial markets, is definitely on the up in what is generally claimed to be a 'resource-poor' area of public sector provision.

But probably the most significant aspect of the recent history of St. Oliver's occurred during that period of diminishing numbers. A suspected arson attack caused considerable damage to the school, an event closely followed by the retirement of the long serving School Principal, who had been at the helm since its opening in 1983. The subsequent appointment of a new Principal from a neighbouring school in 2003 has since coincided with a rapid upsurge in pupil numbers, along with the aforementioned upturn in the amount of funding available to the school, which has served to compliment the refurbishments carried out in the immediate aftermath of the fire. In any event, according to the

most recent statistics available, accommodating over five hundred pupils in St. Oliver's has now taken it slightly above the national average for a second level (the equivalent to secondary level in England) school in Ireland (DES 2003). This is in a national context where there is a traditional tendency for smaller educational establishments, given that the total population of the country has only very recently risen above four million.

St. Oliver's itself is a joint project between the local Catholic Diocese and the area VEC (Vocational Educational Committee), a state-run body which, since 1972, has been charged with the running of vocationally oriented schools generally located in areas where new city housing schemes were ill-served by existing educational provision (Brown 2004: 241). Although funded by the VEC, St. Oliver's is actually administered by a twelve-strong board of management consisting of representatives from the VEC and the Catholic Church, as well as members representing parents, teachers and the local community, who all serve a three-year term of office prior to submitting for reselection.

To say that St. Oliver's is situated in the middle of a housing estate is, in truth, something of a misnomer. In actual fact, it is really an agglomeration of smaller, uncoordinated developments that have sprung up over the last twenty years and now encircle much of the surrounding hillside, as it slopes steeply down and merges into the much longer established north side district of Greenmere, one of the oldest areas of housing in the city. Made up of a series of additions and extensions to the original development at the top of the hill, the estate is nowadays more commonly known as Ballygowan, as this signifies the whole area and not just one cluster of houses within a larger residential location.

The Ballygowan estate is largely privately owned and might generally be categorised as comfortably working-class, with occupations falling along traditionally gendered lines. This chiefly involves the building trades and construction industry, engineering and small-scale self-employment, while many local women work in the service and retail sector, including the 'mall-style' Greenmere Shopping Centre that opened for business during the fieldwork period. For any newcomer arriving at the school for the first time, they would be struck, as was I, by the neatness of the homes in the surrounding drives and closes, the well-maintained gardens competing for the attention of the passer-by with their displays of brightly coloured flowers, and the uniquely Irish take on the choice of kitsch ornamental figurines carefully arranged amid these eye-catching blooms.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the presence of recently constructed houses in close proximity to the school would mean that this is an area with little in the way of disadvantage, or any of the problems usually associated with inner-city urban decay. I say this in the light of my own experience of making exactly this kind of assumption on my first visit to the school, when I talked to the Principal about the idea of gaining access to conduct this study. Having read my initial proposal, and listened at some length to what I told him about my research in England, Ian Miller quickly disabused me of the notion that this was an entirely homogenous, relatively affluent school population:

"You'd be surprised y'know ... some a'dem are well off ... but there's lots of others aren't ... it goes right across the spectrum here and with some the levels [of disadvantage are] frightening, y'know?".

Appearances can indeed be deceptive, and what seems to be the case is that there is a very wide range of social and economic circumstances experienced by families living in the catchment area of the school, resulting in a highly differentiated pupil population that closely mirrors the increasingly divided population of the city as a whole. But the major division in the school, the one felt by everyone, pupils and staff alike, is the sense of cultural identity generated by their location on the north side of the city, which has long been thought of as 'rough' or 'common' by residents on the south side of the river.

For many 'norries', as those residing on the north side are disparagingly known, being a north-sider means dealing with the expectations of what one young man of my acquaintance called "them 'posh', 'snobby' types that live over by the university". For him, this meant emphasising loyalty to the north side, through what, to these English ears at least, seemed to be an even more impenetrable accent than elsewhere in the city, and by treating 'the other side' as though it were a foreign country, which culturally at least, it must indeed have appeared to him, and many more like him. In this fierce sense of pride and belonging, generated as a response to being ascribed a stigmatised collective cultural identity, I found many parallels with the situation encountered in England. For there was a remarkable consonance with the way young people on the Bridgepoint estate also wore these imputed identities like a badge of honour,

refashioning generalised taunts about stereotypical behaviour and rearticulating them as a resource through which to construct a shared identity based on their occupation of a particular social and cultural location.

So while it was always intended that the two schools under study would have enough similarities, in terms of their location and pupil intake, to make viable comparison possible, I was to be repeatedly surprised at the number of common characteristics that the two cities shared, and the correspondingly close sense of identity and character that grew from such congruous experiences. But the real question that I had travelled to find the answer to was to see if these many resemblances were being reproduced at the level of the school, where a Europe-wide political consensus on the need to promote inclusion would appear to ensure a degree of commensurability in national policy discourse.

What I was really there to investigate however, was how this ramifies through the system and plays out in the corridors and classrooms at ground level, as it is mediated by the localised structure of beliefs and norms that operate in this particular cultural context. Given the obvious differences in size and scale between the UK and Ireland, and the possible gap in finances that might therefore result, would the Irish system have the money, or indeed the will, to wholeheartedly promote inclusive practices in schools to combat the growing inequality that is accompanying Ireland's rise as a global economic player? And if that will is not present, what are the consequences for the young people who are likely to be marginalised by a premature disengagement with schooling? Do

they, in resisting the potentials proffered by education, forego the opportunity to participate in the glowing future planned for Europe's 'star turn'?

Initial (and Initiatory) Impressions

According to Terry Eagleton (1999: 94), the distinguished literary scholar and regular commentator on Irish history and culture, "the Irish are well-known for their respect for learning". As evidence of how deep-seated this respect is, he points to the eighteenth century phenomenon of 'hedge schools', in which children were taught out in the open countryside at a time when Catholics were forbidden from running schools[5]. Fortunately, hedge schools have long ago passed into history, but Eagleton's claim is nonetheless well founded, for even today the Irish generally put a high value on the principles of formal education, although these days the state pays for the buildings where it can take place, in a country well known for its dampness and more than its fair share of precipitation. Exactly how much the Irish government spends on education these days however, is a cause of considerable contemporary concern, as attention is inevitably drawn to the widening discrepancy between soaring rates of economic growth and current rates of spending on education and schools.

As Paddy Healy, current president of the main Irish teaching union, the TUI, caustically remarked in a speech made following the publication of an annual OECD report on education, how does one explain to an outsider why it is that a country with a budget surplus of over seven billion euros currently ranks 21st out of 27 countries in its spending on second level education as a proportion of GDP. Pressing home his point, Healy went on to argue that factoring in first

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[5] See Kiberd's (1995) account of the colonial 'invention' of Ireland.

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(primary) level spending only made things look even worse, with only Slovakia keeping Ireland from being rooted in bottom place on 18% of GDP, when the OECD average is 26% (TUI 2005a, 2005b).

Certainly, it does seems as though the Irish governments' spending over the last few years of record-breaking growth has prioritised a modernising agenda of road building (sixteen billion euros already committed) and IT (rolling out broadband across the country) while opting to place less emphasis on investing in an education system that already has, whether justified or not, a worldwide reputation for academic excellence. This reputation, voiced to me at an early stage in this project by a senior academic with considerable experience of Irish education, was, it must be said, intriguing enough to become a key factor in deciding to seek out a comparable research site in Ireland, where one might observe at close quarters the workings of this 'world-class system' in action.

However, such concerns were not at the forefront of my attention as I arrived at St. Oliver's on the first day of the new school year in early August 2004. Irish schools operate on the basis of a dual cycle system, the Junior cycle occupying the first three years of a pupil's education between the ages of 12-15, culminating in the Junior Certificate state examination. Following this, pupils go on to a two or three year Senior cycle from 15-18 which leads to the terminal state examination of post-primary education, the Leaving Certificate. Whether two or three years is taken for the Senior cycle depends on whether the school offers the optional Transition Year, which allows pupils the chance to 'try out' different subjects on a rotation basis, as a way of preparing for the Leaving Cert.

In addition, broader educational inputs such as work experience are also included, without the pressure of formal examinations during the course of that year. Transition Year was quite a controversial addition to Irish education, although it is now thoroughly embedded in the state system, with a declared aim of fostering "maturity, with an emphasis on personal development, social awareness, and skills for life" (DES 2005a: 13). The prominence given here to equipping young people with the capacities for active engagement in all aspects of society has, as I intend to go on to illustrate, a significance that radically alters the way that schooling is conceptualised in Ireland.

St. Oliver's is a participant in the Transition Year programme, but I was already aware that none of the pupils in that year were going to be at school on that sunny Monday morning when I arrived, because the whole of the Senior cycle had been given an extra day off to facilitate and ease the introduction of the first year pupils, on their 'transition' into second level schooling. In fact, the whole of the first week had been scheduled as an 'induction' period both for teachers and pupils, with a number of meetings planned that were intended to cover issues such as staff development, school enrolment and the introduction of the JCSP (Junior Certificate Schools Programme), a new initiative in the school targeting pupils in danger of dropping out before completing the Junior Cert. As a consequence, the pupils had a fairly relaxed start to the term with an afternoon off and priority given to preparing them for what was to come in terms of schoolwork.

Previous ethnographic work in school-based settings (Ball 1984a, Benyon 1985) has highlighted the vital importance of studying just such 'early

encounters' for their potential to illuminate the negotiation and establishment of values and norms crucial to the smooth running of the institution. The suggestion is that by interrogating what Ball (1984a: 109) calls the 'process of establishment' it should be possible to obtain a clearer picture of staff-pupil relationships. In particular, attention focuses on the means by which teachers exert legitimated authority in attempting to impose their definition of the situation on both routine institutional conduct and the more 'episodic encounters' contained within the lesson timetable (Waller 1932). My initial observations in these first few days would therefore hopefully reveal much about the organisation of institutional life both in and out of classrooms, while providing a privileged view of another initiatory experience closely mirroring my own; that of the new intake of first year pupils being flung in at the 'deep end' of second level education and almost certainly suffering, along with me, comparable levels of 'predictable disequilibrium' (Ruddock and Urquhart 2003: 167).

An early opportunity to observe these opening exchanges presented itself through an assembly held for first and second year pupils down at one end of one of the two main corridors that serve as the primary walkways through the school. Gathered there was a large group of extremely apprehensive looking children pristinely dressed in their brand new school uniforms and lined up in single file while being addressed by the Head of Year 1. A number of other staff members were grouped at the opposite end of the large square communal area, watching over their new charges and chatting discretely. A female teacher whispered "sure, don't they look absolutely terrified, poor little mites", smiling as she did so at the wide-eyed incomprehension painted on the faces of these new

arrivals, who were struggling to make sense of this strange and unfamiliar world they now unaccountably found themselves in.

However, the level of concern expressed by my companions at the back of the gathering contrasted quite sharply with the markedly disciplinary tone adopted by the Year Head, an imposingly tall and forthright woman who seemed determined to assert her authority at this early stage in proceedings. After instructing the newly formed first year classes to walk in the corridors and always stay in line, the Year Head then led them away, dark green crocodile lines trailing after her as she walked them to their lockers. A group of second years remained in the area, lined up against a wall and facing a classroom in one corner. The woman stood beside me, Nora, directed my attention to the line of children and said "Oh look, that's all my lot from last year... how come they're all together?".

Nora's role as coordinator of the School Completion Programme brought her into close contact with pupils who, for various reasons, had high levels of absenteeism and showed signs indicating that their engagement with school was waning. Her puzzlement stemmed from seeing all of her major 'clients' from the previous year grouped together in one class. It fell to me to inform her that this class was, in fact, the new JCSP group, specially selected as the first intake in this scheme designed to run parallel with and converging in the Junior Certificate. She appeared quite surprised that I, as a relative newcomer, would know this but it was confirmed by another member of staff close by, as we watched them troop into their classroom. In truth, it had been a little more than an informed guess, but one offered intuitively on the basis that JCSP was being

specifically introduced to tackle the persistent problem of school dropout, in a way that complimented the work being done by Nora and her team.

Again, the introduction of this programme had been one of the main attractions influencing the decision to conduct research here, as both schemes represent attempts by the Irish government to respond to repeated charges that they are doing little to increase participation or promote inclusion in addressing the widening socio-economic divide in second level education[6]. Even at this early stage though, it seemed that SCP 'targeted cases' were being followed through in the selection of JCSP pupils, a good example of 'joined-up' policy in which the work of one scheme feeds into and better informs the work of another, with a clearly visible correlation seen between the stated aims and objectives of both programmes.

This brief sketch, drawn from the first morning of the school year, taken together with subsequent observations conducted throughout the rest of the week, provided a number of insights into the institutional arrangements at St.Oliver's that revealed it to be operating under very different principles to those encountered in the UK. For instance, it soon became apparent that a strictly enforced code of discipline underpinned much of the routine business of the school, a regime that it was only possible to maintain through the tacit approval, most of the time, of the vast majority of the pupils. It seems that herein lays an initial clue as to the glowing reputation of Irish education in general.

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[6] See Smyth and Hannan (2000); Archer (2001); Walshe (2005).

There is a wealth of evidential literature to suggest that the more defined and structured disciplinary codes residing in the culture of Catholic schooling has positive effects on the educational outcomes of those from disadvantaged backgrounds[7]. However, this is a highly contested area of academic debate, replete with statistical generalisations drawn from varying national contexts, and while it may account, at least in part, for the good reputation Catholic education has in fostering academic success, it could equally be explained as a self-fulfilling prophesy perpetuated by the discourse of strictly disciplined Catholic schools. In any event, in a country where the vast majority of schools are in fact Catholic-run, presumably similar systems are normatively applied and therefore further investigation would be required to excavate further the 'Catholic discipline = academic achievement' equation. So whatever the wider implications for assessing the educational value of emphasising an 'invisible pedagogical code' of discipline (Bernstein 1990), it certainly was the case that there seemed to be a considerably greater degree of consensus at St. Oliver's that there were good reasons for the exercise of, and compliance to, clearly defined ground rules for conduct and behaviour.

What I could not help but notice as well though, was that discipline appeared to be taken much more seriously as a basis for ensuing social relations than it had been in England. Whole school assemblies held every morning in the main hall were a regimented display of straight green lines as most of the pupil population (the first years had their own assembly area) congregated together to listen to the Principal address them on a diverse range of school-related topics, before being led off by their teacher to their designated room. Orderly lines were

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[7] See Greeley (1982); Convey (1992); Bryk et.al. (1993); O'Keefe (1996).

maintained, talking was kept to a minimum and the hall would empty with a smoothness and efficiency that came from years of practice and due deference among the pupils to the authority of the teachers. According to Lodge and Lynch (2000: 47), the exercise of this kind of disciplinary regime in Ireland is a practical demonstration of the institutional relationship between teachers and pupils commonly found in the Irish system:

> "Teachers are invested with power over students, not only by virtue of their adult status in society, but also because of their institutional position as knowledge providers who are deemed to have a special responsibility for the young people in their care" (2000: 47).

The use of the key term 'knowledge providers' appears highly significant here, suggesting that the kind of respect Terry Eagleton alluded to in general educational terms is extended to those charged with the task of delivering school curricula. And it is to the ways in which this trust is maintained between teachers and pupils, and equally importantly, teachers and parents, that I will now turn.

Codes and Conduct: Embodying the Social System
The school's ability to maintain such a regime depends to a large extent on the level of trust that exists not only among pupils, but also in the level of partnership enjoyed with local parents too. And this sort of 'social partnership' is seen as a key ingredient in the crucial cycle of relationships needed if a school is to follow through on matters of policy regarding they way it acts towards the

children and young people in its charge. It is also a clear indication of the much higher degree of respect that teachers still command among the general public in Ireland, and the contrast with the current situation in the UK, where rhetorics of accountability and effectiveness have supplied additional fuel to an ongoing 'discourse of derision' (Ball 1994: 39) could not have been more stark.

This requires further elaboration, and I will return to it in a later chapter, but for the moment it should suffice to offer one straightforward example of the very visible support St. Oliver's receives, in its rigid insistence on adopting a dress code that would be more usually associated with 'elite' forms of middle-class institutions. Nevertheless, viewed from its own particular social and cultural context, this stance is intended to engender a shared financial and moral commitment to the idea of a distinctive school community. Thus, investing in the ethos of a self-proclaimed community-based college rests in large part on backing the institutional structure of discipline that seeks to affirm the collective interests and values it embodies, while working to minimize any material differences that could easily undermine the promotion of such values.

The uniform code at St Oliver's was, by English standards at least, strictly adhered to, with white shirts (ties compulsory for boys and girls), green jumper, grey trousers and black shoes (definitely no 'runners')[8]. Anyone found contravening this policy was immediately despatched to the Principal's office, and usually sent home to change. Now it must be conceded that, judging by my everyday experience travelling through the city, many schools in the area appeared to have similarly traditional policies regarding the wearing of school

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[8] The Irish term for training shoes.

uniforms, and certainly at least some would have originated in schools situated in far more affluent areas than the Ballygowan estate. Furthermore, inter-school rivalry, contested and played out both on and off the sports field, is a longstanding tradition and extremely keenly felt, as much by the staff as the pupils who currently represent their institution.

This may well intersect with more deeply embedded structural processes of differentiation in the distinctive Irish trait of selecting extremely lurid colours, which tended to lead to the sight of some unfortunate boys and girls clad in garish ensembles featuring powder blue, purple or fuchsia, in contrast to the more understated tones of St. Oliver's green and yellow. But the overwhelming sense one got from the school was that, while the tactic adopted may have been appropriated from more 'elite' forms of education, the real purpose was not to highlight social distinction, but rather to foster and promote a feeling of commonality that would cohere around the institutions' values. So, where objections on the grounds of cost may have consigned this form of uniform to a bygone era in many parts of England, its continued presence in Ireland seems assured, if only because parents like the one quoted below are only too aware of the alternatives (and their cost), and appear therefore to want to see it continue:

"it's the only time I ever see 'im smart like, when e's not wearin' sports gear an' runners ... an' the prices o'them I tell ya". (a third year parent, responding to a question about the uniform[9]).

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[9] This remark also reflected this mothers' feelings regarding her older son, a sixth-year pupil at the school.

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The persistence of such a rigorously applied school uniform policy in Ireland is probably a hangover from a past largely dominated by private educational provision overseen by the Catholic Church, and subsequent processes of 'reinvigorated traditionalism' (Halpin et.al. 1997) pursued by schools coming on stream since the late 1960s. However, it should also be pointed out that the uniform acted as a deliberate marker of local identity, as the Principal would often stress to the pupils at morning assembly that whenever they left the schoolgates in uniform, they were representing *their* school to the wider public.

And of course the uniform is a great leveller, its function in limiting the 'classifying practices' and reining in "the distances that need to be kept" (Bourdieu 1986a: 472) being the main reason why it was so assiduously policed in the school itself (hence, no 'runners'). Interestingly, there were few complaints among the pupils regarding the rigid enforcement of the uniform policy and consequently infractions were rare, although I did detect murmurings from staff about its loosening grip toward the end of the year, when, significantly, they felt it reflected badly on the schools' ability to maintain consistency. Perhaps a clue as to its normative acceptance by the majority of pupils was provided by Damien, a transition year pupil in a metalwork class, whom I observed pulling his tie off in an exasperated fashion while laboriously filing a perfect hemisphere.

> **J. S.** Are you allowed to take it off?
>
> **Damien**:   Not really ... but I'll put it back on after, like ...
>
> **J. S.** Do you mind wearing the uniform?

> **Damien**:   Nah ... s'what we 'ave to wear for school in'it ... if
>
> we all 'ad our trackies on all the time it wouldn't be like school
>
> would it?

Being 'in school' quite clearly meant acceding to the demands of school for Damien, and, the evidence pointed to this being the case for the majority of his fellow pupils. Conforming with equanimity to institutional norms relating to the dress code did not appear to unduly trouble most of them, and indeed even the older teenage girls were surprisingly untroubled by the prescribed rules. Exceptions, because they were relatively rare, tended to stick out even more, like those who tested the boundaries with their wearing of gaudy earrings, or the few who risked asserting their blossoming sexuality by preferring short skirts to trousers (Lees 1993: 42). Possibly the key reason why there was so little conflict over, what, in England is an extremely contentious issue, was that within the normative institutional structure there was built in a series of sanctioned 'gaps' in which the pupils were released from the constraints of the uniform and free to wear contextually appropriate attire.

Players in the many sporting teams that the school fielded were permitted to dress out of uniform when travelling to away games, which, because they always took place during the school day, could take them out for anything from two or three hours to the whole day for longer trips. This was an option open to all the pupils, as alongside the usual boys soccer, Gaelic football and hurling teams, St Oliver's also fielded basketball and Camogie (a female version of hurling) teams which girls participated in as well. The mode of dress adopted for these excursions consisted of the ubiquitous 'trackies' and 'runners', along with

the American-style baseball caps that seemed to be almost obligatory among the older boys. Some of the teams even had their own school tracksuits, which shifted institutional norms into the realm of the informal, but the pupils were surprisingly enthusiastic about wearing them and usually had to be persuaded to change them upon their return to the school.

Waiving the uniform code for these teams was a way of rewarding individual sporting achievement, but it also allowed the 'achievers' to take a brief step 'outside' the regulatory framework of school structure, offering them a glimpse of the strengthened social unity that such a structurally coherent regime provides. This is just one example of the 'anti-structural' spaces made available within established norms that became apparent very early on, as non-sporting opportunities also existed where groups of pupils were allowed to shed their institutional skin while taking part in school activities and excursions. Thus, over the course of an average school year, most pupils would have a number of opportunities to experience these gaps in school life, which seemed to leave them less inclined to rebel too much about wearing school clothes on an 'ordinary' school day.

Taken together, the existence of a far stricter disciplinary system that extended from the dress code right through to embodied forms of social control (no running in corridors or loitering between classes) and rigidly enforced restrictions on the use of mobile phones[10], had the net result of making St. Oliver's an entirely different environment from the one I encountered in England. From the very first week of the regular school timetable it was

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[10] These had been a constant distraction at Bridgepoint High, seemingly unresolvable at an institutional level. Here though, the Principal simply banned all phones, on pain of confiscation.

immediately apparent just how quiet the school was despite the fact that it is essentially a single structure with a series of 'blocks' arranged along interconnected parallel walkways. Proceeding up and down these corridors during lesson periods failed to yield anything that might have disturbed the atmosphere of calm and stillness that pervaded the entire length of the school. On these unannounced and unplanned 'tours' it would be rare to see a pupil outside a classroom and only the projected and echoing voices of teachers pierced the slightly eerie silence that routinely descended following each lesson change.

It was during one of these perambulations in the second week of term that I fell into conversation with Connor, one of the younger members of staff, an RE teacher who had been at St. Oliver's for four years. Having enquired what I was doing hanging around at the far end of the school as he exited his classroom, and after considering my response that it was unusually quiet, he replied that "you should have been here two or three years ago". Pressed to expand on this, he explained that when he began working at St. Oliver's, he had found a "tense atmosphere" permeating the school and that he too believed that things were very different now. Connor seemed reluctant to go further but he did mention the previous Principal in referring to this earlier period when he had initially arrived at the school.

At the time I judged it imprudent to question him in more depth about this as we had only recently met and experience had taught me that reticence is often more productive than forcefulness in long term ethnographic work with participants. So I was left to draw my own conclusions, which gradually, piece

by piece, would hopefully build into a clearer and increasingly more detailed picture of life at St. Oliver's. In a later chapter, I will return to this topic in order to bring together a more fully rounded analysis of how the school's mission had been reenergized by strategically deploying elements of the past in order to challenge the circumstances of the present. However, for now, this section has focused on the institutional structures and social arrangements by which the staff maintained order and control. It seems appropriate therefore to now move on to explore some of the wider social influences that made these school relations possible.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES IN AN ERA OF PROSPERITY AND CLEAVAGE

Ireland's education system operates under somewhat different conditions than those currently found in the UK. In two countries with such long traditions of subjugation and domination, recurring flows of migration and a relationship that, however ambivalent, seems always to have been inextricably intertwined, it would be difficult to imagine that continuities dating from the colonial era would not still exist in one form or another. But scratch beneath the surface, to what McDonnell (2003) terms the 'deep structures' of Irish schooling, and what is revealed reflects both the turbulence and politically charged past of this relatively young nation, and the major cultural influence that shaped its fight for independence, along with the subsequent development of its key institutional structures of social provision, namely education and health (Phadraig 1986: 142).

Since the early nineteenth century, when the British government attempted to 'anglicise' Irish children by introducing the 'national' school system and thereby eradicate the Irish language[11], schools in Ireland have, whatever the ruling ideology, been explicitly concerned with the transmission of cultural values. In more specific terms, the post-independence era saw the state-sanctioned formalisation of ongoing "struggles to mould the consciousness" (Clancy 1986: 120), through the educational teaching of competing religious ideologies. During this period, these denominations ensured their continued place in Irish society by the twin strategy of first establishing their de facto managerial status and then vigorously pursuing the development of a segregated school system (Hoppen 1999).

The common thread linking these discrepant historical processes was that, yet again, ostensibly learning environments became forcing houses in which moral socialisation took precedence over the teaching of practical skills. Moreover, in the post-independence phase, successive Irish education ministers were content to see the role of the state as a subsidiary one to that of the Church, which was entrusted with managing the revival of Gaelic culture alongside the reinvigoration of the Irish language (Lee 1989: 129).

For this was an era dominated by the state-building project of 'cultural nationalism', the somewhat idealistically conceived principle that underpinned the "gaelicization of education" (Brown 2004: 39). As a joint partner in the Irish nationalist project, the most important influence brought to bear on denominational schools has, of course, been that exercised by the Catholic

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[11] For accounts of this quintessentially colonial 'civilizing mission', which, on its inception in 1831 preceded the English model by four decades, see Inglis (1987) and Hoppen (1999).

Church. And as I have already highlighted, the Church's involvement in Irish schools actually predates that of the Irish state itself and continues to act in both a managerial and administrative capacity throughout every sector of the system. While I do not wish to dwell here on every aspect of the relationship between the Catholic faith and Irish schools for fear of repeating what has gone before, there is one potentially problematic feature of this unparalleled presence that has a direct bearing on the primary focus of this study. This is the apparent contradiction that lies at the heart of the Church's continued participation in managing such a diverse range of schools, which, to some observers at least, seems like having a fairly explicit involvement in the deepening ruptures that are threatening to tear the education system asunder.

Phadriag (1986: 141) makes the noteworthy observation that the "informal and indirect links" between Church and state are in fact "very significant", resulting in a situation where "the vast majority of schools are run by committees 'guided by' parish clergy or religious orders" (1986: 142, author's italics). For the more critically oriented Drudy and Lynch (1993: 6), this raises serious questions regarding the Church's commitment to its own educational principle of the 'preferential option for the poor'[12] when it is seen to be upholding the credibility of the fee-paying sector through its close association with 'prestige' institutions. This charge has been the subject of some lively debate, the usual rejoinder being that the Catholic Church is not a monolithic entity but rather a site of internal ideological struggles[13]. But setting aside the arguments made by both sides in this debate, what is undeniably true is that the fee-paying sector in

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[12] The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin renewed the historical Catholic commitment to the service of the poor in 1968. For social scientific studies see O'Keefe (1988, 1992, 1999); McLaren (1986); Oldenski (1997).

[13] See Grace (2002) for a comprehensive review.

Ireland has, over the last fifteen years, enjoyed an unprecedented period of expansion that has seen enrolment rise by as much as 22% on some estimates (Rice and Duffy 2005).

This growing exodus from non-fee paying schools into the supposedly 'private' sector has seen a particularly worrying drop in 'comprehensive' and 'community' school enrolment of 30% since 1990 (Walshe 2005). Clearly, with just over two thirds of the 58 private schools in the country being Catholic administered, there is fairly stark evidence here that many Irish parents, having prospered on the back of the 'Celtic Tiger', are asserting their rights as a 'parentocracy' (Brown 1990) to become 'active choosers' in transferring their children from non-fee paying to fee-paying Catholic schools. However, my purpose in highlighting at some length what critics have argued to be the questionable moral stance taken by the Church is not simply to reheat an old argument. As a leading custodian of what is rapidly becoming a 'two-tier' education system specifically organised to articulate "the maximisation of rewards through a more subtle form of social closure" (Ball 2003a: 59); the Catholic Church itself seems brazenly unconcerned about the implications of some of its representatives somewhat less than consistent actions.

This is about much more than merely acting as if 'the preferred option of the poor' was someone else's field of operations and as such has no direct connection with prestigious private colleges. In fact, there is a very real connection that hinges on precisely those 'informal links' alluded earlier, as the haemorrhaging of state pupils into largely Catholic private colleges is correlatively starving state schools of the funding that they, unlike the private

colleges, are entirely dependent upon for their existence. For, under the terms of the deal struck between the government and the churches during the foundation of the Irish state, the government pays teaching salaries in all schools while the denominational religions carry on their managerial function.

Therefore, what the general public witnessed in 2004 during my time at St. Oliver's, and what the print media were understandably keen to disseminate to as wide an audience as possible, was a situation in which the 58 private schools in Ireland were able to generate a hugely disproportionate per capita income, disproportionate simply because it was based on only 26,000 pupils, out of a total second level Irish pupil population of over 340,000. So, aside from the 110million euros aspiring parents themselves pumped into these schools, the state also handed over 84 million euros in 'subsidies', mainly to cover teaching expenses (Rice and Duffy 2005; Walshe 2005).

Mounting protests over the funding of state education in Ireland should be viewed in the light of these structural inequalities, made even more pressing by the lack of awareness on the part of certain elements within the Catholic Church regarding just how much their role in private provision is exacerbating a less than equitable situation. So, having lodged this critique of the traditional sector of Catholic education, it seems appropriate to look at how Catholic schooling at the other end of the social class spectrum struggles to cope with a learning environment that is, as a direct consequence, considerably under-resourced.

Encountering Inclusion at the Sharp End

The opportunity to observe at first hand the internal staff arrangements and organisational structure of St. Oliver's presented itself almost immediately when I was invited to a series of meetings intended to address various aspects of the forthcoming school year. The most pressing issues involved the impact on staff of the new JCSP programme, the setting of budgets for individual subjects, and whole sessions devoted to pastoral care and enrolment strategies. Nearly all of these meetings involved the whole of the teaching staff, and sitting in on them provided some definite early indications not only about the management style of the Principal, but also highlighted a number of themes that would recur throughout the year.

Probably the most often repeated and consistently aired of these concerns was the straightforward lack of finances available to the school in relation to its entire range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. It emerged initially in the JCSP meeting when the coordinator, Gerry Ryan, informed the various subject option teachers what the budget allocation was for programme administration, and then swiftly pre-empted their expected responses by commenting that "yes, I know, it's hardly going to cover the photocopying ... but there it is". The general mood of this meeting had, in any case, been one of scepticism regarding the purpose of the new programme and the chances of it having positive benefits for the school as a whole. This, of course, was not unconnected to the fact that these teachers were being asked to take JCSP pupils into their classes when the whole year split up for certain subject options, one or two at least appearing to be under the misapprehension that the JCSP class would be a stand-alone,

separately taught group when in reality it is intended to be a mixture of group and year cohort teaching.

While it would be fair to say that the teaching profession in Ireland has not experienced to anywhere near the same degree the kind of restructuring in work relations that has taken place in the UK over the last fifteen years[14], it was clear that these teachers viewed the accelerating pace of change at St. Oliver's with considerable unease. Indeed, confirmation of this came towards the end of the meeting when one teacher asked Gerry if he thought the programme would 'last', the obvious inference being that it was just another in a series of 'innovations', which, in her words, would be "here today and gone tomorrow". His answer was unequivocal, and in fact, consistent with comments he subsequently made to me in interview:

> "Well, there's no going back on this now y'know ... and we
> don't really have a choice whatever some of the staff may
> think ... we're a community college and we're here to serve
> the needs of the community".

If this meeting proved to be the first to reveal simmering tensions among teaching staff over the financial strictures in place being accompanied by what many perceived to be extra demands made on them in terms of workload, then more was to follow. During the pastoral care meeting held the following day, an hour-long open forum allowed all the staff to raise any issues they felt strongly about. Two major topics dominated this session, the first being the idea of

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[14] See Gewirtz (1997); Salisbury and Riddell (2000); Mahony and Hextall (2000); Coffey (2001).

buying a school bus, which was quickly dismissed as prohibitively expensive. The second was raised by Niall Crean, an English teacher, who, in his capacity as soccer coach put forward the suggestion that the school actively look into the possibility of bringing vending machines into the year blocks, as a way of generating a much needed extra income flow that might offset the steeply rising costs involved in out-of school activities, including bus hire.

Now, at Bridgepoint High in England, the vending machines had been ubiquitous in all the year blocks and were frequented as much by the staff as the pupils, despite being entirely stocked with 'crisp-type snacks' and chocolate bars. Their presence was completely unquestioned as they provided an important source of revenue and the heavy turnover they attracted generated substantial sums of money that went towards improving facilities in the year blocks, although they also attracted less welcome attention through repeated acts of vandalism and theft. Thus, as someone who had recently arrived from a stint in an English school, I, perhaps naively, thought that this seemed to be a fairly innocuous proposition that, certainly at that time, would not have warranted further discussion. So it came as something of a surprise when the Principal responded calmly but quite firmly by saying that there would be no vending machines in the school, and that henceforth the 'tuck shop' would be pursuing a policy of offering fruit as well as sweets, with Wednesdays from now on being designated as 'healthy eating days'.

As if to drive the message home, he also stated that if it were up to him, there would be a complete ban on Coca Cola and other bottled drinks in the school,

with only water being allowed on the premises in future[15]. While conceding the point that the extra income would indeed be very tempting, and freely admitting that the school was, to use his own phrase "strapped for cash", the Principal nevertheless strongly argued that the children's health took priority over getting money in by any means whatsoever[16]. This declaration of such a firm ethical stance in the face of dire financial need seemed a remarkably brave position to take when it would probably have been easier just to accede to the lure of 'filthy lucre'.

The last brief sketch I shall relate here involves an informal meeting held in the staffroom at the end of the week in which the Principal invited everyone to put forward ideas aimed at strengthening 'enrolment strategies'. Euphemisms aside, this basically was all about improving the image and presentation of the school in order to maintain the upward trend in pupil numbers, along with addressing what Ian Miller called the 'perceptions' held by people on the outer fringes of the Ballygowan estate. It was here that I first became aware that the competitive element of an educational marketplace was not a uniquely English phenomenon and was clearly recognised and being acted upon in a proactive way here too in Ireland.

Divided into discussion groups, we began talking about the various ways in which St. Oliver's might achieve a higher profile through things like positive press coverage. The group I was attached to quickly moved to the more general topic of exactly what kind of image the school wished to present, and this gave

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[15] This was introduced in January 2005.

[16] This occurred long before the Jamie Oliver-fuelled media furore over 'school dinners' that New Labour found itself embroiled in (Lawrence 2005).

one or two individuals an opening through which to mount an attack on what they saw as the downward trajectory St. Oliver's was clearly adopting in 'embracing' schemes like the JCSP. Even observing these exchanges as a relative newcomer with little knowledge of the 'micropolitics of the school' (Ball 1987), it was plain that there were fundamental divisions among the staff over a range of issues. These included the apparently constant and thorny problem of finance, discrepant increases in workload perceived by certain staff members, and the whole issue of whether to back the management decision to implement policies specifically designed to promote inclusion. My fieldnotes of the meeting reveal a growing awareness that competing interests lay only minimally below the surface of much of what was said:

In the group I sat in with, what came out strongly from some of them was that 'we' had to decide who the school was targeting and what kind of school we wanted to be seen as. This was explicitly tied to rolling out JCSP and 'dumbing down' as one of them put it, while ...[a teacher]... said we'll get known as a school for 'messers'. I think there is a basic contradiction here between ...[the Principal's]... stated commitment to inclusion and his wish to sell the school to a wider constituency, which necessarily means appealing to, and falling in line with, the kind of processes of distinction that I heard today (Fieldnote Diary 1/9/04).

Reflecting on these meetings provided an opening snapshot of an educational institution in which a relatively new school Principal was in the process of implementing major changes designed to realign the culture and ethos of

St.Oliver's in order that it could more closely attune itself to the needs of the local community. Bringing with him an extensive background and long teaching experience in 'special education', the VEC had handed him the task of turning around St. Oliver's falling pupil roll, to which he had responded by deliberately targeting the growing population of the Ballygowan estate. In particular, attention was fixed on local families sending children to schools outside the area, as a result of the perceived 'reputation' St. Oliver's had acquired in the years immediately preceding his arrival. These were the 'perceptions' that he was attempting to challenge through a twin strategy that was aimed at transforming the way the school operated, in line with current thinking on inclusive education as an ongoing series of processes (Booth et.al. 1998: 194), while simultaneously working to disseminate, and indeed where possible publicise, the positive outcomes arising from such changes.

But it was also clear from my early observations that, while many members of staff were solidly behind the Principal's vision of what St. Oliver's role should be in the local community, there were significant dissenters who held differing views about the direction being taken, along with others concerned about how these shifts would be accomplished. Of course, it should be pointed out here that none of this in itself is really surprising, anymore than is the prompt surfacing of conflict surrounding shifts in long established structures and practices in a school. For as Stephen Ball (1987: 32) has noted:

> "change in an organisation is almost certain to
>
> produce dissonance among individuals or groups
>
> within the membership. The introduction of ...

changes in structure or working practices must be viewed in terms of its relationship to the immediate interests and concerns of those members likely to be affected, directly or indirectly. Innovations are rarely neutral".

What is important to glean from this ostensibly unremarkable situation therefore is that these simmering conflicts and tensions, which surely permeate all schools to some degree, will inevitably be reflected in everyday practices in which teachers with varying affiliations and loyalties come face-to-face with the practical consequences of change in their interactions with school pupils. And the empirical material I offer in the remainder of this chapter is intended to shed some light on the difficulties arising from such processes. For if St. Oliver's was to proceed on a path towards a more inclusive framework of schooling in which every pupil, regardless of 'race', class, gender or 'ability', was encouraged and supported fully in participating in every aspect of school life, then it would take more than a strong leader as primary 'change agent' to implement such a vision.

Felicity Armstrong (2003: 256), taking up precisely this point, argues that "Inclusion refers to a serious project of cultural struggle and change in which those who have 'presided over exclusions' will be fully engaged". In the case of St. Oliver's, surely the litmus test of whether that cultural change could be effected largely depended on the teaching staff themselves, and their willingness, enthusiasm, and capacity to become 'fully engaged' in putting this project into practice. Their input takes on an even more crucial significance in

the light of some of the shifting structural features I alluded to earlier in the Irish educational landscape, where deepening fissures in social and economic circumstances are focusing increased scrutiny on schools as the key battleground upon which an individuals' future prosperity can be achieved.

For those lacking the wherewithal to opt for one of the city's private colleges, or simply wishing, like many working-class families, for their children to be educated in the immediate vicinity of their own community (Ball et.al. 1995), schools like St. Oliver's are feeling the weight of heightened parental expectation with precious little of the financial clout available to more 'elite' institutions. In such circumstances, proclaiming an inclusive approach is itself to voluntarily walk a tightrope of conflicting interests even with the solid support of the staffroom, but with divisions already apparent, would these rapidly rise to the surface as the realities of the educational encounter got underway?

Predicaments of Inclusion

In the weeks that followed, life at St. Oliver's became a gradually increasing round of classroom visits and more informal interactions as my presence in the school became less of a topic for conversation and the pupils got used to having me sit in on many of their lessons. This was particularly the case with the boys and girls making up the JCSP group designated as class 'Carthach', who began the year finding themselves in a new class only half the average size and yet still allotted their own room, as well as an increase in their staffing levels that they initially found very curious.

I must admit here that I was partly responsible for this unexpected rise in the number of adults joining them in the classroom as I had been invited in to meet them during the first week by their lead teacher, Jan O'Donnell, who was a long serving member of staff and held a position on its senior management team. Along with two other senior colleagues, Ms. O'Donnell had been allocated most of the teaching duties associated with the group, in line with national JCSP guidelines, which suggest that a core group of teachers share contact with the pupils to foster greater levels of familiarity and a higher level of consistency in the learning experience.

However, there was an acknowledgement by the team overseeing the programme that additional support would be a necessary and regular component of teaching the group given the general level of literacy skills and individual needs among the pupils. It was therefore felt that this group should become accustomed as quickly as possible to having additional support staff in the classroom, despite the fact that it is still quite rare in general to find more than one adult in classroom situations in Irish schools. Ian Miller, a man shrewd enough to know exactly how to deploy whatever assets he has at his disposal, had shown a particularly keen interest when I described in some detail the differences in teaching arrangements at Bridgepoint High in England, and was fully aware that I had recent experience carrying out a variety of similar support roles in that very setting.

Following my introduction to the group, during which I took some time to explain to the girls and boys my purpose for being in school, Jan asked if I would care to attend regularly with her whenever she was teaching them. There is no doubt

in my mind that the Principal took me at my word when I told him I would be happy to do anything to help, and saw an opportunity to provide his staff with some much needed support, which, at that time, was simply not resourced. So, jumping at the chance to get involved, I began working with Ms. O'Donnell in all of her classes, covering four different subjects altogether. I should point out though, that it was made clear from the outset to the class that I was not a teacher and was there to assist and support Ms. O'Donnell while conducting my research, a process of separation that was aided considerably by Jan introducing me by my first name in that first lesson, a practice I continued throughout the school in all of my contact with pupils. Thus, throughout the duration of my stay, along with Eamon and Christy, the much-loved and well-respected school caretakers, I was the only adult at St. Oliver's whom the pupils referred to on first name terms, rather than the 'Sir', 'Mr' or 'Miss' reserved for members of the teaching staff.

The girls and boys in Carthach all had poor 1st year school attendance records and therefore had a lot of catching up to do in this their 2nd year, but this was an issue complicated by their low literacy skills and general lack of enthusiasm for even being in school. These three factors, low attendance, low literacy levels and disaffection are, of course, closely intertwined and tend to develop quickly, especially among young adolescents from families in which parents themselves may well have had unhappy experiences of schooling, causing them to question the actual benefits of academic knowledge or qualifications (Lucey and Walkerdine 2000: 46).

This is not to say however, that such parents showed little interest or did not care about their children's well-being, for this is usually far from the case; rather it is to suggest that, for many working-class families, the 'practical order' of simply getting by (Dickens 1990: 17) means that their children's' day-to-day happiness is ranked more importantly than exposure to the anxieties and ambivalence associated with education. In the same way, ideas circulating in the family regarding the education of children are less likely to be the result of forward planning and much more likely to be focused on the 'here and now', embedded as they are in the pressures of work and a constellation of practical limitations, which would take into account the wishes of the children themselves. However, as Ball and colleagues (1995: 57) are quick to point out, "This is not a matter of cultural deficit but rather pragmatic accommodation", a question of balancing the legislative requirement for compulsory schooling against the well being of the whole family unit, often under conditions where finance is paramount.

For the sixteen girls and boys in Carthatch, their thoughts at age 13-14 were already firmly fixed on the 'here and now' of the adult world of work, and not on spending the next two years incarcerated in school studying hard for the Junior Certificate. One reason for this is that in the UK, there would be little scope for paid work at this age outside of a paper round, but in Ireland there persists a strong and durable culture of what, if we are being generous, we might call 'youth labour'. This is a phenomenon through which large numbers of predominantly working-class, school age children volunteer to enter the labour market either to contribute to the family income, or to fund burgeoning adolescent identities predicated on popular consumption patterns. So while the

Junior Certificate Schools Programme constitutes a concerted attempt to extend the schooling of children most at risk of dropping out of the system up to and including the Junior Cert, it faces an uphill struggle against all the enticements offered by the opportunity to engage in paid employment.

Even to young people of this tender age, such opportunities present a tantalisingly available temptation that is understandably difficult for them to resist. Indeed, it is doubly depressing to report that, for many of these young people, resistance chiefly manifests itself through a gradual disaffection with the very idea of school that causes them to simply 'disappear' from the register long before sitting the Junior Cert. It is this familiar pattern, so memorably documented by Paul Willis (1977), which continues to blight the future destinies of large numbers of working-class Irish teenagers, buoyed by a flourishing local labour market in low-wage part-time jobs that offer an easy transition into adulthood with none of the traumatic experiences of formal examinations.

One of the main consequences of this continuous and ongoing tension between the 'dull compulsion' of school and the knowledge that there is a ready availability of work outside the schoolgates was a heightened propensity for disruptive and inappropriate behaviour among a minority of pupils. While troublesome behaviour is not among the criteria for admittance into JCSP, it can, understandably, be difficult to untangle from a range of multiple factors that might lead to such a decision being made. At least some of this troubling behaviour is born out of frustration with a first year curriculum they had found largely irrelevant to their needs. However, now in their second year, and undertaking a radically streamlined timetable, the pupils quickly concluded that

they formed the 'thick' class due to their obvious 'lack' of 'ability', something helpfully confirmed by their peers in the wider population.

Thus, my fieldnotes are littered with references to numerous occasions when both Jan O'Donnell and myself were questioned directly by members of the class about the validity of this attribution. Their peers' pointed labelling of them, and the schools' apparent collusion in legitimating this label (Cicourel and Kituse 1968), left them woefully unsure of their status in the school and threw up the potential pitfalls and ambiguities of any system that, however well intentioned, institutionalises difference among pupils[17]. During this period of anxiety, any inconsistencies between teachers would be seized upon and measured against what they already knew, weighing evidence as much by who had provided it as by whether it fitted what they had previously been told, as in this fieldnote extract:

> Seamus commented on [a teacher's] attitude in the class today,
> as they [the JCSP group] had asked her why they were using a
> first year book and [the teacher] hadn't given them a satisfactory
> answer, or at least it wasn't for them as it was one they saw
> straight through. Already at this stage, they instinctively
> understand the ambiguity embedded in the term 'special' and are
> laughing at the contradictions of being told they are a 'special'
> group (Fieldnotes 9/9/04).

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[17] See Hargreaves (1967); Lacey (1970, 1984); Keddie (1971); Ball (1981, 1984c).

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The boy alluded to in this extract, Seamus, was in fact one of the more vocal inquisitors on the groups' behalf, firing off knowing questions in mid-lesson like 'ow come we get more teachers in 'ere Miss? ... is this the nutter's class like?'. This would then provoke his classmates into offering their own commentary on the unfolding situation and effectively curtail what was achievable in the rest of the lesson. Seamus was probably the boy with the worst behavioural record in the class, and a reputation for trouble (especially with female teachers) that had been earned in one single year at the school, although there were at least three other boys in Carthach with equally poor disciplinary records. However, in terms of garnering a reputation for unrivalled levels of disruptive behaviour, Seamus was truly without peer in the school, something that was difficult to reconcile with this diminutive, angelic-looking figure, but which one might speculate had much to do with the growing trend within education to construct new institutional 'categories of thought' (Douglas 1986) that ultimately have recourse to individualized, asocial, medical models of behaviour[18].

For Seamus had been diagnosed as having ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) in his first year at St. Oliver's and was subsequently prescribed daily doses of Ritalin to moderate his volatile and unpredictable temperament[19]. In the UK, this would certainly have led to him being categorised with 'special needs' status and possibly even removed from the mainstream population, depending on the context of the particular school. Here, however, rather than being excluded he was accommodated into the JCSP

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[18] The leading biologist, Stephen Rose (2005: 256) argues that these 'conditions' should be seen "not as a disorder but as a cultural construct in a society that seeks to relocate problems from the social to the individual".

[19] The use of Ritalin to treat ADHD is illegal in France (Armstrong et.al. 2000, c.f. Thomas and Loxley 2001:114), whereas prescriptions issued in the US run into millions (Rose 2005). See also Booth and Ainscow (1998); Tait (2003); Hjorne and Saljo (2006).

scheme and allocated a small number of 'resource' hours for a dedicated support assistant. Thus, the decision to begin the year with an in-class, team-teaching approach proved to be a sound one as it was augmented by resource staff focused on one-to-one tuition, although the downside was that it made it obvious to the children how 'differently' they were being 'treated'.

It was though, one of the girls in class Carthach who most clearly articulated what they were all feeling at that time with a witty riposte that, at the time it occurred, hit me with the all the force of well-timed slap in the face:

> One of the girls, little Maureen I think, said earlier in the day, in
> response to my answering a question from one of her classmates
> about what ES (Environmental Studies) stood for, "its
> environmental studies int'it Jeff, coz we're all mental". This was
> followed by the sweetest of smiles, which amply conveyed her
> delight in pinning down with a clever joke their attempts to deal
> with the predicament they find themselves in (Fieldnotes
> 10/9/04).

The Junior Certificate School Programme's first term was a predictably fraught beginning for everyone concerned. Gerry Ryan, the scheme's coordinator, offered a first-hand insight into some of the issues raised in the course of this initial period of profound cultural change at the school:

> **G. R.** I suppose it was very much a new experiment for the
> school so ... I didn't know how it would turn out ... and my

feelings into the year now, its been a very steep learning curve, erm ... there's been quite a few teething problems but its been a fantastic learning experience as well ... and I would say its been very beneficial for the students involved, there have been problems, erm ... but I'd say, overall, considering that everyone is new to it, that I'm reasonably happy with where things are at this stage. One thing I would like to say is that I was only given two hours a week to coordinate this group ... its very little really ... and to continue with my own teaching schedule, which included this group ... so the sheer time allocation was very low as well, and I can see in hindsight ...[pause] ... personally, in terms of teaching the class myself, hard work, y'know ... the hardest work I've had to do as a teacher in my ten years at the school.

J. S. You volunteered for a lot of hard work really ...

G. R. Were we volunteering for it, was it imposed on us ... our Principal took the decision, we'll go for it in September, and we knew it was going to be very tough ... he suggested it, we decided to go for it ... I still think it was the right thing to do.

J. S. You're so positive about it ... would I be right in thinking that there are some here who are much less positive about it?

G. R. Yea, but Jeff, that's reflective of ... of ... so many teaching staff and our attitudes to education ... erm ... so many teachers

just want to push them ... we've had a very, very vibrant group of kids and I would say that if we hadn't had JCSP, under the old system, those kids would not be in school by now.

It is clear from this interview extract that, while deficiencies in funding and time allocation are foremost in Gerry's thinking, there is also an undiminished commitment to the broader aims of the programme, in spite of his cautious concession that this view is not exactly unanimous among the staff. The difficulties the children themselves had in adapting to their reconfigured positioning as school subjects attracting 'extra help' appeared less of a priority than the perceived educational benefits seen among them, although this emphasis on outcomes that are clearly felt to have been hard won does not deflect him from restating his faith in the project. But my observations suggested that their delicate and sometimes painful attempts to establish reconstituted identities reflecting an ambivalent and not entirely accepted status were made more problematic, at least in part, by the variations in attitude displayed by a small minority of teachers, underlining once again the fundamental importance of teacher-pupil relations in shaping school experience.

The Pressures and Pleasures of Irish Classroom Life
Observing lessons throughout the school offered the opportunity to look in more depth at the sort of relationships teachers and pupils had both inside and outside classrooms. More specifically, focusing on this dynamic opens up a window on the ways social order is maintained and provides a clearer picture of the exact nature of 'classroom control'[20]. For while the authority delegated to

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[20] See Becker (1953); Hammersley (1976); A. Hargreaves (1978); Rosser and Harre (1984); Denscombe (1985).

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teachers licenses them to determine rules and sanctions in defining classroom situations (Fenwick 1998: 621), it is inevitably subject to contestation, requiring constant adjustment and negotiation with a shifting timetable of pupil audiences. Concern in the UK and elsewhere in the Western world over the restructuring of teacher education centres on the diminution of professional autonomy caused by what Beckermann and Cooper (2004: 6) describe as an "ideological drive towards performance improvement"[21].

The effects on teachers in recent years has been high levels of stress-related illness and early retirements along with sporadic periods of recruitment crises (Helsby 1999; Troman 2000; Gleeson and Husbands 2001), which for many has signalled the deprofessionalisation of a vocation increasingly stripped of its autonomy and collegiality and now chronically overburdened with impossible expectations and the accompanying fear of failure (Furlong et.al. 2000). In Ireland though it is a slightly different story, as despite the Irish government's public sector pursuit of a "sustained neo-liberal commitment to fiscal rectitude" (Brown 2004: 382), teacher's work identities have not suffered the kind of major upheavals documented following the UK experience (Bottery 1996).

Factors put forward to explain this include the deep-rooted imbrication of the Catholic church in Irish education as well as forceful lobbying by the still powerful Irish teaching unions that actually led during my stay to an education minister viewed as unsympathetic being replaced by a former teacher. However, space precludes me from delving further into this matter here, although I do intend to devote much more time in a later chapter to a detailed

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[21] See also Maguire (1995); Mahony and Hextall (1997, 2000); Smyth et.al. (2000).

interrogation of the singular character of teacher-pupil relations at St. Oliver's. For now though, in this final section I shall confine myself to offering a few brief slices of empirical material that capture some essence of what defines teaching and learning at the school.

I earlier highlighted how a kind of unforced discipline was an important underlying ingredient in structuring daily life at St. Oliver's, with the relative calmness and order witnessed in the main hall and corridors extending to the classroom as well. The majority of my time during the first term was spent with younger pupils, and at all of these lessons, children arriving at the room would be expected to line up outside and wait for the teacher to beckon them in. Given the natural exuberance and youthful energy generated by around thirty children aged anywhere between twelve and fifteen, it was a real surprise to find that generally speaking, this was exactly what they did, only the noise level occasionally attracting the teacher's presence, upon which it would quickly subside. Having entered the room, pupils stood behind their chairs until given permission to sit down, and only then would books and writing materials be produced.

If this description of generally well-behaved children moving in an orderly fashion between classes and deferring to teachers gives the impression of a submissive population of 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977) cowed into acquiescence by a sternly authoritarian disciplinary regime, then the reality could not have been further from the truth. The children at St. Oliver's are like young teenagers anywhere, boisterous, chatty, full of youthful energy and typically preoccupied with the usual obsessions – fashion, music and sport.

In addition they exhibit the characteristically Irish fondness for 'the craic' that leads them to extract the maximum amount of humour from any situation. This applied whether swapping jokes with friends or enjoying the regular opportunities given them to voice their opinions in the classroom, something in which they were allowed considerable latitude. Eagleton (1999: 46) argues that this is due to there being little history of Puritanism in Ireland, leading him to note that "the Irish are, by and large, a less inhibited, more gregarious bunch than the Anglo-Saxons". Whatever the truth of the matter, passive they were definitely not, and the forwardness with which they approached me during my early days was initially quite disconcerting, especially for someone used to the studied surliness and untempered aggression of teenagers one was often met with in England.

But the key thing was that despite the superficial appearance of a more regimented disciplinary structure emphasising an atmosphere of politeness and respect on both sides, the pupils were incredibly lively and communicative both in and out of the classroom and could often be observed engaging teachers in animated conversations as they carried out supervisory duties at breaks and lunchtimes. In the classroom, for the most part they appeared motivated and focused, excited even, by the prospect of the learning experience, and generally these younger age groups showed none of the disillusionment that is such a problematic feature of the post-Junior Cert. phase of Irish schooling. Indeed, confirmation of their fundamental respect for teachers was found at the end of every lesson, when each pupil would file past the teacher and thank them personally before leaving the classroom. As I too became a regular recipient of this genuinely touching compliment in the numerous lessons I assisted in, I

could not avoid reflecting with some incredulity that the same thing had not happened once in over eight months of classroom attendance at Bridgepoint High.

I suspect that for those familiar with contemporary English education, teaching in Ireland would today be viewed as slightly quaint and old-fashioned, devoid as it is of interactive whiteboards, laptops, Powerpoint-driven lesson plans or much in the way of computers at all, although the latter are belatedly beginning to feature more prominently. Set against this dearth of technology though, there was rather a focused concentration on encouraging pupils to accept a measure of responsibility for their part in the learning process, in terms of turning up on time armed with the right books and equipment, prepared for the lesson at hand.

With an individual 'copy' book required for every subject, alongside another for homework, in addition to subject textbooks, bags weighed heavily across young shoulders as girls and boys hauled themselves cheerfully from lesson to lesson, but, after an early settling-in period, it was rare to find anyone turning up without the correct books. This was equally so with pens, pencils, rulers and erasers, and pupils soon got into the habit of keeping a case full of these items. In fact, in contrast to the situation in England, an excess of writing equipment appeared to be the norm here, deriving in part, I suspect, from the first level practice of encouraging colour-coding different forms of writing, along with liberal use of highlighters and underlining. Work at second level undoubtedly reflected this, and pupils were routinely observed using three pens at once, their copybooks

displaying red, green, black or blue inks with liberal use of multi-coloured shading.

In this assiduous preoccupation with schoolwork materials, there was a sense that these items had acquired a symbolic significance, much in the way that Barrie Thorne (1993) observed in a US-based study of primary children, where such tokens of friendship acquire the status of coinage for a informal system of barter and exchange. The symbolic weight invested in these objects arises from the fact that, in an institutional context where children have little power, they constitute probably one of the few currencies upon which to ground an 'informal underground economy', through which may be traced trade patterns marking the boundaries of friendship groups and other socially constituted relations. However, it is important to stress the seriousness of these ritualised exchanges as a means of mediating power relations that have real and meaningful consequences in children's lives. As Thorne (1993: 21) argues, what may, at least to adult eyes, seem like 'play' should actually be viewed as amounting to:

"a focus of provocation and dispute, as a medium through which alliances could be launched and disrupted, as sacraments of social inclusion and painful symbols of exclusion, and as markers of heirarchy".

The continued reliance on books and the writing out of both class-based work and homework at St. Oliver's seemed to provide a commendably solid foundation of literacy skills that would prove to be a necessary platform for future learning in later years. As such, it was something that was taken very

seriously across all school subjects in the younger age range. As an example, in the 2ⁿᵈ year English class I spent time with, every pupil owned a cheap pocket dictionary that they were expected to use constantly both in lessons and when doing their homework. These were routinely carried in schoolbags and failure to produce one in a lesson carried a stiff penalty, usually extra homework, just as producing high quality work would result in 'getting off' the next homework set. Many of these lessons revolved around descriptive writing exercises in which the pupils were expected to use the dictionary in a creative way to enliven and broaden their prose style while simultaneously expanding their vocabulary.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that a traditional PPP (pen, paper and prose) approach made for a dull or lifeless classroom experience, for this would be to grossly underestimate the creativity of some of the high quality teaching practiced at the school. During one such lesson, Niall Crean asked if I would mind acting as a 'catwalk model' so that the class could write a short descriptive piece focusing on my physical appearance. Having secured my agreement, he then proceeded, to my surprise, to decamp the whole of the class and their chairs out into the main corridor, where, with the help of a three-step platform used for lunchtime registration, I did my best not to trip over while performing a distinctly self-conscious 'catwalk' routine.

Niall was keen to have the girls and boys read their own work for the rest of the class, and as a result the remainder of the lesson provided high amusement as they discussed at some length the huge variation their choice of language had thrown up and the relative merits of 'receding', 'thinning' or simply 'shiny' to

describe my newly shaven pate. The pupils relished the impromptu nature of this kind of lesson, freed from the restrictions of the classroom setting and authorised to express and enjoy themselves interactively with an educator who, over the course of a whole year of these classes, they grew to know, and be known to, in a much more rounded way.

Significantly, when I mentioned to Niall one day that, in spite of a two-year age difference, this class were working at a much higher standard than one I had worked with in England, he responded by saying that he needed to "keep up the pressure" on them because of the highly competitive nature of the Junior Cert. English results. He explained that these results would have a significant influence on whether they went on to sit the Ordinary or Higher Level Leaving Certificate exam. This comment was interesting for the insight it gives us into the kind of conditions Irish teachers are expected professionally to respond to, as it was symptomatic of the unwavering eye every teacher in the school had for monitoring the performance of the pupils in their charge, whether in the initial three year Junior cycle, or in the subsequent Senior cycle.

It is a concern that stems not from the kind of austere authoritarian zeal for stern social, cultural and religious control that typically characterised Irish teachers, and indeed Irish society in general, in the forty years from independence to the early 1960s (Grace 2002). That particular form of autocratic inculcation embodied for many of those educated during that period a powerful symbol of state regulation, through the enforced ideals of 'cultural nationalism' – religion and language – often quite literally "marking for life generations of Irishmen and women" (Brown 2004: 237). Today however, the

current attention to prevailing market forces on the part of teachers is thoroughly informed by their insider's knowledge of the finely calibrated workings of the Irish system and, in particular, the sheer competitiveness of the contemporary transition from second to third level education.

For the Republic of Ireland has the highest percentage of young people in Europe, with nearly 800,000 in compulsory education out of a total population of just over four million (DES 2003). The massive growth in school attendance seen in Ireland since the publication of an OECD-supported government report in the mid-1960s (DE 1966), coupled with a concomitantly increasing demand for third level provision, served only to reveal the inadequacies of a university sector limited to 'elite' institutions that actively operated as mechanisms of class reproduction (Brown 2004: 239).

These less than satisfactory arrangements were addressed in subsequent years through the rapid expansion in third level institutions acquiring 'new university' status, resulting in a highly differentiated contemporary sector of 55 colleges and universities offering everything from prestige academic traditionalism to the kind of vocational training found at FE colleges in the UK (DES 2005a). The upshot of all this is that Ireland today is an increasingly certified society, the sustained effects of the 'diploma disease' (Dore 1976) and ongoing credential inflation being that unprecedented attention is now paid to the Leaving Cert. as a triggering mechanism for the 'points race'[22] into a high-earning future.

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[22] In Ireland, points are awarded rather than grades in the Leaving Certificate. The local university required 550 points to study Law in 2005, a substantial increase on the previous year resulting from more applications for a fixed number of places. The anxiety generated has been described as "a kind of national mania" (Eagleton 1999: 45).

For teachers in a school like St. Oliver's then, this is a far more complex matter than simply pressuring young people with the sole intention of extracting the highest points score. Rather, it reflects an implicit acknowledgement that the system as it stands is a major force in generating expectations, or what, in class terms, Skeggs (1997) calls 'entitlements', on the part of pupils and parents, and that as such, it is a fundamental feature of their work that they simply cannot afford to ignore. This results-based imperative, which gained ascendancy in the UK through published League Tables that have attracted fierce criticism for masking the widely differing social conditions under which schools operate[23], has been a deep-seated feature of Irish schooling for many years, even though the government has so far refused to publish official Performance League Tables.

Its origins are almost certainly embedded in the high-achieving tradition of the 'prestige' colleges, where middle-class cultural capital could be 'cashed in' for educational credentials that would ensure the economic basis for social reproduction. More recently, hitched to burgeoning prosperity and intensified competition for the scarce resources on offer in higher education, processes of differentiation involving streaming or 'setting' have been normalised in second-level education as 'practices of classification', motivated chiefly by the demands of aspirant parents and "the urgent futurity of middle-class ambitions" (Ball 2003a: 74). The level to which the scramble for points has now achieved the taken-for-granted status of 'doxa' (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994) was vividly brought home to me during a conversation with a young man called David, a

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[23] See Slee et.al (1998); Lauder et.al. (1999); Walford (2000); Alexiadou (2002).

Leaving Cert student scheduled to sit the exam in June 2005. When we spoke in late September 2004, I asked him what he planned to do when he left school:

> **David**: Oh, ah'll be lookin' t'go to [the local technical college] t'do engineering or somethin' like that ... it all depends on the points ah get y'know.

> **J. S.** So you know how many you need now, already?

> **David**: Well, roughly like ... they don't usually announce 'em 'til about November, but y'have an idea y'know ... the main thing is to keep in Higher level 'cos the points are a lot better.

> **J. S.** How does that work?

David then proceeded to explain with commendable patience to this rather uninformed Englishman the arcane nuances of the system, by removing from his wallet a newspaper clipping that listed the points awarded on a scale from A to E for both Ordinary and Higher Level Leaving Cert. passes. He then went on to carefully point out how disproportionately the points were weighted in favour of the higher level exam, such that a good Higher C carried more points than an Ordinary A. My point in relating this fragment of casual conversation held during a free period on a dull Tuesday afternoon is to show how ingrained the tyranny of the points system is among the majority of Irish teenagers, and the way that this led them to expect, and indeed demand, a certain degree of pressure from their teachers. This would gradually build from about the second year when a

focused Junior Cert. curriculum is taught through the twin streams of ordinary and higher level, and continued to mount as similar sorting processes operate during the senior cycle.

SUMMARY

Irish parents, like parents anywhere, generally want their children to do well at school, and, as I have already mentioned, tend to believe that education is the main route through which an individuals' life chances can be enhanced. Such aspirations however, laudable as they are, cannot be viewed in isolation from the social and economic context in which they are formed, or, to put it another way, where one is, socially speaking, tends to shape what one aspires to, in terms of a family's future. The relative economic prosperity currently enjoyed by a significant number, though not all, Ballygowan residents has to be placed in a context in which things were not always thus, and memories of far more straightened circumstances often feature prominently whenever narratives of contemporary social life are discussed. The following comparison, delivered by a woman not entirely enraptured by every aspect of the current pace of social change, is, nevertheless a neat summation of this tendency:

> "D'know, it's only two generations ago people lived in places with
> two bedrooms and five kids, ... now they all seem to want houses
> with five bedrooms and two kids ..."

Living on a modern housing development with all the trappings of a suburban lifestyle, there remains among a good number of Ballygowan residents a certain sense of disbelief at how they quite arrived there so quickly. This seems to mesh forcefully with reminiscences of harsher times in firing a determination to ensure that their children maintain this forward momentum and avoid slipping back just as rapidly into situations of economic hardship. Meanwhile, those less fortunate residents of the surrounding community who for one reason or another have not reaped the benefits of the 'boom' times nevertheless place their faith in education as a means by which their children might make a better life for themselves.

Such are the pressures and demands made on a school like St. Oliver's in meeting an expectation that, however poorly-resourced, the education offered would be capable of keeping local young people in the 'race' that culminated in the Leaving Certificate. But as we have already begun to see, these kinds of pressures tend to ramify through the system in explicitly exclusionary terms, something that is extraordinarily difficult to temper in the context of a single institution. When that institution sets out with a stated aim of furthering processes of inclusion, then the notion of pushing in different directions is writ large on every aspect of school practices, under the unwavering eye of a public keen to assert their rights as 'enterprising consumers'.

How exactly this conundrum is resolved is a question I shall address in the final chapter, as I seek to explain how decisions taken about what is really of the utmost importance in educating young people has led to St. Oliver's Community College being adjudged a 'success' in terms that rest on a broader conception

of human flourishing. However, before that, we must now return to the north of England, to look more closely at the underlying culture of Bridgepoint High school, in order to discern with some clarity what it was about the nature of daily life there that made teaching and learning such a problematic experience.

PART THREE

ANALYSING SCHOOL EXPERIENCE:

COMPARING 'SUCCESS' IN TWO NATIONAL

SETTINGS

5

Cultural Politics, Identity and Social Class:

Re-engaging with Gender Issues in Contemporary

Schooling

In this the third and final section of this study, I shall begin the task of presenting data from the two schools studied to provide a more detailed analysis of the way that issues involving social class and identity formation continue to inform processes of secondary education as it is currently carried out in both national contexts. And in this chapter I will be pointing in particular to the impact of changes in gender relations in state schooling in the UK, and more specifically, the consequences of a 'masculinist' business model of school management in reconstructing the relationship between teachers and pupils (Apple 2006: 475). This, I will go on to argue, is responsible for 'remasculinizing' and 'resexualizing' schooling practices (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2001: 24), in ways that shape significantly the kind of schooling experienced at Bridgepoint High.

Naturally, in a study concerned with putting schools under the microscope as a key site for interrogating such matters, the dynamic relationship between these institutions, structures and processes cannot be viewed in isolation from wider transformations at a local, national or global level. However, while acknowledging the profound impact these shifts have on working-class children

and young people living, and coping with, what Helen Lucey calls "this maelstrom of change" (2001: 177), this should not blind us to the continued salience of some distinctly 'old school' features of state education that persist in dominating the lives of many girls and boys. This of course applies as much in Ireland as it does in the UK, as governments in both countries seek to promote a fragmented post-welfare state predicated on individual enterprise and entrepreneurship (DuGay 1996), set within the principles of a competitive market economy.

Certainly, those who declared the 'death of class' during the 1980s and 90s have been shown to be premature in issuing such optimistic declarations. Evidence gathered over the last decade conclusively demonstrates that the power of class never really faded at all, but that, in conjunction with variables such as gender, 'race' and ethnicity, merely found reconfigured ways to classify working-class children as failures, while maintaining the positional advantage of the professional middle-classes[1]. Moreover, claims made regarding efforts to ameliorate these injustices through widening participation have been undermined by research evidence pointing out that HE expansion, rather than opening up opportunities for all young people, predominantly benefits middle-class families (Blanden et.al. 2005).

Confirmation duly arrived in an official study showing that currently children from middle-class homes are fifty per cent more likely to stay in education after sixteen than their working-class counterparts (ONS 2005). To make matters

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[1] See Hillman and Pearce (1998); Plummer (2000); Paxton and Dixon (2004).

worse, a recent report on education and training (Nuffield 2006) criticised too much 'policy busyness' on the part of government and suggested that:

> "the current drive to ensure young people achieve the examination results needed to progress into higher education may have detracted from the quality of learning for 14-19 year-olds, and such an approach may be turning some students away from education" (2006: 2).

Given the paradoxical outcomes of these supposedly 'inclusionary' policies, one can only concur with Diane Reay's (2006: 294) assessment that "we still have an education system in which working–class education is made to serve middle-class interests". One of the most far-reaching changes witnessed in the last two decades have been those involving gender relations, both in education and in the workplace beyond. The widespread 'feminisation' of the labour market, coupled with the legislative aftermath of 'equal opportunities' policymaking implemented as a response to second wave feminism[2], improved significantly the educational possibilities open to girls as compared to boys. However, the positive benefits resulting from this process of macro social change have obscured, and some might even say concealed, policy developments on a global scale concerned to shift attention from gender equality and concentrate instead on 'redressing the gender balance'. In doing so, a mounting desire to 'target' school 'underachievement' has been reconceptualised in rigidly demarcated gendered terms.

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[2] As opposed to 'first wave' feminist campaigns for legal and political rights.

For improvements witnessed in girls attainment in school and their subsequent increased participation in post-compulsory education coincided with concern that perceived gains made throughout the 1990s had been won at the expense of boys, who were subsequently reconstructed as the new 'underachievers'. The formation of a growing debate surrounding the alleged 'problem' of boys therefore acted to shift the terms of gender policy away from girls' improved chances to the urgent need to find explanations for a widespread perception that boys were now falling behind in educational terms (Francis and Skelton 2005).

At the root of this concerted campaign is the much-publicised 1990s phenomenon dubbed the 'crisis of masculinity' (Lingard 2003), in which men's identities are felt to be under threat due to the encroachment of women into traditional areas of male domination, and their subsequent invading of 'space' formerly reserved for males (Foster 1996). These fears of a loss in male privilege have been aggravated by the debilitating effects of economic restructuring and contractions in manufacturing industry, the virtual collapse of traditional apprenticeships that destabilised youth employment, and a fast fading demand for manual labour that has been matched by a rapid growth in a service sector founded on the 'soft skills' of new technology.

The media, along with certain prominent politicians, amplified anxiety levels even further and added a social class dimension to the issue by emphasising the threat of an emergent underclass of disaffected adolescent males as an inevitable outcome of this new 'crisis' in education (see Francis 1999; Skeggs 2005). Here, in this conflating of social class attribution and certain

pathologising gendered ascriptions, it is possible to perceive the material effects of what Skeggs (2004: 186) has termed, "the consequences of cultural struggle and how this is part of new marketisation, new attributions of value, new forms of appropriation, exploitation and governance". In light of this "new kind of class paradigm" (Savage 2003: 535), a number of themes emerge here that require a little more elaboration to put these events into a wider context, and coincidently help explain the sheer volume of newspaper column inches, widespread public concern and serious scholarly interest generated by the so-called 'problem' of 'failing boys'.

Firstly, education itself underwent radical reform during this period (Salisbury and Riddell 2000), as a neo-liberal imperative sought to gear public services for a world dominated by free market economics (Porter 1999). Neo-liberalism, particularly in its application in the educational arena, has been comprehensively criticised over a number of years[3], for a fixation with competition that has resulted in an obsessionally narrow focus on exam performance that impels young people to gain higher and higher grades (Mahony 1998). The imposition of this 'credentialist principle' (Francis 2006: 190), intensified by a stringent regime of standards and achievement and closely monitored through surveillance and testing, naturally found schools desperate to seek out areas where attainment might be increased, as part of the inevitable institutional process of 'learning to compete' (DfEE 1996).

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[3] See Ball et.al. (2000); Mahony and Hextall (2000); Olssen et.al. (2004); Olssen and Peters (2005); Apple (2006).

Following what has been strongly argued to be a superficial reading of available statistics[4], attention soon lighted upon boys, and in particular working-class boys, whose disappointing results, if only they could be 'continuously improved', could conceivably enhance a school's position in the league tables (Skelton 2001: 5). In this reading of events, concern surrounding boys is driven by a need to maximise exam 'performance', as a direct consequence of introducing the evaluative mechanisms of a quasi-market into mass secondary education. However, present also in this targeting of certain groups of pupils is a tendency within the neo-liberal state to locate responsibility in the individual (Rose 1999).

This has the effect of shifting 'failure' from socio-economic structures onto 'irresponsible' individuals, who, being deemed to be "failures in self-governance" (Gillies 2005: 837), are subsequently constructed as 'undeserving' (Byrne 2005). Hence, as Francis (2006: 192) recently observed, "neo-liberalism is dependent on individuals buying into notions of meritocracy (via educational credentialism), flexibility, individual responsibility, economic competitiveness and so on", which provides the moral justification for introducing increasingly punitive measures designed to 'redeem' these 'social ills'.

Much of the legitimating rhetoric underpinning this debate over boys relies on attributing blame for the situation on the impact of feminism, and a decade or more of equal opportunities policies aimed at improving the life chances of girls and young women (Reay 2003: 153). This is part of a wider 'backlash politics' across many Western states that is shifting the basis of debates concerning gender, 'race' and class to one grounded in the notion of 'presumptive equality'

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[4] See Arnot et.al. (1999); Gorard et.al. (1999); Gorard (2000).

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(Foster et.al 2001: 7). As such, pursuing a policy agenda Bob Lingard (2003) refers to as 'recuperative masculinity politics', this line argues that "boys specific needs are subsumed under the priority given to girls and minority concerns, leaving them in the role of villains who must change ... to alleviate the problems they cause" (Lingard and Douglas 1999: 133).

Strategies emanating from government and the print and publishing media have therefore focused on male educational failure as a simplistic corollary of female success, and all too often smack of a fundamental return to biological determinism. Furthermore, as a direct consequence of this tendency to apportion blame within a culture of intensified competitiveness, the dominant discourse driving the boys underachievement debate in schools today is not just that 'boys will be boys' and that a feminised school workforce and curriculum has actively sought to suppress that. More worrying still is the claim that 'boys actually *need* to be boys' and be allowed to express some essentialized version of masculine behaviour in order to properly achieve their problematic emergence into manhood (Rowan et.al 2002: 13). And once more there is evidence of certain classed evaluations being smuggled in here, as it is argued that the ascendancy of a 'poor boys'[5] discourse is channelling greater resources towards their needs (Francis and Skelton 2005), rather than concentrating on developing approaches that confront at the classroom level assumptions regarding dominant gender constructions (Younger et.al 2005).

One final point is worth underlining in trying to grasp a wider perspective on the recent sea change in attitudes towards gender relations in education. While

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[5] See Epstein et.al. (1998).

there are connections with both the factors already mentioned, I have placed it last as it seems to me to currently operate, although arguably much more so in the UK, as *the* overarching structural influence guiding the shift in practice at school level. For, following in the wake of the educational reforms undertaken during the 1990s, there is a strong argument to suggest that there has been a remasculinization of school organisation and management in the last ten years (Mahony and Hextall 2000; Skelton 2002).

In asserting this claim, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2001) argue that moving from a 'soft' welfare state to the 'hard realism' of market economics resulted in "the emergence of an entrepreneurial curriculum" (2001: 26) that privileges authority and awards status to the practical orientation and rationality required to overcome the emotional ambiguities of classroom life. Moreover, in redirecting the social justice agenda in line with individualist notions of achievement, such cultural shifts provide a rationale for reasserting previously contested versions of 'dominant' masculinity. This offers opportunities to reject as 'obstructive' gender equity based approaches like those advanced by no longer politically fashionable 'ideologies' like 'feminism' (Raphael Reed 2006: 42, see also Rowan et.al. 2002).

Thus, the derided language of 'equal opportunities' is now supplanted by a performance discourse that has effectively sidelined social justice elements to the level of surface rhetoric, insisting that improvements in boys', and schools', performance is somehow causally linked to the cultural restoration of some lost aspect of masculine identity that needs rapidly reasserting (Myers 2000). It should also be added that one of the major consequences of this shift in the

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gender agenda is seen in teacher training in the UK (Mahony 2003). Within this arena equity issues are now largely neglected, as management structures in schools show little interest in further developing gender equality programmes, which perhaps is not so surprising given the 'presumptive equality' discourse that currently dominates the policy agenda (see Reay 2006: 302).

To sum up, there is a lot more going on here than the statistical identification of a growing tendency among young working-class boys to become disaffected with school, and to behave in ways that run counter to the established standards set in their learning environment. Rather, what we are witnessing is the latest round in an ongoing battle being fought over the existing gender settlement between men and women, and the roles open to them respectively amid the wider social, cultural and economic transformations taking place within conditions of late modernity. And while it is beyond the scope of this study to venture further into the global complexities involved in the future of gender politics, there is one thing we can say regarding its contemporary relevance in the field of education. For as the competitive advantage that is made available through schooling takes on a heightened significance for the future life chances of young people, so the gender relations played out in schools become an increasingly important locus of contestation and resistance, where politics and power are likely to permeate every aspect of classroom-bound institutional processes.

However, we should be careful not to paint too pessimistic a picture of the possibilities for addressing gender issues within the broader context of an educational environment that is attentive to the pernicious influence of certain

gendered identity formations. For any system, however unequal, is only an assemblage of its constituent parts, or in this case, schools, and even those that operate from similar hierarchical positions do differ in the way they deal with the structural constraints they are placed under. Schools, of course, whether in the UK or in Ireland, are hardly impervious to the broad sweep of cultural influences that shape actions and perceptions at a national and more specifically local level, anymore than they are invulnerable to what are argued to be the privatising effects of deliberately targeted government policy (Ranson 2007: 205; see also Hill 2006).

What they do have though, as individual establishments and as collective bodies of women and men, are choices that can be made about the kind of schooling they wish to offer children and young people, within the tightly circumscribed twin constraints of a highly centralised educational policy environment and the harsh immediacy of local socio-economic circumstances (Lupton 2004, 2005). Therefore, through the fine-grained 'witnessing' offered by ethnography, in this chapter I will be attempting to show that what some refer to as a school's 'educative ethos'[6], that difficult to pin down ensemble of moral standards, social values and educational commitments that constitute an institutional normative framework, made an immense difference to the kind of schooling offered in the two research locations.

Given the close alignment in policy thinking in both national contexts, I have to admit that this came as something of a surprise. For there are some rather bold claims currently being made by both nations regarding moves towards more

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[6] See McLaughlin (2005) for a broadly philosophical discussion of the concept of 'ethos'.

'inclusive' educational practices, although I have also urged caution in assuming the veracity of these claims and sought to place them under serious question. But this is of little analytical value unless we critically interrogate how concepts like social inclusion are actually implemented in day-to-day practices and thus form a crucial component in the institutional ethos of a school. If anything, this is more vital than ever before in schools serving working-class communities in both countries.

For mounting levels of material disadvantage and increasing social polarisation are currently being obsessively pored over by the pathologizing discourses of the media, egged on by leading politicians (see Skeggs 2005: 966), and intensified even further by the market-driven hierarchy of schooling itself, which arguably dictates that those at the bottom receive only a third-class education[7]. So, in seeking to address the issue of social class alongside constructions of gendered subjectivities in secondary schooling, I intend to present data showing that a complex interweaving of both classed and gendered discourses continues to play a key role in perpetuating, and sustaining, traditional constructions of working-class masculine identity. Furthermore, interrogating contemporary gender dynamics provides a means through which to explore how contemporary policy movements under the influence of neo-liberalism are having adverse consequences for one particular section of the school population, working–class teenage boys.

For I found huge differences in the way the two schools approached the whole question of gender relations, and more specifically how they dealt with the

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[7] For this argument, see Riddell (2005).

alleged 'problem' of boys. Prolonged ethnographic engagement revealed that one school, Bridgepoint High, through the 'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein 1990) of its institutional ethos, actually reinforced and provided tacit 'lessons' in a narrowly defined heteronormative reading of masculine behaviour, which as the dominant cultural form, readily adhered to Bob Connell's (1987, 1995) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. This acted as both support and validation for lingering identifications with traditional working-class masculine modes of being, a cultural form deeply embedded in the class composition of the surrounding estate, and inhering in familial histories of industrial labour, but now with little prospect of being grounded in the ingrained physicality of manual work. The atmosphere generated by this culture of muscular heterosexist masculinity was one in which working-class boys reacted with hostility to a system that explicitly defined 'success' in such rigidly academic terms that they almost inevitably confirmed their own 'failure to succeed' (Arnot et.al. 1999: 143).

Thus, school-wide conflict and a pervasive 'anti-school' resentment was the overriding and entirely predictable response. Paradoxically, this antipathy and lack of diligence was not just exacerbated but actually fuelled by a school culture that in many respects created the conditions for the reproduction of traditional working-class identities, through an emphasis on essentially masculine traits in prioritising performance and competition in formal assessments (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997: 121). The extremely surveillant and visible nature of this sorting function had the effect of raising the stakes over compliance to disciplinary authority, which carried little legitimacy among pupils that appeared highly sceptical of the meritocratic ideals purported to underpin the system.

This was something Madeline Arnot and colleagues (1999: 143) foresaw in asserting how newly emerging "organisational and regulative practices of schooling" could be perceived as constituting reconfigured forms of social control, rather than as embodying an environment that would enhance young people's educational and work opportunities. The material presented in this chapter therefore, providing empirical evidence confirming these disheartening predictions, hopefully contributes a more up to date picture of how the application of market principles in schools has actually increased levels of confrontation between teachers and working-class pupils (Lucey 2001), triggering processes of exclusion that marginalise further these already disadvantaged young people.

In sharp contrast, the approach of St. Oliver's Community College was markedly different, as both the leadership team and staff actively adopted a whole school policy that represented a 'transformative' agenda in respect of gender relations. This they did by confronting at source aggressive and negative displays of what Connell (1995: 111) terms 'protest masculinities', as a way of challenging traditional 'anti-learning' attitudes. In the process what was promoted was a reform-oriented gender regime that was unusually attuned to the nuances of equality issues in what is still a predominantly patriarchal wider social environment. This stance was just one aspect of a broader commitment to inclusive practice at the school that fundamentally recognised the need to pay full attention to the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of all of its pupils, in seeking to create a 'community of solidarity' among teachers and learners in which a high value is placed on mutual respect.

This chapter concentrates mainly on Bridgepoint High school in England, in order to devote sufficient space to a detailed description and analysis of the kind of processes just alluded to, by way of opening the analytical section of this study. In doing so, in a way, it represents for me personally the culmination of over eight months of fieldwork and a distillation of what it was like to attend this school over that extended period of time. And while this study is certainly not about attaching blame to individuals or organisations, I would concede that here my concern will be to try to explain why it was that Bridgepoint High was not 'successful', although in my defence I would also argue that the arguments I shall offer amount to a fair and honest account of what life was really like at Bridgepoint, for teachers, for the pupils, and for myself.

This decision to focus on the English context here will allow me to reserve for the final chapter a complimentary analysis that will try to pin down in some ethnographic detail what exactly it was that made St. Oliver's in Ireland such a 'success', in engaging its pupil population, and in managing to create a safe and caring environment that young people actually looked forward to attending. However, for the moment, it is the turn of Bridgepoint High, and it is to that school that the following pages will now be devoted.

GENDER REFORM IN 'CRISIS' SCHOOLS:

REFRAMING 'OLD SCHOOL' VALUES?[8]

For those occupied in the field of educational research, the ongoing debate surrounding 'boys underachievement' marks the latest manifestation of an ongoing 'moral panic' that initially erupted in the mid 1990s when boys' GCSE benchmark results (5 A*-C grades) revealed a 'gender gap' in school attainment (Arnot et.al. 1998, Arnot et.al. 1999; QCA 1998). The subsequent outbreak of public handwringing over 'failing boys' (Epstein et.al. 1998) centred on a subsequent discourse of blame that ranged from the 'disempowering' effects of an alleged feminist bias in education (Foster et.al. 2001), a litany of the various deficiencies found in schools, and consternation over the dearth of male role models to whom boys might aspire within educational settings. A proliferation of 'backlash blockbusters' (Mills 2003), along with regular media reporting, quickly identified the source of this 'crisis' as the logical outcome of the 'feminization' of teaching (Mahony 2003: 7).

Thus, by constructing boys as the ultimate 'victims' of feminism, these proponents of 'recuperative masculinity politics' (Lingard and Douglas 1999) sought to address the 'new 'disadvantaged' (Yates1997) by advocating 'boy-centred' approaches over 'equal opportunities' frameworks drawing on pro-feminist and gender-equity interventions grounded in a broader social justice agenda (Kenway 1995). However, the authors of these 'recuperative' forms of 'reverse discrimination'[9] chose to remain silent on the issue of sexuality in

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[8] Here, I expand on ideas first outlined in Smith (2007b).

[9] See Biddulph (1997, 1998); Sommers (2000) and Gurian (2002). Titus (2004) provides a comprehensive and critical review of this work.

schools, and seem equally reluctant to link adolescent male identities with schools as sites where sexualised (and sexualising) behaviour takes place (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 1996).

This is a strange omission in an educational landscape where surveillance regimes focus increasing scrutiny on working-class 'laddishness' or 'rogueish' behaviours (Sukhnandan et.al. 2000; Francis 1999, 2006). For these 'macho' attitudes were most memorably brought to our attention through Paul Willis's (1977) enduringly graphic portrayal of working-class boys rejecting formal learning in favour of an 'anti-school' culture mirroring that of the factory floor. The groundbreaking insights provided by this and subsequent studies documenting how factors involving social class, 'race', ethnicity and gender fundamentally intersect in processes of identity construction among boys appears not to be considered relevant, leaving us with a wilfully 'untheorized' (Lingard 2003: 53) account of the sheer complexities involved in contemporary school cultures.

However, their lack of regard does not negate the continuing usefulness of scholarly endeavours in this field. For it was Willis, among others[10], that explained conflict between 'formal' school authority and the 'informal' culture of the 'lads' by highlighting their articulation of a white patriarchal masculinity forged out of an intimate relationship with industrialised manual labour. Later studies built on this research by offering more nuanced understandings of boys' differing school experiences and thus their variegated masculine subjectivities (Kessler et.al. 1985; Connell 1989), revealing the centrality of power relations in

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[10] See also Corrigan (1979); Woods (1979); Lee (1987).

shaping interactions between boys and other boys, as well as those between boys and girls (Mac an Ghaill 1994, 1996b, 1996c; Martino 1999). This more sophisticated analysis of the contingency underpinning gendered processes reconceptualised gendered identity as multiple and multidimensional, embedded and formed in the practices of interactional relations and embodied in gendered practices[11].

The work of Bob Connell in particular (1987, 1995, 2000) broke new ground in illuminating how 'hegemonic' heterosexual masculinities gain ascendancy through dominating oppositionally positioned 'Others' like girls or gay and subordinate masculinities. By 'presuming the heterosexual norm' (Epstein and Johnson 1994), 'culturally exalted' forms of masculinity are 'brought to life' in collective and institutional practices that legitimate the patriarchal order (Skelton 2001: 50), through repeated enactments that 'fix' male power in embodied heteronormative practices deployed to 'police' compulsory heterosexuality (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Redman 1996). Gender here is theorised as always a process of 'becoming', a series of performances conjuring up the illusion of a 'natural' gender (Butler 1990).

Research adopting this theoretical approach has uncovered how boys inhabiting 'hard' or 'macho' subjectivities (see Salisbury and Jackson 1996; Mills 2001; Frosh et.al. 2002) often equate schoolwork with an 'inferior effeminacy' (Mac an Ghaill 1996b: 147) that makes it inappropriate for them, as men[12]. Similarly, other work has shown that displaying 'clever' or 'studious' behaviour

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[11] See Carrigan et.al. (1985); Arnot and Weiner (1987); Thorne (1993).

[12] See also Wolpe (1988); Lees (1993); Kehily and Nayak (1997); Epstein (1997); Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997); Alloway and Gilbert (1997); Francis (2000).

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can result in aggressively homophobic taunting[13]. Clearly, the correspondence made between schoolwork and femininity among young men striving for status in tight-knit school settings has tremendous potential to encourage deteriorating attitudes towards learning and heightens the risk of adverse educational outcomes.

Sadly though, prospects for change offer little to be optimistic about in a 'remasculinized' and 'resexualized' school system where assertive, entrepreneurial masculinity is a predominant influence on a reconfigured professional discourse (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2001: 24) through which teachers are expected to do 'whatever works' in order to engage disaffected boys. Unfortunately, it is the highly gendered discursive registers enacting "particularised instances of masculinity" (Martino 1999: 239) that are employed in this misguided effort that fatally underscores the 'schoolwork = anti-masculine' couplet, paradoxically confirming the belief among working-class kids that 'real boys don't work' (Epstein 1998).

What the profound lack of attention paid to such scholarship on the part of 'recuperative' advocates reveals is their retreat to a biological determinism in which boys are set against girls through a 'competing victims syndrome' (Cox 1996). Bereft of such insights, what schools are offered instead are 'tips for teachers' approaches (see Bleach 1998), often based on essentialist readings of gender that assumes 'boys will be boys' (Mahony 1998). Strategies based on these ideas appear ill equipped to dislodge the persistence of some thoroughly gendered ideas about schooling and schoolwork, and this casts into

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[13] See Nayak and Kehily (1996); Epstein (1997, 1998); Renold (2001); Jackson (2002).

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considerable doubt their chances of success in combating the frequently

negative impact school subjectivities often have on the educational

achievements of working class boys (Martino and Meyenn 2001).

An opportunity to document at first hand the material outcome of such

processes was afforded to me during the latter stages of my time at Bridgepoint

High school in England. I was invited by the Head of Year 11 in the early weeks

of 2004 to take on the role of 'study buddy' to a group of boys designated as

'underachieving'. With just a few months left before their GCSE exams, these

boys and I subsequently became constant companions as we traversed their

school timetable in each others company. And while I like to think that I helped

them a little with their studies, I know that in reality I represented little more than

an amusing diversion for them in their remaining time at school. For by the time

we met, in their heads at least, they had already left Bridgepoint High and were

understandably preoccupied with adult futures largely framed by cars, girls and

money. In this, as in so many other things, they reminded me uncannily of

myself when I was their age. But as with most teaching and learning

experiences, I am sure that I learned more from them than they did from me, so

while much of the material presented here draws on their daily lives, my

analysis also draws on data from elsewhere in the school, and thus should not

be read as pertaining exclusively to the 'lads' I have chosen to dub 'the

Bridgepoint Boys'.

The end result of this long-term engagement with the lived reality of daily life in

school is ethnographic data showing how adolescent working-class boys'

investments in locally fashioned versions of dominant, or 'hegemonic' (Connell

1987) masculinities are primarily pursued to achieve, manage and maintain collective peer group status in the conflict-ridden environment of the co-educational classroom. Participation in tactics such as these significantly diminishes the risk of being publicly singled out for accusations of homosexuality, furnishing a degree of protection from the displays of homophobia that are routinely prevalent in school-based interactions. And there are sound reasons for this ploy; apart from the psychic fears and social anxiety such naming would undoubtedly provoke, sustained homophobic baiting is the ultimate form of social stigma in this resolutely heterosexual milieu (Epstein 1997; Kehily and Nayak 1997).

The dangerous potential inherent in such accusations are that they could decisively 'spoil' the kind of social identity required to gain a ranking position within the acceptable peer group registers of working-class masculinity deemed normative in these intensely monitored surroundings. Exploring these processes as they unfold should therefore allow us to glimpse how, in actively adopting subjectivities buttressed by the enduring symbolic force of a highly masculinised local working-class identity, boys negotiate a preferred subject position in an established gender order. Moreover, the data suggests that boys do so in competition with 'other' boys, as well as oppositionally with girls and popular discourses surrounding femininity. To those committed to an inclusive educational framework of gender relations that maximises the potential of all young people from working-class backgrounds, there is an uncomfortable paradox revealed here.

For in an institutional environment that was characterised by aggressive confrontation and authoritarian forms of control predicated on physical domination, I found that it was the gender regime of Bridgepoint High itself that acted to define and regulate collective understandings of dominant masculinity, thus aiding and abetting the naturalising of certain key assumptions underpinning hegemonic forms of heterosexist discourse. What was crucial in sustaining this ascendant regime of gendered regulation was that this powerful binary dualism was being normalised and 'made flesh' by the 'cultural complicity' of some teachers, whose classroom practices served to reinforce the 'naturalness' of compulsory heterosexuality (Roulson and Mills 2000; Skelton 2001).

Evidence gleaned from this research points to these practices, at least in part, being an emerging response to performance management pressures to tackle the 'problem' of 'failing boys', by seeking to find ways to squeeze higher exam grades from educationally disaffected young men. Thus, a number of teachers actively courted the admiration of 'macho lads' in efforts to establish 'friendly' relations and thereby minimise control and management problems while maintaining academic engagement. Through such actions, the persevering power of a gender absolutism that naturalises hegemonic forms of heterosexuality, given added vigour by 'recuperative' strategies aimed at engaging working-class boys, seemed to justify the absence of any overall school policy to challenge homophobic behaviour[14].

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[14] See Rowan et.al. (2002); Martino and Berrill (2003); Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) and Younger et.al. (2005) for such policies.

Such policies were, in any case, routinely derided by many staff as 'political correctness' and antithetical to 'natural' behaviour, views that substantially derived from teachers' own discursive readings of popular sexual repertoires, in which compulsory heterosexuality is naturalised as 'commonsense' and 'normal reality' (Williams 1976: 118). This raises serious questions about exactly 'what kind' of additional male teachers are really needed as role models in the contemporary schooling of boys (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Mills 2004). Having provided the theoretical background and context for the data that forms the bulk of this chapter, it is now time to turn to the material itself, which I would argue underlines the importance of confronting the lingering tenacity of a localised version of working-class manliness that turns young men away from schoolwork and towards an identity of muscular masculine prowess that ill prepares them for a deindustrialised future.

GENDERED PERFORMANCES IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS

It quickly became apparent that gender was a regular performative aspect of informal classroom practices, as boys used space, deportment and voice to articulate embodied demonstrations of dominant masculinity (see also Lahelma 2002). And as this following extract reveals, lessons offered a recurring collective arena through which to exert authority over the remainder of the class. Indeed, the sound of laughing, jeering and shouting would often pave the way for the arrival of a group of boys that would subsequently seek to monopolise space and attention:

The boys have all just trooped into the classroom, walking in as a six strong party of cheerfully boisterous, jostling individuals, bantering away to each other. Greet teacher warmly, which she returns. They then engage in a protracted and noisy period of desk adjusting and chair scraping as they park themselves in a single dark blue line across the front row of the class. Usual seats? Constant movement and activity generated by this group carries on well into lesson time - chairs are pushed out and twisted sideways so that talk can be directed at those seated behind as well as either side. They all use raised voices, arm-waving and hand signals to communicate with each other and the rest of the class, who, apart from two talkative girls sat in the row behind, do not appear to welcome the attention. Dean leans back precariously on the flimsy plastic, balancing on two legs and swinging back and forth languidly. From my position at the side of the room, they appear to form a confrontational row that seems to challenge the teacher to try delivering a lesson over their heads. (Fieldnotes 23/1/04).

This extract conveys some sense of the influence their presence had on the rest of the class. The boys used physicality and manly assertion to collectively inhabit a stylised form of working-class masculinity that cleared an informal space in the otherwise socially regulated classroom. This "embodied grammar of manual labour" (Nayak 2003: 147), a practical manifestation of "cultured habitus" (Bourdieu 1976b: 195), enacts what Charlesworth (2000: 229-300)

describes as "a way of walking, of moving in space, of gesticulating, of swearing, joking, bantering, of laughing, eating, drinking and 'being a lad'". The ensemble performance of these stereotypically swaggering gendered subjects dominated a restricted classroom environment, reinforced through a narrow linguistic 'vocabulary of abuse' (Lees 1993: 34) to conduct category boundary maintenance work in a public arena (Martino 1999: 239), as demonstrated in this next incident:

Michael: (Talking about last night's TV, a makeover show) ... an' all the furniture was white an' curtains an' carpets as well ...

Dean: Don't be so gay ya freak, whadya wanna watch that fo' anyway? ...

The significance of peer relations is paramount here, and the generative influence the peer group has on regulating hierarchical masculinities has been amply documented in recent research[15]. For as Connell succinctly puts it, it is "peer groups, not individuals, that are the bearers of gender definitions" (2000: 162), and it is the capacity of the peer milieu to render visible a gender order that enables boys to partake in the shared enterprise of hyper-masculinity making and competitive 'macho' bravado that denigrates females and anything considered 'feminine' (Robinson 2005). Here, speaking about their dislike for schoolwork, the boys underline the importance of peers in shaping school experience:

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[15] See Thorne (1993); Jordan (1995); Connelly (1998); Swain (2000); Skelton (2001); Renold (2001) and Keddie (2003) for primary contexts and Foley (1990); Mac an Ghaill (1994); Connell (1989, 1995, 2000); Martino (1999); Mills (2001) and Frosh et.al. (2002) for secondary settings.

Lee: Ah car't wait to get out of 'ere, it's so borin' an' all the stuff y'do's crap any'ow …

Mike: (interrupting) … Thee 'ave ya doin loads 'a stuff that's no good t'ya, like poems 'an that, what we did this mornin' … ah' mean, what goods that t'ya at work? …

Steve: Y'get fed up of 'em gerrin' on y'back all the time, tellin' y'what t'do 'an that … ah'm gonna do a modern apprenticeship … its nearly all practical in that … its on'y forty per cent written werk …

J.S.: Well, that's still forty per cent y'll 'ave to do, Steve …

Steve: Yea, but that's less than 'arf in'it eh?

J.S. : So, in't there anything y'like about bein' in school now then?

Mike: Well, y'get t'be wi'ye mates, do't ya … an' y'cun 'ave a good laff in class wi' some teachers…

Mark: (interrupting) … Sometimes y'just do't know what's gonna 'appen d'ya … it can be brilliant 'ow summat just teks off …

Lee: Thiss' times when ah've laughed s'much in class that its 'urt, y'know …

However, peer social dynamics also operate antagonistically, pitting one individual against another in a competitive cycle of 'ritualised amplification'. For as Michael Kimmel (1994: 132) argues, "our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies". In the next excerpt, boys pursuing these "ensembles of self-fashioning techniques" (Martino 1999: 246) undertake precisely this kind of 'borderwork' (Thorne 1993), doing so at the expense of others to police the boundaries of acceptable masculinity by rejecting (and thus conjoining the 'victim' with) something attributed as feminine (in this case, actually doing schoolwork):

> Two boys sit next to each other, with two more immediately in front. They have been instructed to copy a map onto paper freehand. Only one boy, Brian, is drawing the map:
>
> **Andy**: What y'doing? (Looks across at Brian's drawing) ... s'gay is that ...
>
> **Brian**: What's it look like ... ya' fat freak.
>
> **Chris**: Oh yea, that is really gay that is Brian ...(laughs)
>
> **Andy**: You are so fuckin' gay you are ... God, what a gayboy ...
>
> **Dane**: (interrupting) ... E's a fuckin' paedo, that's what e'is ... paedo, paedo ... (Andy and Chris join Dane in a football chant of 'pee-do', raising their voices across the room).

While everyone participated in these practices, noone relished being targeted as a 'victim', escalating verbal retaliation usually spiralling into bouts of

'ritualised slanging', thereby symbolically reiterating the peer mediated 'rules of engagement'. The 'cut and thrust' world of informal pupil culture's most pressing demand is the need to be popular, and it is this striving for status that impels boys into "taking up the offer" (Connell 2000: 162) of a desired position in the gender order by performatively complying to collective group norms and behaviours. Bridgepoint High's aggressive and frequently confrontational school culture demanded that all its pupils, boys and girls, learned fast about 'standin' up fo' y'self' and not backing down under intimidation. Being 'tough enough' to respond physically to verbal taunts was therefore a minimum expectation and respect had to be earned under the monitoring gaze of one's peers in the competitive arena of school life.

In such an environment, the quest for peer approbation is thus largely responsible for reinforcing those "repertoires of relating" (Martino and Berrill 2003: 107) deemed normative in the local cultural context, which is why 'soft' or 'weak' versions of masculinity are so disparaged and routinely labelled as 'gay'. How well boys cope in negotiating peer relations depends on the economic, intellectual or physical resources they can draw on in their daily life in school (Swain 2003: 302), the complexities of differing pupil trajectories deriving in part from their resoursefulness in utilising one or more of these assets. In the following section, I go on to describe the overwhelming influence one particular cultural form had for the 'Bridgepoint boys', and the forceful way it 'spoke to' and 'spoke for' the aggressive heterosexuality they strove to inhabit (Redman 1996: 177).

Building 'Physical Capital' by 'Embodying' Masculinity

The significance of sport in shaping masculine identity has been highlighted by a number of authors[16], while, in the UK, recent studies have investigated how football acts as a key signifier in constructing hegemonic masculinities in schools.[17] The game offers boys a set of masculinising practices almost entirely predicated on physicality and embodied social action, enacted on a public platform to display competence in a cultural form that "personifies the acme of masculinity, and communicates ideals of fitness, strength, competition, power and domination" (Swain 2000: 107). This resonated strongly with my observations at Bridgepoint High and, indeed, I would go further by suggesting that, in a social landscape where certain popular cultural forms are more 'exalted' than others, footballing prowess represented *the* prestige resource in signifying 'successful' masculinity. Dominant boys invested heavily in a symbolically valorised or desirable image and profile cultivated through the accretions of 'physical capital' (Shilling 1991) football provided.

But as Shilling (2004: 477) drawing on Bourdieu (1978, 1986a, 1986b), points out, the chances of converting this into economic, social or cultural capital are extremely limited and carry high opportunity costs as pursuing sport can frequently conflict with academic demands, working-class dispositions tending, if anything, to have a negative impact on formal assessment (Keddie 1971, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Prolonged investments in football therefore, and the working-class masculine aesthetics it symbolizes (Critcher 1979), only yields profits in the specific cultural field upon which they are won, and

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[16] See Dunning (1986); Brod (1987); Hargreaves (1987); Messner and Sabo (1990); Connell (1990); Parker (1996); McKay et.al (2000).

[17] See Skelton (1993); Renold (1997); Connelly (1998); Swain (2000); Nayak (2003).

consequently were more likely to adversely affect school outcomes as they expressed somatically what Willis (2003: 395) terms "the anti-mental animus of the counter-school culture". To illustrate this, the next excerpt shows how boys used football in classrooms to exert hegemonic masculinities' power to regulate thought and action by defining itself as the 'norm', not just against girls but also by calling into question 'subordinate' masculinities such as those associated with the 'goth' subculture (Abraham 1989).

(Fieldnote diary 3/4/04). The class are doing the oral presentation component of their GCSE 'O' level coursework. This involves standing in front of the class and talking for five minutes about a chosen topic. Most of the boys and girls are very reticent about it, with many refusing to stand at the front perhaps because of the eight boys sitting across the first row. Those boys who usually sat near the back of the room chose topics broadly relating to their affinity for 'goth' culture, such as music, computer games, or comics. In stark contrast with these diverse topics, and their nervousness about presenting them, the dominant boys at the front insisted on going first and every one of them chose to talk about football, and specifically the exploits of the Sunday league teams they play for, with local rivalries much to the fore (they play for two different teams in the same league). There was a lot of ribald banter among the group (which the teacher cautioned them about) as each took their turn at speaking, but not a single question came from either the girls or boys making up the remainder of the class. However, this did not prevent the 'dominant' boys from

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commenting freely on their presentations in terms that questioned the credibility and viability of the speaker's public image, especially when applied to girls, where it was usually both sexualised and highly derogatory.

However, this brief excerpt involved an exchange between them and a boy who had just talked about 'goth' music:

Lee: In't it just about wearing black all the time and bein' miserable? (laughs from the others)...

Steve: D'ya do it (wear 'goth' style clothes) cos' ye not very good at footy an' wun't get in the team?

Dean: Do'te ye just sit around on yur own, feelin' sad all the tarme? (grins at the others).

Jonno: ah must admit, ah wunt fancy playin' agenst ye wiv all them chains ... (laughing) clankin' about ... (At this point the teacher has to tell the boys to be quiet as they are all shouting out comments and interrupting each other).

This brief vignette shows how importantly this particular group of boys ranked the ability to play football over and above any of their classmates' interests. Declaring a preference for elements of 'goth' culture in such a public forum threw into sharp relief the acts of verbal and physical intimidation used to substantiate a hierarchy of masculinities. Subordinated masculine identities such as those exhibited by 'goths', in defiantly deviating from the 'norm', are perceived to represent a challenging alternative and consequently are ruthlessly

pathologised and positioned as 'other' for preferring pursuits that, in their 'unmanly' absence of physical aggression, categorically locate them as 'feminine'. For the Bridgepoint boys, football, and the ideals it encapsulates, is the 'norm' and status and popularity are only achievable through the 'cool' masculinity exhibited in its skilful displays of corporeal social action.

Engaging in these particular cultural performativities, they are re-enacting "a set of meanings already established" in Butler's (1990: 140) terms, as they 'make exhibitions of themselves' as the 'right kind' of man. This accords with the cultural logic of a time-honoured tradition of working-class masculine heritage rooted in the physical demands made by manual labour, generating an identity imbued with a deep-seated 'pride in place', and clung on to stubbornly in uncertain and precarious times (see also Nayak 2003, 2006[18]). These quotes, captured right after the lesson just alluded to, indicate how factors involving social class, peer pressure and a jostling of identities are all implicated in the energy expended in maintaining a place among the 'dominant populars' (Willis 2003: 409):

> **J.S.:** What's the best thing about playin' for you, then?
>
> **Dean:** S'brilliant in'it, y'can get outside an' run about wi' ye mates ... an' it keeps ye fit an' that ... me Dad comes to all our games to watch 'ow we're gettin' on, so we must be good ... (jeers from the others).

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[18] Nayak (2006: 828) argues for the importance of place, locality and regional identity in sustaining "a cultural text upon which the previous inscriptions of past cultures continue to be etched into the present, to be embodied by a new generation".

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Mike: It's great when ye playin' an' it just sorta teks over so ye do'te really think about it ... ye just do it.

Dean: Well e'dunt, that's why e's a defender ... ah'm a striker, me ...

J.S.: What about you Lee, why do you like it?

Lee: Me ... ah like getting stuck in ... that's my job anyway coz ah play in midfield, but you 'ave to in our team coz thez some right animals in the league we play in ... an somebody 'as to stand up fo' the team ... (pushes Dean, one of his teammates, who swears back at him).

J.S.: Aren't ye worried about getting kicked an' that? Don't ye ever think about 'em giving ye some back?

Lee: Thing is ... it's 'ard innit football ... an' ye've got to 'ave balls t'play this game sir ... (they all start laughing at his pun) ... that's if ye've got any ... (looks accusingly at Dean).

So far, I have focused on the strategies and manoeuvres that adolescent boys undertake in striving to stake out 'pole position' in the 'pecking order' of the pupil hierarchy. The school here acts as a setting in which the cultural resources available to pupils are deployed to alleviate the "vulnerability of ambivalence" (Nayak and Kehily 1996: 220) that is so acutely felt during this period of adolescence.

However, does the school itself have a role in this process of gendered identity construction, as a site where certain structures and practices transform it into an institutional agent that aids the formation of certain masculinities? And if this is the case, what does it reveal about the institutional 'gender regime' (Kessler et.al. 1985), the totality of gender relations that intersect and mesh to give life to the definitions of masculinity that boys must participate in simply by spending every day moving through the structures of the school? In what follows I shall present data documenting how the reality of lived practice at Bridgepoint High, as distinct from its stated ethos, was a prime mover in shaping a culture of compulsory heterosexuality. This was 'demonstrated' in the symbolic value awarded to 'tough' or 'hard' forms of masculinity, and in the example set by some teachers, who were found to be acting as 'cultural accomplices' in perpetuating heterosexist and homophobic discourses in order to court the affirmation of dominant popular boys.

Making 'Real' Men: 'Cultural Complicity' and the
Neo-Liberal Imperative to be 'Tougher than the Rest'
While schools are far from being the only institutions involved in shaping masculinities (others include the family and the mass media), research suggests that co-educational settings do indeed convey a variety of difference-marking gender messages by creating oppositions between girls and boys[19]. Connell (2000: 157) goes further by arguing that co-ed schools "typically operate with an informal but powerful ideology of gender difference, and do put pressure on boys to conform to it". This study found considerable evidence to support this claim. In sharp contrast to Bridgepoint High's declared aim of

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[19] See Beynon (1989); Skelton (1993); Thorne (1993); Mac an Ghaill (1994); Hey (1997a); Skelton (2001); Keddie (2003).

"supporting each other ... in a happy and friendly school where good personal relationships ... are part of our daily life"[20], the overriding concern appeared to be with maintaining control through regulation and disciplinary restraint, with shouting, verbal threats and physical confrontation a common occurrence throughout the school. However, these authoritarian forms of control did not appear to extend as far as challenging the routine incidence of misogynistic, homophobic and racist behaviours at an institutional level, leaving individual teachers to arbitrarily judge what was 'acceptable' in a hostile atmosphere of staff-pupil antagonism.

Compelled by pressure to improve exam results in a managerialist regime of intensified technologies of surveillance (see Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2001), some teachers developed 'survivalist' strategies grounded in the kind of 'muscular' working-class masculinity Willis so vividly outlined, involving a "complex of chauvinism, toughness and machismo" (1977: 53). The clear objective was to 'win over' disaffected boys by emphasising similarity and downplaying difference in positioning themselves as 'one of the boys' (Skelton 2001: 140). The following extract illustrates how one teacher's reliance on the 'heterosexual presumption' (Epstein and Johnson 1994) underpinned his distinction between 'good lads', and aberrant (and therefore deviant) masculinities ascribed to 'other' boys while supervising a school excursion:

> **Mr. Brown**: ... It was a great trip for them and I'm sure they found it useful ... good bunch a'lads really ... although I must say some of them are a bit ... y'know ...

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[20] Bridgepoint High's Parent's Brochure 2004.

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J.S.: How do you mean?

Mr. Brown: Well, there's one or two of 'em in that group …
they give you the creeps with the way they are …

J.S.: Why's that …

Mr. Brown: … It's … it's just the clothes they wear and the
way they flounce about … take that lad John, he was wearing
a baggy white shirt with big puffy sleeves … and black make-
up … I mean … urgh (grimaces) … it's just weird …

Dominant assumptions about what constitutes the 'right' sort of 'lad' are here
taken for granted as the 'norm', resulting in those who choose to stray from this
standard being labelled as 'weird'. The normalising gaze of teachers thus
operates as a mechanism of surveillance for the disciplinary regulation of the
school's gender regime, sanctioning certain 'kinds' of 'lad' while subordinating
'others' for being too 'weird' to meet the rule and the norm, operating in no less
effective a way than the Bridgepoint boys had with their 'piss-takes' and 'put-
downs' in solidifying a hierarchy of 'acceptable' masculinity. However, some
teachers went further still, transmitting vehemently heterosexist performances
that served to 'flesh out' the contours of acceptable masculinity by
demonstrating in burlesque fashion how humorous the possible alternatives
could be.

(Fieldnote diary 5/3/04). One teacher whose lessons I regularly attended with the boys carefully cultivated a 'matey' relationship with them, sharing jokes and chatting informally during periods when they were note-taking. Occasionally, he would go into his 'camp' character, where he would answer questions, or respond to one of the boys by placing an arm into his side, cocking a hip and lisping, pantomime-like, in a stereotypically 'gay' fashion. His 'acting out' was greeted with waves of laughter and much cheering, and performances became more regular as their popularity grew.

A penchant for entering into joking relations with certain boys meant that this teacher was generally well thought of:

Will: ... E's alright is Needler ... e'as a relaxed attitude y'know ...

J.S.: Yea? In what way ...

Darren: E's not as strict as that cow P... (the female Head of Subject)

Stevie: ... Yea, y'cun ave a laff wi'im ... e's quality, not like some o'the others ...

This teachers' popularity, as I discovered after sitting in on his lessons over a number of weeks, firmly rested on his careful positioning of himself and the year 11 boys as 'mates', something he accomplished by resorting less often to the

infantilising disciplinary techniques that other teachers regularly deployed. However, the sole aim, as he told me himself, was to *'get along with as little friction as possible'* in order to *'get as many of 'em through the exam as I can'*. This teachers' flamboyant teaching style and calculated adoption of popular readings of 'hard' masculinity were a calculated 'self-fashioning' response to being set a seemingly intractable problem; how to get pupils through an exam they had already disassociated themselves from months before. However, the increasingly truculent outbursts that I witnessed over time also signalled mounting frustration, something he expressed to me on numerous occasions:

Mr. Needler: ... the thing is, I'm getting pushed by the boss to keep the grades up and get as many as possible through the exam but ... when you've got an odds an' sods class like this, and some of the most disruptive lads dumped in here together ... I've all on just to keep 'em in the room, as you've seen ... so I'll try anything to grab their interest and hopefully we'll get through it together.

It is not my intention here to single out this teacher for consciously condoning inappropriate attitudes, but rather to reveal the complexly interweaving factors that are involved in motivating these practices[21]. For schools like Bridgepoint High, only one criterion for 'success' counts in this neo-liberal era, and that is measured in GCSE results within the managerial technology of 'continuous

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[21] Martino and Frank (2006) assert that in certain contexts, "male teachers feel compelled to fashion their own masculinities so that they can manage the potential threat posed by disruptive boys" (2006: 28). I would suggest that Bridgepoint High represented one of these contexts.

improvement' (Benjamin 2002: 15). So when the 'failing boys' discourse, despite a dearth of evidence (Epstein et.al. 1998; Gorard et.al. 1999), heightens fears about the potentially disastrous effects a crisis among boys could have on a school's League Table performance, we surely need to take seriously claims that pressure is being brought to bear in relation to teacher's work with adolescent boys.

For there is persuasive evidence that these sort of 'male-bonding' relationships, based on humorous practices and sexualised banter, often act as a regulatory technique for disciplining the constitution of heterosexual masculine subjectivities[22]. In a similar vein, Christine Skelton (2001: 140) argues that male teachers discursively consolidate 'properly masculine' identities as a response to the professions' 'soft' image, by interrogating the credibility of boys' heterosexual 'maleness' (Askew and Ross 1988). By "expelling femininity and homosexuality from within themselves" (Mac an Ghaill 1994: 90), a consensual space is thereby cleared for the substantive (and substantiating) performance of culturally acceptable registers of heterosexuality. In light of these insights, I would contend that the gradual decline in behaviour I witnessed in this class was at least partly attributable to the teacher unwittingly legitimating certain gendered discourses that, upon being exuberantly reiterated by certain boys, were then rather paradoxically judged inappropriate and subjected to authoritarian disciplinary sanctions.

One might speculate further that the normative framework of the school in question, in terms of the existing gender regime and the overriding imperative to

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[22] See Lyman (1987); Kehily and Nayak (1997: 80); Lesko (2000); Robinson (2005); Martino and Frank (2006).

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'escalate' GCSE grades, left teachers with nowhere else to go but into extreme readings of heteronormative behaviour. Confronted with the hyper-masculinity of disaffected and often disruptive adolescent boys, it seems plausible to posit that the authority of the institution, grounded as it was in muscular forms of assertive masculinity, would be the primary route to engagement for many teachers, whether male or female. Such performances, delivered with sufficient authority, would leave noone in any doubt about who was really 'tougher than the rest'.

By way of illustration, one might suppose that such an overtly masculine gender regime would be particularly problematic for female teachers, but some of the more experienced staff had clearly adapted their teacher identities in line with changing work practices by relinquishing 'naturalised' feminine images and taking 'onboard' the attributes of 'hard' masculinity. This 'spoke' volumes about the gendered 'nature' of authoritative disciplinary power that is now a prerequisite for middle managers in a remasculinised educational workplace (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2001: 26), something, one might add, that would hardly be lost on younger staff harbouring ambitions to climb the teaching hierarchy.

A female teacher that I occasionally encountered in the Year 11 block exhibited precisely this potent blend of barely suppressed aggression and intimidating physical presence, and as a result, was grudgingly admired by many of the more disruptive boys for her willingness to back up her frequent verbal outbursts:

Adrian: ... but the best teacher 'ere is Miss Grey, she's ace

... an she packs a real punch as well ...

J.S.: What do you mean?

Richard: Oh, e's on about what 'appened in the year block,

when she was 'avin a lot off to Jonesy and she just smacked

'im in the chest ... an' knocked 'im right back against the

wall ...

Adrian: Ah tell ya ... ya don't mess wi' 'er, she's better than

the men teachers she is...

My purpose here is not to highlight the incident itself, but rather to reveal just how naturalised and commonplace was the culture of 'machismo' that a woman could indeed achieve the status of 'honorary' man, but only by being demonstrably 'hard', and, as one year 9 boy put it, *'not tekkin' shit off anybody'*. This also bears out Dubberley's (1988:111) assertion that working-class pupils generally preferred 'hard' teachers "who give as good as they get". In this particular case, it seems borne out here by a woman who had learned, within the culture of Bridgepoint High, 'how to be' a 'tough' teacher. The 'invisible' curriculum and pedagogy of Bridgepoint High, as it played out in the everyday practice of its teachers and its disciplinary effects on pupils, imparted ongoing lessons to boys about what was to be expected of a 'real' man. The resultant culture of heterosexist masculinity, informed by localised readings of authentic working-class sexual relations, was being magnified and 'made flesh' before being reflected back onto the pupils by an unwitting group of educative 'cultural

accomplices', unaware of the potentially detrimental consequences of their capacity to reinscribe gendered dualisms (Martino and Frank 2006: 29).

SUMMARY:

REFLECTING ON GENDER AND 'PERFORMANCE'

Dominant hegemonic forms of masculinity continue to influence many working-class boys' attitudes towards schoolwork, with destructive repercussions that have far-reaching consequences for their willingness to sustain an engagement in learning. The persistent prevalence of a compulsory heterosexism on the Bridgepoint housing estate where this study was conducted highlights a determined attachment to the normative standards of an era when masculine subjectivity defined itself in confrontation with the 'real' world of industrial manual labour, along with its primary "symbol of machismo" (Willis 1979: 197), the wage packet. In this uncompromising environment, an all-consuming need for acceptance in school-based peer relations requires that boys learn the 'hard way' (Renold 2001) how to be a 'real' man. All too often therefore, the main 'lesson outcome' is that schoolwork, a mental/intellectual pursuit positioned as 'feminine' in opposition to manual/physical labour, is something 'only girls do', and anyone displaying interest or enjoyment in study becomes an instant target for the kind of homophobic taunting rife in adolescent peer culture.

The conflicts arising between formal requirements like studiousness and mental application and the informal domains' equation of 'school = uncool' frequently turns boys towards the more appealing capitalist interface of global sport and

consumerism, where exalted status is awarded to the cultural exemplars that most embody manly sporting/sexual prowess. As such, this is a form of gendered resistance, coalescing around anything constructed as 'feminine', involving young men's "self-convincing rituals" (Nayak and Kehily 1996: 221) that enact credible performative dramatisations of traditional elements of masculine competency.

But there are worrying implications here for the large number of young men whose burgeoning disillusionment with school is directly proportional to a yearning for the wage packet that carries with it the cultural status of adulthood and all its attendant promises. For the 'protest' masculinities they persist in exhibiting desperately limit their opportunities for individual growth and development (Salisbury and Jackson 1996: 4), especially as they now find themselves cast adrift amid the treacherous currents of a labour transition thoroughly divested of its former certainties.

The decision to organise this chapter around the somewhat slippery concept of 'school ethos' (McLaughlin 2005) has allowed me to focus my attention on the institutional gender regime of Bridgepoint High, where an informal curriculum of authoritarian control was grounded in a 'heteronormative ethos' of assertive, 'can do' masculinity. I have argued that in practical terms, this effectively served to condone the rampant homophobia and sexism witnessed in school and provided an explanation for the absence of any institutional policies designed to interrupt and confront exclusionary practices of this kind. This culpability was further compounded by the unwitting and somewhat paradoxical practices of certain teaching staff 'acting' as 'cultural accomplices', who, in themselves

drawing on "a realist tale that naturalises two sexes" (Letts 2001: 194), sought to inhabit authoritative versions of the very same dominant masculinity that boys were striving so much to accomplish.

The hegemonic power of the 'Bridgepoint boys" collective definition of masculinity, accentuating culturally familiar patterns rooted in physical engagement with a practical 'task at hand', constantly attempted to overshadow the increasing complexities represented by alternative symbolisations of identity (Renold 2004), negating or re-presenting as 'feminine' those gendered subjects subordinated by their association with elements of 'goth' culture. However, what really cemented the normalisation of these hierarchical imperatives was the amplification of naturalising heterosexist assumptions underpinning teaching practice in the school, as pupils were presented with 'models for action' that offered confirmation of the essentialist 'nature' of gender relations.

Certainly, some of the 'hard' behaviour of the boys I accompanied around Bridgepoint High was undoubtedly a reaction to the institutional regime they faced, for, as Jordan (1995: 77) has observed, "getting into trouble ... is a touchstone for masculinity". Moreover, the fact that it escalated over time adds weight to Connell's (2000: 135) assertion that "the authority system of the school becomes the antagonist against which one's masculinity is cut". Ultimately therefore, calling for more male 'role models' to address the education of boys remains a problematic course of action as long as teachers' own investments in normative masculinity perpetuates prevailing discourses of heterosexism such as that witnessed at Bridgepoint High. The consequences,

as Martino and colleagues (2004: 437) point out, could be to "inadvertently lead to a remasculinization of school culture".

Trying to strike an optimistic note in the face of what Pat Mahony (2003: 75) describes as "the morally bankrupt gender agenda currently being defined by policy-makers" is therefore a difficult but absolutely necessary task. For if schools are to genuinely embrace the notion of inclusive gender relations, as a necessary and progressive step towards inclusive education, then educators at the local level have a central role to play in moving towards critical reflection on the ramifications of their own institutional actions. Indeed, as 'reflective practitioners', rather than relying on biologically determinist assumptions that reinscribe gendered expectations, they should be encouraged to develop pedagogical spaces where the myriad social processes involved in identity formation are interrogated within a gender equity and social justice framework.

This is not to say, of course, that this is plain sailing and that teachers will not encounter numerous problems in adopting such a pro-active stance towards gender reform, or indeed in their assiduous challenging of sexist, homophobic, or racist behaviour among pupils. For actually 'doing it' in a classroom environment, pursuing an anti-essentialist position in tandem with a successful transformative pedagogy aimed at de-naturalizing assumptions regarding what it means to be a boy or girl, is, as I witnessed myself on countless occasions, an extremely difficult mission. Indeed, as Rowan and colleagues (2002: 207) capture so aptly in their metaphor of anti-essentialist gender reform as the 'hard yards'[23] approach, it is, as they conclude, "very hard work" (2002: 207),

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[23] Given the Australian background and research context framing the work of Rowan et.al. (2002), it seems extremely appropriate to construct a metaphor drawing on the 'hypermasculine', high-impact

precisely because such an approach dispenses with the 'quick-fix' 'tips for teachers' solutions of pop-psychology literature and attempts to circulate instead counternarratives to the limitations of dominant gender discourses (Mills 2004).

However, as a crucial component in working towards the 'unattainable ideal' of inclusive education, gender reform has to be pursued as one aspect of the viable long-term creation of a school community built on tolerance, support and mutual respect. Parents too, need to be included more, for the sound reason that they know very well how unforgiving the contemporary labour market is, especially for young men who are unlikely to obtain the credentials to labour in the 'new' economy. Otherwise, the kind of masculine subjectivities generated in schools like Bridgepoint High are likely to persist in giving rise to processes of alienation that significantly diverts boys from realising their full educational potential. In the next chapter, I shall move on to adopt a comparative lens to explore how schooling is approached in both national settings, in order to discern what was being done so differently in the Irish context that, despite similar constraints, resulted in a radically contrasting set of outcomes.

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collision sport of Rugby League to portray the challenging task of pursuing an anti-essentialist approach to gender issues in the classroom. For the uninitiated, the 'hard yardage' is that forward progress made in the first few tackles of a 'set' (of six), usually deep in one's own half of the field, where there will be a well organised defensive line of tacklers rapidly bearing down on the ball-carrier. Hard yards indeed!

6

The Landscape of Contemporary Education:

Comparing Approaches.

Scene 1.

It is early February 2004, and the north of England is experiencing one of those periodic bouts of snowfall that reminds people what real winter weather feels like even in this era of global warming. Predictably, this being a Monday morning, virtually the whole city appears to be slipping, staggering or sliding uncontrollably to a premature and unscheduled halt. The drive into school normally takes around fifteen to twenty minutes, but this morning I have been sat in my car for just over an hour, ponderously inching my way towards the Bridgepoint estate as heavy flakes of snow continue to fall onto traffic moving in bleary-eyed slow motion, as though its wheels are adhering to the powdery white substance that is steadily blanketing the roads.

When I finally arrive at about 9.20 am, a number of the somewhat reduced compliment of teachers that have managed to negotiate their way in seem surprised to see me, and there is an uncommon lightness and humour about the place as everyone swaps 'how I got in' stories that makes it feel noticeably different from a regular school day. Monday is usually spent in a full timetable of lessons and today supply teachers are much in evidence, while a member of the senior management team covers one of the lessons I attend for an absent

colleague. The senior staff member actually expresses some surprise that I made the effort to get in this morning when I turn up at her classroom with the very few of my 'classmates' that have taken heed of the bedside alarm. And from her point of view, one can easily appreciate why. For while the teachers may seem to be quite thin on the ground, the pupil population as a whole appears to have decided en masse that venturing outside in such inclement weather would be nothing short of foolhardy. While more young people did eventually drift in as the day wore on and the weather began to ease, in a school numbering more than sixteen hundred kids, most of whom live within walking distance, anything up to half of them simply did not turn up for their full timetabled day, with the attrition rate being particularly marked among the older age cohorts.

At lunch break I adjourn to my usual area of the staffroom, the one normally occupied by PGCE students, GTPs, supply teachers and other itinerant members of the adult population, to have my coffee and sandwich and try to take advantage of some of the warmth generated by the bright midwinter sunshine streaming through the windows now that the snow has temporarily abated. While eating, my attention is drawn to squeals of laughter emanating from two lunchtime supervisors, who are stood at the window just across from me in the corner of the room. Wandering over to see what the source of all this amusement is, I join them at the window and gaze downwards onto the front reception area that leads to the main doors into the school. Joyce, the older of the two supervisors, is a good-humoured woman who, as one might expect from someone who has herself brought up children here on the Bridgepoint estate, has a kindly, somewhat maternal, but at the same time thoroughly no-

nonsense approach to dealing with her young lunchtime customers. Noticing my presence, she beckons conspiratorially with a finger and then points down to the front steps:

"Look, y'see that down there ... it's little Tommy Lee from year 8 ... usually it's all we can do to get 'im in 'ere every morning ... but today 'e turns up first thing just so 'e can stand at the door all day an' chuck snowballs at all th'teachers".

Sure enough, a few seconds later, a young teacher out patrolling the area fronting the school while conducting playground supervision strays too close to the fire zone, and is rewarded by being hit square on the back, splattering snow across the material of his thick, black overcoat. This provokes a rueful smile, and a warning look towards the perpetrator of this discomforting assault. But he also realises that he is in an area with perhaps twenty boys, all of whom are pelting snowballs at each other with unbridled enthusiasm, and he quickly gives up trying to identify the guilty party and instead moves away to avoid the crossfire that is in danger of zeroing in on him once more. Towards the end of the lunch break I decide to walk over to the Pupil Support Centre, where I worked for just over a month in the lead up to Christmas 2003, and say hello to some friends who always made me feel welcome and treated me as though I actually belonged there. The short journey entails walking downstairs, through the front doors, turning left, and then walking the hundred yards or so to the Centre's front entrance.

Stepping outside into the dazzlingly low winter sunshine, I set off at a brisk pace, hunched against a bitter gale force wind as it slices uncomfortably through the wholly inadequate lining of my thin black jacket. Out of the corner of my eye, I spy two small boys emerge stealthily from round the side of the front entrance to my left and then bend hurriedly to gather and compress snow into their bare and by now reddened hands. Fearing the worst, I turn to confront them as they ready themselves to let rip with a salvo of crushed ice. But upon seeing my face, the taller boy relaxes his stance and calls over to his diminutive friend, "Ah leave 'im alone Tommy ... ah know 'im ... 'e's norra teacher". Just seconds later, I nod to a supply teacher I know vaguely who passes me walking in the opposite direction and then turn around just in time to see him flinch instinctively as he is hit by the impact of a totally unexpected double blow on the right shoulder from a sudden volley of hard, compacted snowballs.

In relating this incident, I am aware that the interpretation I offer here could simply be read as evidence of some mildly mischievous behaviour on the part of two youngsters indulging in a time-honoured pastime that occurs whenever there is a sufficient covering of snow on the ground. For me however, the events of the day crystallised in symbolic terms how many of the pupils attending Bridgepoint High felt about their school. For despite the brief spell of poor weather, which is hardly uncommon in this part of the UK, my estimate that literally hundreds of pupils decided not to attend for part, if not all, of the day I think speaks volumes for their lack of enthusiasm for, and level of investment in, the institution itself, especially given that most lived within a ten minute walk of the school[1].

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[1] Bridgepoint High registered 86% attendance in April 2005, well below the national average.

But what really underlined the antipathy they had towards what is supposed to be the fulcrum of their local community was witnessing the sight of these two youngsters, identified by a third party as serial truants, but here determined to overturn their normal routine in order to participate, however fleetingly, in a symbolic celebration of status reversal (Turner 1969) that expressed publicly their feelings towards those vested with authority in relation to their school careers. Resolutely intent on taking full advantage of this brief period of liminality, the boys, whom Victor Turner might well have had in mind in famously directing our attention towards "categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure" (1969: 167), clearly had not felt the need to absent themselves on this particular day.

Rather, they were, in Turners words, "positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors ... [who] ... in their turn, must accept with goodwill their ritual degradation ... in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors" (1969: 167). It is perhaps the acknowledgement at some level that these hierarchical positions are considered "axiomatic and unchanging" (1969: 176), that chiefly motivates this "fantasy of structural superiority" (1969: 168), tempting one, on reflection, to concur with Turner's conclusion that "It provides, in effect, a discharge of all the ill-feeling that has accumulated during the previous year" (1969: 179). A social order structured according to conflictual positions I would suggest, required a conflictual response during this liminal period from two boys whose need to vent their antagonism reveals an awareness of their structural situation.

Now fast-forward nine months to later that same year, in late November 2004, as the ethnographic scene shifts to the northern outskirts of the city of Cove, in the far south of the Republic of Ireland. Today is the St. Oliver's Community College twelve-hour five-a-side soccer marathon, an annual event held at the school to raise funds for a local Catholic charity that organises and delivers Christmas food hampers to those in need within the local diocese. The event has become something of a pre-Christmas tradition at St. Oliver's, and is planned and executed for weeks in advance with the thoroughness and precision of a military operation. What might surprise some though, is that all of this planning, and all of the pre-event and actual marathon organisation, is almost entirely carried out by the young people of the school themselves, with only minimal involvement from one or two key members of the St. Oliver's teaching staff.

The idea, as it was excitedly explained to me beforehand by a group of first year boys impatient to get a taste of their first-ever marathon, is that every pupil in the school, girls and boys, is randomly selected to play for a team captained by a senior pupil, so that each team eventually consists of one representative from each of five year groups. Everyone collects sponsorship based on their participation in the event, and all the money raised is then spent on purchasing vast amounts of food and provisions that the pupils actually go out and buy and then subsequently assemble into hampers at the school[2]. The tournament itself is run on a group format in order that every team plays a minimum number of

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[2] The amount raised eventually topped 8,000 euros, all of which was spent with much merriment at a local cash and carry warehouse. Around thirty-five pupils, two teachers and this researcher participated in this unforgettable shopping trip, transported in what became known for the day as the 'bus of happiness'.

games, before converting to a knock-out competition by mid-afternoon, hence the extended duration of the event.

Not really knowing what to expect on the big day, I arrived at the school gymnasium just after the scheduled start time to find the tournament already in full swing, with hundreds of children milling around good-naturedly outside the building in the chilly morning sunlight before playing their allotted games according to a strict timetable. Senior pupils refereed all the games, and, although I cannot be precise on this, there were probably no more than a maximum of ten teachers present when I got there, most showing up much later in the day. Although it seemed to me that the event presented a perfect opportunity for any pupil to simply have the day off, I can hardly recall any of the teams taking to the 'field' a player short and, if anything, the numbers swelled even more as the day wore on.

For players exiting the competition early tended to stay on to cheer on their friends while family members arrived to watch those teams who continued to make progress. I had been informed well before the event that while the tournament itself would be hotly contested and the subject of considerable banter among the youngsters long after its completion, the real game that everyone looked forward to and just had to be there to see was the final game scheduled on the day. Here, the prize for the eventual winners of the competition would be to have their skills 'tested' against the footballing might of a 'staff select' team, consisting entirely of teachers.

At the appointed hour, the two teams squared up to each other in a gladiatorial atmosphere generated by a thunderous roar of cheering, whistling and screaming as the game kicked off in front of what appeared to be, and certainly sounded like, the whole of the school population. I must confess here that at this point professional detachment had been temporarily abandoned in favour of what I like to think was a more embodied, and participatory approach, as this ethnographer was one of those 'select' players lining up to start this momentous game, having bluffed my way onto the team thanks to some well meaning but unfortunately sorely misguided recommendations. Alas, it turned out to be an all too brief and spectacularly unsuccessful cameo appearance, as I was rather swiftly withdrawn before half time after missing two easy goal-scoring chances, mainly due to my by now only too transparent lack of footballing ability.

But what really made the event so memorable for me and for everyone concerned was the sheer enthusiasm and wholehearted involvement of all the pupils throughout what was an unforgettable day, cheerfully working, and playing, together with minimal interference or direction and only encouragement and support represented by the presence of school staff. The children and young people of St. Oliver's, in effectively taking on the responsible ownership of the school with the endorsement of the Principal and his entire staff of teachers, had made something special happen on one particular day that would chiefly be of benefit to others within their own community.

I include these two introductory vignettes to provide a framing device for what follows in this chapter, as I bring together the two case studies that constitute the focus of this investigation and hold them up to analytical scrutiny. Opening

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with these two 'tales from the field' invites the reader to compare the two episodes for what I believe they say to us about the nature of school experience in the respective educational establishments. For as I will go on to show, while there are surprising similarities both in the structural conditions under which both schools operate and in the social and economic circumstances of their surrounding communities, I found that there was a marked difference in the attitudes displayed towards the respective schools by their pupil populations.

This had repercussions not only for the general atmosphere and 'climate' of both schools, but was also clearly present in the entirely different character of teacher-pupil relations I witnessed in both establishments, which for one school at least, had the extremely positive effect of sustaining the engagement of pupils in both curricular and extra-curricular work. Sadly, for the other school, a long, slow process of disengagement was more generally the order of the day, as hostility to both the institution and its staff gradually generated what often turned into an outright rejection of the idea of education itself, for lacking any relevance in aiding young people acquire forms of adulthood most prized within their local community.

My task therefore, is to set out in some detail in the first two sections the particular structural conditions under which these two schools operate. Specific attention here will be given to some of the problems both schools face as vocationally-oriented establishments serving working-class communities, in adequately meeting the needs of their respective pupil populations given the constraints imposed by "school systems extensively restructured on market principles" (Power et.al. 2003: 19). I will then go on in the final section to try to

point to why it is that despite these common features, one school appeared to be faring much better than the other in its efforts to provide a more 'inclusive' model of secondary education, while remaining focused on increasing participation and achievement among all of its school community.

I believe what this teaches us about the schooling of children in the first decade of the twenty-first century carries important lessons for the future of mass education itself, as it struggles to retain the core principles underpinning what John Smyth (2001: 238) terms "equitably provided public schooling". For public education was once the cornerstone of the social contract between the state and its citizenry, but the taken-for-granted nature of this key element of public provision is now unquestionably under threat. Strident demands from an 'enabling state' (Olssen et.al. 2004: 210) for "individually managed, competitive, hermetically sealed, consumerist and choice-oriented stand-alone schools" (Smyth 2001: 238) is putting at risk the idea of public schooling at a time when its educative role is required more than ever before.

So in trying to answer the question I posed at the outset of this study, I shall attempt to explain why it is that despite the huge amount of attention and finance invested in 'inclusive education', there remains a growing conviction that secondary schooling, for a significant number of young people, continues to exact exclusionary processes that dramatically affect their future life chances. For schools, it barely needs restating, are highly complex organisations and the process of schooling itself is a changed experience from that depicted in earlier

cultural stereotypes of dry and dusty 'chalk and talk' didacticism with which we are all familiar, and some of us even witnessed at first hand[3].

One obvious innovation is the huge expansion in ICT resources, which has had a massive impact on the way learning takes place today[4], along with the welcome shift away from the physical coercion of young people that followed the abolition of corporal punishment in schools. But other changes have arguably been less concerned with improving the school experience of young people. Developments on the macropolitical stage dominate what is now a highly politicised educational agenda and individual schools have little option but to pragmatically adjust to prevailing corporate values in a stark financial climate, quite literally under threat of being closed down. Thus, amid "the creeping corporatisation of education" (Thrupp and Tomlinson 2005: 553), it seems pertinent to question if it is still possible for the values underpinning inclusive education, embodying ideas about universal human rights and social justice, to carry any real force in creating the conditions for a truly anti-oppressive schooling. For if not, then we must conclude, along with Thomas and Loxley (2001: 88), that such noble sentiments more often prove to be empty clichés, deployed rhetorically to mask "larger political and policy context[s] which many would interpret as antithetical to inclusion".

Caution must be exercised though, as in moving from the general to the particular and focusing on individual schools, this does not mean suspending

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[3] The classic evocation of Secondary Modern schooling is Blishen (1955), a fictionalised account of his teaching experiences in a deprived working-class area of London. Resonant with my own secondary education, it is troubling that thirty years on, at least in England, so much of this experience appears largely unchanged.

[4] The use of ICT is a source of ongoing debate. Critics point to a growing 'digital divide' exacerbating social inequalities, while others focus on how ICT redefines the subject 'educated' child in terms of their 'technical', (rather than analytical or critical) skills (see Postman 2003).

one's critical faculties by pretending that they play no part in reproducing social hierarchies or have little influence over which knowledges are presented as legitimate in constructing 'cultural topographies' of particular groups and individuals (Rizvi 2003: 84). Acknowledging these 'hidden' institutional aspects of education, Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 31) note that:

> "schools are far from autonomous in their actions but neither are they neutral institutions where predetermined inequalities are unproblematically realised – they are active in the creation and re-creation of inequality".

So, as a prelude for the comparative analysis that follows, in sketching out the dominant contours of the current educational landscape of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, I will identify what we might term 'school effects'. For while there is considerable merit in the view that all schools should be treated as unique institutions, with their own distinctive local culture, one must not lose sight of relationships between schools, and the way they interlace to form a particular structure, or system, of schooling. This is a important point, for, as Chitty (2004: 67) insightfully observes, just as the structures of a particular institution cannot be judged in isolation from the whole system, neither can we afford to ignore the localised and broader hierarchies that, in their interrelatedness, form a determinate social and political order in which schooling takes place. Such an understanding should allow us to interrogate what I have somewhat mischievously termed these 'school effects', while retaining an awareness that these 'effects of schooling' all too often arise from arrangements invariably decided upon well outside the confines of the school.

MARKETS, SELECTION, AND THE UNMOURNED DEMISE
OF 'COMPREHENSIVE' EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

The last two decades have witnessed fundamental shifts in economic and labour market conditions for young people in the UK, the consequences of which, as Arnot et.al. (2001: 213) wryly note, "had a particular impact on working-class families and households". The reform programme of Thatcherite moneterist economics firmly established the principle of the market as the key mechanism for co-ordinating education, an ideological imperative which formed the cornerstone of educational policymaking in the intervening period[5], something even the election of a Labour government did little to weaken (Muschamp et. al. 1999; Ball 2001). And as I argued at some length in an earlier chapter, a relentless pursuit of economic efficiency and single-minded determination to maintain international competitiveness has been at the heart of the current administration's undiminished enthusiasm for a market-oriented model of schooling.

Naturally of course, the government would energetically defend its case by claiming that this is only part of the story, and that the 'Third Way' represents a politically innovative and theoretically informed attempt to reconcile the economistic and individualist values of 'New Right' neo-liberalism with current social democratic concerns regarding equity and social cohesion[6]. But in a world where neo-liberal economics remains unchallenged as the dominant paradigm structuring the global economy, and growing labour market

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[5] While James Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech signalled the 'Great Debate' over education, legislative reform only became a reality under Thatcher (see Phillips and Furlong 2001).

[6] See Phillips (2001, 2003); Paterson (2003); Gray (2000).

polarisation, particularly among young people, is endemic throughout the industrialised West (Gallie et. al. 1998; Brown and Lauder 2001; Dickens et. al. 2000), this curious amalgam of apparently contradictory ideas is offered as the only option available through which to address the inevitable tide of globalising processes sweeping the planet. As Strathdee (2005: 80) rather sardonically observes, with more than a hint of irony in adopting characteristically 'New Labour' jargon:

"the aim of VET (Vocational and Educational Training) is to remanufacture intelligence in ways conducive to the labour markets of deindustrialised economies and to build ladders of opportunity for all young working-class people".

The priority given to 'flexibility' and the deliberate aim to individualise this process neatly captures how the purpose of education has been redefined so that it is now primarily envisioned as providing a 'best fit' service for the shifting needs of transnational global capital. It is ironic though, that amid all the rhetoric surrounding the government's policy obsession with 'building' human capital to fuel a 'knowledge-driven economy'[7], there remains a visible thread of the Platonic tripartism that had a profound influence on educational thinking throughout the twentieth century[8]. In seeking to highlight how this persistent legacy of social distinction and discrimination between individuals continues to inflect educational thought in strategically reconceptualised terms, I intend to concentrate here on two particular concepts, those of 'choice' and 'diversity',

[7] For critiques, see Lloyd and Payne (2003); Thompson (2004).

[8] McCulloch (1998) provides persuasive evidence of a "strong underlying cultural influence" (p.4) underpinning British educations' historical tendency to "mark off the superior from the inferior" (p.1).

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that have been key elements in configuring a revised discourse of meritocracy. Deploying these concepts has served to shift the emphasis towards notions of 'equality of opportunity' at the expense of a once strived-for but now largely abandoned ideal of 'equality of outcomes' (Lister 2000: 43).

An absolutely key aspect of educational reorganisation, and one might add, *the* critical 'policy ingredient' that promised access to these aforementioned 'ladders of opportunity', was the elevation of 'choice' and 'diversity' (DfE 1992) as central precepts shaping the reconfigured relationship between schools and the wider community. Markets, after all, are deemed within the carefully constructed parameters of this policy discourse to be neutral, grounded in the rational actions of individual actors, thus making them highly responsive to individual choices, and unburdened of the dead weight of bureaucracy or state interference. However, as Michael Apple (2001: 107) pointedly observes, this idea of the market must itself be legitimated and marketed to anyone wishing to avail themselves of these 'natural' effects:

> "markets and the guarantee of rewards for effort and merit are
> to be coupled together to produce 'neutral', yet positive,
> results. Mechanisms, hence, must be put into place that give
> evidence of entrepreneurial efficiency and effectiveness"
> (2001: 107).

The introduction of these twin mechanisms constructed a discursive field in which the publication of Performance League Tables and a punitive regime of inspections might then be politically justified on the grounds of 'transparency'.

Widespread national dissemination of what Clyde Chitty (2004: 55) ironically dubs "reliable guides" could then be vital tools in ensuring the possibility of making a 'fully informed choice'[9]. These policies, according to the rhetorical claims made on their behalf, would enable parents across the social class spectrum to select schools based on the social and learning needs of their child, and, in the process, begin to dismantle the classed nature of secondary education in this country. The obvious ideological appeal of this latter claim explains why the current Labour government has had few qualms in adopting the notions of choice and diversity (although typically this has now been reinvented as 'specialisation', or "specialist diversity') in asserting their own project of 'modernising the comprehensive principle' (Tomlinson 2005: 125). The critical question that must now be asked is to what extent has this aim been realised by adhering so closely to a neo-liberal growth model (Hay 1999) inherited from the previous administration?

The evidence from educational research provides an overwhelming case for arguing that, far from breaking down inequalities, the maturing relationship between parental choice and school intakes has actually served to strengthen these divisions, by revaluing a hierarchical system that closely approximates existing social class hierarchies (Robertson and Lauder 2001: 230-1). Arguably the most widely cited studies carried out into this question were those of Stephen Ball and colleagues based at King's College, London, and the main conclusion drawn from their research was that "choice emerges as a major new factor in maintaining and indeed reinforcing social class divisions and inequalities" (Ball et.al 1996: 110; for more detailed references to this work, see

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[9] Tomlinson (2005: 54) states that "Choice, in reality only the right to express a preference, as many parents discovered when LEAs wished to direct children to specific schools, was the mechanism which made some schools richer and others poorer".

chapter 1). While the King's College research was criticised by a leading proponent of education markets (see Tooley 1997), plentiful support for their findings appears elsewhere in studies that have investigated these highly complex processes from a wide range of perspectives in differing national contexts[10].

For what started out in the 1988 Education Reform Act primarily as a means by which the 'New Right' wing of the conservative party sought to redefine the principles underpinning education for the first time since the 1944 Butler Act, had, by 1992, become a full blown onslaught on 'comprehensive' education itself, which exercised only a 'brief hegemony' as the dominant model of provision in secondary schooling[11]. A raft of legislation based on flimsy evidence (see Crook et.al. 1999), provided a launch pad for 'specialization' to be implicitly tied to selection by prioritising 'parent-driven' choice (DfE 1992: 10). The enthusiasm with which many educational institutions sought to avail themselves of this opportunity to set themselves apart from what now had to be viewed as competitors, more or less guaranteed that by 1997, with Labour newly installed in office, nearly a quarter of all the secondary schools in England had already opted for GM (Grant Maintained) status. Thus, Margaret Thatcher's longstanding promise to revive selective schooling in the long term had finally been achieved (Benn and Chitty 1996: 138).

The subsequent course of Labour government policy has only served to strengthen the belief among a number of scholars that the pursuit of

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[10] See Smith and Noble (1995); Tomlinson (1997); Glatter et.al. (1997); Power et.al. (1998); Powers and Cookson (1999); Lauder et.al. (1999); Weiss (2000); Broccolichi and vanZanten (2000); Carnoy (2000).

[11] See Hadyn (2004).

'decomprehensivisation' has continued with an unabashed enthusiasm on the part of the current administration[12]. In this time, a succession of Education Ministers, routinely briefed by high-profile 'celebrity' spin-doctors, consistently ramped up the rhetoric of derision poured on 'bog-standard' comprehensives (Hadyn 2004: 420), as mass secondary schooling became increasingly commodified through a bewildering variety of 'rebranding exercises' chiefly designed to appeal to 'better off' parents. These 'privileged choosers' (Gewirtz et.al. 1995), embracing "the laws of the market and the values of self-interest and personal and familial profit" (Tomlinson 2005: 196), suddenly found that they now had a legitimate means by which to avoid schools perceived to have 'negative characteristics', while the market situation itself encouraged schools, as 'businesses', to re-orient themselves to be attractive to middle-class families.

Thus, a highly fragmented and competitive school marketplace currently operates, with the retention of 164 'overtly selective' grammar schools, which, it has been claimed, adversely affects the intake (and therefore the social mix) of 500 neighbouring comprehensives (Benn and Chitty 1996). Meanwhile, a proliferating number of self-designated 'specialist colleges', Beacon and Foundation schools (formerly Grant Maintained), as well as growing numbers in the faith-based sector, apply both officially sanctioned and more covert methods to select desirable pupils[13].

The net effect is a school system resembling a fiercely contested battleground, where 'vigilante' parents pursue tactics of 'selection by mortgage' to secure

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[12] See Walford (2001b); Edwards and Tomlinson (2002); Chitty (2004).

[13] Tomlinson (2005: 103) lists thirteen categories of school in England, to which we should now add the highly controversial 'city academies' (see Hatcher and Jones 2006; King 2006).

'positional advantage' (Hirsch 1977) in 'popular' schools. The measure of these 'popular' schools' 'success', competing in a form of natural selection against other schools in their area, effectively allows them to be selective in choosing who they wish to have as 'clients'. Indeed, just as Stephen Ball (1993: 8) predicted back in the early 1990s, "Without the pressure of surplus places, the dubious social psychology of competition also ceases to work", and 'successful' organisations now routinely seek legitimacy for such a position by recasting selection as a 'unique selling point' in addressing prospective parents.

As Ball rightly suggested, "power here accrues to the producer" (1993: 10), and the most salient cultural consequence of embedding consumer sovereignty in this domain has been the entrepreneurship shown by such schools in recognising education as a social field amenable to the production of "classified and classifying practices" (Bourdieu 1986a: 114)[14]. A worrying tendency noted among these oversubscribed schools, which has accelerated a spiralling process of social polarisation, is the way they naturally tend to prefer pupils that will enhance League Table performance, and therefore have been predictably 'market-minded' in adopting a less than welcoming attitude towards children carrying the potential to threaten their much-cherished status as 'centres of excellence'.

Even regulations stating that full schools cannot be forced to take on more pupils have been strategically exploited as some schools have engaged in the practice of accepting able pupils, while at the same time claiming to be

[14] The notion of 'choice' can only be fully understood if the concept encompasses an appreciation of the levels of economic, social and cultural capital that are at stake in this social field. Choice making is thus, in Bourdieu's terms, a judgement of taste, "a sort of social orientation, a sense of one's place" (1986awe: 466). See Bourdieu (1986a: 175).

'tactically full' when receiving applications from "less promising recruits" (Haydn 2004: 425). A mounting body of research points to this predominantly affecting children with additional educational and behavioural 'needs', as well as those from ethnic minorities[15]. In such a situation, where education is presented as a commodity and parents are licensed to be 'active' consumers, old class inequalities have swiftly been revived, as the idea that all families are 'free to choose' has, for some, proved to be an entirely false promise (Noden et.al. 1998; Noden 2000).

For there is well documented evidence that, in Helen Lucey's words (2001: 181), "there is a world of difference between making and getting your choice of secondary school", as working-class children less often gain entrance to their first choice of school than middle-class children, and black working-class boys fare worst of all in this frenetic 'race' to secure the advantage of a 'good' education (Lucey and Reay 1999). The consequences of this institutional polarising of school populations, largely driven by an active and vocal constituency of aspirant, better off parents, is an absurdly paradoxical situation whereby the relative level of inclusion practiced at a school appears to stand in inverse proportion to its rating in the Performance League Table. As a recent Audit Commission report made it all too abundantly clear:

> "A school that is highly inclusive is likely, almost by
>
> definition, to have a higher proportion of pupils at the
>
> lower end of the attainment spectrum. It may
>
> therefore appear to perform poorly in a league table.

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[15] See Bowe et.al. (1992); Booth and Ainscow (1998); Gillborn and Youdell (2000); Bagley et.al. (2001); Armstrong (2003).

Conversely, a school that is not welcoming to children with special educational needs may appear to be a 'good school' simply because it has fewer pupils with learning difficulties." (Audit Commission 2002: paras 122-3).

The Commission's report is a damning indictment of the unexamined costs of implementing 'choice' policies at a time when labour market shifts have drastically intensified competition for credentials. For, as Robertson and Lauder (2001: 227) observe:

"[as] education has become increasingly significant as a determinant of life chances ... [I]t is those with the cultural and social capital who are most likely to be able to translate that capital into a market advantage by exercising the choices they consider most advantage their children"

The circulatory and self-reinforcing nature of this process has a chimerical quality about it for schools too, just as it does for many working-class parents. For a decision not to pursue a strategy of choosing the brightest and the best, and instead operating an 'open door' policy of pupil recruitment could well signal a sudden spiral of decline in assessment performance similar to that described in the Audit Commission's bleak scenario. One might reasonably assume that this would soon be followed by some form of 'pupil flight' as better off parents exit the school for 'leafier climes'. This has troubling ramifications for schools situated in urban settings where market competition is most intense, because in

its obsessive concern with reductive notions of 'excellence' and 'raising standards', the contemporary terrain of schooling places an undue burden on schools that, by their very location, are responsible for educating young people from areas suffering deep-seated social and economic deprivation. As Plewis (2000: 91) points out:

"The league tables have a clear, in-built bias against schools in disadvantaged areas, where educational performance is lower because socio-economic circumstances are worse. The pressures on school managers created by the league tables are not likely to be in the best interests of ... pupils in most need of extra attention".

Nevertheless, these schools too, must abide by the 'rules of the game' and continue to operate as though they are participating on a level playing field in striving to compete in the schools market (Thrupp and Hursh 2006). And if such a school is 'successful' enough, simply by dint of being situated in the centre of a densely-populated council housing estate with sufficient pupils on its doorstep to boast the highest school roll in the city[16], then it too can opt to go down the 'specialist'[17] route that two thousand others had, by early 2005, also opted (or felt constrained by market forces) to apply for (Tomlinson 2005: 127). This, as I have noted previously (see chapter 3) is exactly what Bridgepoint High School did in 2000, something that the Headteacher informed me he considered one of his biggest single achievements during his time in charge, as in his view, it

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[16] Funding follows pupil numbers, reflecting directly the school's budget.

[17] Formerly 'comprehensive' specialist schools can select up to 10 per cent of their intake on the basis of 'aptitude'. Repeated claims that this does not imply selection by ability, ethnic or social class criteria have failed to placate critics of such policies (see Gewirtz et.al 1995; Edwards 1998; Walford 2001b).

"gave the school an immediate boost ... and it certainly added a lot more money to us".

This is the quandary those running schools like Bridgepoint High find themselves in, as by the very act of trawling for the kind of funding that allows them to keep pace and stay in 'the game', they are unerringly drawn into, and trapped within, a discourse of 'specialist diversity'. Here lies the imperative to reinvigorate a selective educational traditionalism that steadily eats away at the values underpinning the 'comprehensive ideal' (Pring and Walford 1997). Reflecting on the challenges facing schools in meeting these contradictory demands, the underlying principles behind 'comprehensive' education have been restated in summary fashion by Geoffrey Walford (2001b: 47), embodying the belief that

> "educating all local children in a single school, where they
> would have equal physical facilities and equal access to high-
> quality teachers, would raise the aspirations of all children and
> teachers, bring about greater equity within the schools and
> lead to greater opportunities outside in the world of work".

It is surely no coincidence that the broad thrust of this statement is not a million miles away from the definition of inclusive education that Tony Booth (2000) has consistently put forward, and which I quoted in an earlier chapter (see chapter 1). Indeed, I would contend that these two declarations are entirely commensurate, which makes it all the more problematic and worrying that processes of 'decomprehensivisation' are now so ingrained and accepted in

such a 'matter of fact' manner that one wonders how these developments can be reconciled with the government's stated commitment to achieving an 'inclusive' society (Blair 1998). Without wishing to conclude on such a gloomy note, this seems an opportune moment to ask how the situation here in England compares with the current educational scene in Ireland, and what possible lessons might be learned from viewing these very different contexts in a contrastive light.

THE 'FUNNEL LEADING TO THIRD LEVEL', IN A LAND WHERE 'ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IS KING'[18]

The singular nature of Irish education has already been highlighted in this study. This being so, and at the risk of retracing old ground by pointing yet again to what makes Irish schooling so distinctive, I will limit myself to a short summary of the basic features of the Irish system before discussing some of the key issues currently shaping education in Ireland. Put in simple terms, the major influence on schools in Ireland is the prolonged, historically embedded relationship forged with denominational religion, and particularly the Catholic Church, which was formally institutionalised under the principle of subsidiarity in the years immediately following independence. At both primary and post-primary level, a de facto denominational management function extends throughout public and private sectors, continuing to exert a strong influence today despite the widespread processes of secularisation and social

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[18] Here, I paraphrase a quote attributed to Emily O'Reilly, the Irish Information Commissioner, during an address to the Irish Vocational Education Association (Donnelly 2006). The Commissioner and the Irish Education Minister, Mary Hanafin, are currently conducting a very public row as to whether school results should be published, and whether the government is acting illegally in withholding them.

liberalisation that have been witnessed elsewhere in Irish public life (Cleary 2005: 15).

Probably the most unusual aspect of contemporary education in the Republic, and one flowing directly from the profound influence various religious orders wielded on school organisation in the twentieth century, is the strong presence of single-sex schooling in the four types of institution provided at second level. Of the 340,000 Irish pupils attending second level education, 42% do so in single-sex schools, this figure rising considerably in the traditionally middle-class, denominational 'secondary' sector (Lynch and Lodge 2002). This operates under the private ownership and management of the various churches (although the vast majority are Catholic), but somewhat perversely continues to receive substantial state subsidies. Private schools and colleges typically offer a traditional, rigorously academic curriculum, a 'vocational' sector caters predominantly caters for those preparing for apprenticeships and the two other institutions, 'comprehensive' and 'community' schools, have been almost entirely co-educational since their introduction in the late 1960s and early 1970s respectively (Clancy 1986).

However, notwithstanding national variations, similarities have been observed occurring in Ireland that bear a striking resemblance to processes that I have already alluded to in England, even after making allowances for the reduced scale of operations in the Republic. Recent research shows that in spite of government initiatives to expand community and comprehensive schooling, pupils now experience "a more hierarchical, stratified and differentiated school system at second level" (O'Brien 2003:251), with those from working-class

backgrounds leaving school earlier (Ryan 1999), performing less well when they do stay on (CPA 1998), and still be significantly underrepresented in the university sector (Clancy 2002).

This, of course, is hardly a new phenomenon and in fact concern was first raised following the introduction of free post-primary education in the late 1960s to widen participation among poorer families, that the real beneficiaries would in practice be the middle-classes, who could then invest the 'freed up' money on 'grinds'[19] and private schooling (Breen 1984). Subsequent legislation introduced in 1995 to open up the university sector by abolishing third-level tuition fees has also paradoxically 'subsidised the affluent', once more freeing up middle-class resources set aside in trusts and other saving schemes, which were soon ploughed into private schooling in 'prestige' fee-paying institutions (Walshe 2006a).

Indeed, the newly-installed Education Minister (and ex-school teacher) Mary Hanafin, was recently drawn into admitting that this was indeed the case under extreme pressure from one of the leading teaching unions (TUI). In a publicly aired response that chimed seamlessly with New Labour's educational vision, Hanafin defended this alarming trend by citing 'the parents right of choice, and the right to exercise that choice' (Walshe 2005). And as we saw in an earlier chapter, that choice is currently to exit the state system in numbers that are rising rapidly, with potentially dire consequences for the future of state schooling in Ireland.

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[19] A term commonly used in Ireland for private tuition. It is a ubiquitous presence, whether in the form of fee-paying 'grind' colleges specialising in maximising 'points scores', or as informal revision study undertaken by off-duty teachers.

It appears therefore that the Fianna F'ail government finds itself on the horns of the same dilemma as New Labour, having in practical terms to appease a core constituency of middle-class voters, while presiding over rising levels of inequality that are directly traceable to its own fiscal policies[20] (Allen 2000). But whatever the excuses for the complacent attitude shown towards those not fortunate enough to hitch a ride on the 'Celtic Tiger', what the current administration cannot claim is that this is something that they were not forewarned about, as these processes were already seen to have been set in motion many years before.

For it was twenty years ago, when mounting evidence of growing class differences in the level of educational achievement prompted Patrick Clancy (1986), writing in a major sociological profile of Ireland published by the government-funded Institute for Public Administration (Clancy et.al. 1986), to issue an uncompromisingly stark and prescient warning regarding the future direction of Irish education:

> "The persistence of marked inequalities in the attainment of
> valuable educational credentials raises serious questions about
> the meritocratic assumption which underpins the public funding of
> education ... it would appear that, since social destinations are so
> closely related to social origins, the middle-classes have
> perfected the process of passing on their 'achieved' status from
> one generation to the next. The reproduction of achieved status

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[20] Bertie Ahern's government has a long record of rigorously pursuing 'business-friendly' policies to promote economic growth. Fintan O'Toole (2003: 168) caustically summarises them as "simply keeping Corporation Tax low and being nice to multinational corporations".

in an apparently meritocratic society seems to have replaced the inherited privileges of an ascriptive society" (1986: 131).

What was not foreseen then of course, and what has really exacerbated and accelerated this instrumentalist shift in the intervening period, is the previously unimaginable economic prosperity enjoyed by a significant segment of the Irish population throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The result of this unexpected 'bust to boom' scenario (Nolan et.al. 2000) is the highly visible presence of a burgeoning middle-class constituency of parents prepared to invest heavily to buy their children the inside track in the 'points race' for the Leaving Certificate. For when entry to prestigious universities and elite subjects like medicine and law are entirely dependent on achieving a predetermined point score adjusted annually to reflect student demand, it is clearly vital to 'get the points' in order to pursue such high earning occupational careers.

Little surprise then that there is no shortage of applications for much sought after places in the high status private 'grind' colleges that thrive in Ireland's major cities, as families actively engage in the kind of territorializing practices of class distinction that education, as a 'positional good', now quite clearly offers. Here, a heady mixture of denominational religion and the kind of 'traditionalist' academic curriculum more commonly found in a minor English public school combine to ensure generational reproduction and social closure for a largely metropolitan elite of professional middle-class families.

Of only marginally less importance is that this is also a key factor in the worrying trend of 'parent-driven flight' away from the free sector, especially when viewed

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in a context where school rolls are tumbling countrywide due to the steady decrease in the demographic population at second-level since the mid-1990s (Walshe 2006a). Putting to one side the questionable equity of a system that pits public education against a private sector that is also significantly funded by the state, how exactly is the free sector coping with these challenges in its remit to provide a rounded education for those families without the wherewithal to afford a fee-paying school? As I highlighted in a previous chapter (see chapter 4), one of the most intractable problems faced by state schools in Ireland has historically been that of extremely low levels of funding, and how to overcome a traditional and longstanding shortfall in state spending on educational infrastructure investment (Walshe 2006b).

At the same time, and all too aware of the mounting risk that inaction in the current climate could lead to a school rapidly haemorrhaging pupils, there is a growing pressure to fulfil the constant demand (usually from parents) for more IT resources, improved and more diverse sporting facilities, brighter and better equipped classrooms, and fresh new textbooks. The list of possible objects for expenditure in this bright and shiny new consumerist-oriented Ireland is literally endless, especially when private 'grind' colleges' glossy marketing is easily at hand, and the task of accommodating these demands within the kind of punishing budgetary restrictions state schools currently face tends to preoccupy School Principals to an unnecessary and burdensome degree.

Yet, even deeper resonances with the English experience also come to the fore when one bears in mind that these schools, many of which fall into the 'comprehensive', 'community' category, as indeed does St. Oliver's Community

College, were specifically introduced to serve working-class populations previously ill-provided for by existing schools. And as a recently compiled independent report convincingly argues, the 'social context effect' of offering schooling in areas of deep-seated social and economic deprivation is that those schools inevitably soon begin to reflect the broader inequalities pervading society, as "the disadvantage associated with poverty and social exclusion assumes a multiplier effect when large numbers of pupils in the school are from a similar disadvantaged background" (EDC 2005:28).

This is easily measured in the vastly different level of supports required in schools serving working-class neighbourhoods, where the greater number of children with additional needs places yet more strain on desperately scarce resources and therefore further constrains efforts to ameliorate educational disadvantage in these poorer communities[21]. Acknowledging the socio-economic realities of the situation, the EDC (Educational Disadvantage Committee) report, *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage* (2005) insisted that simply introducing compensatory programmes focusing exclusively on school-based approaches "is a limited model for the longer term" (p.28) as "the problems of educational disadvantage cannot be solved in mainstream school-based educational programmes alone" (p.9).

Their recommendation was a blunt one; that root and branch reform was urgently required at a structural level to systematically tackle what it termed the 'poverty issues' (p.28) identified as being central to achieving what the report pointedly referred to as 'equality of outcomes'. This bold, but politically

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[21] See also Naughton (2006).

contentious conclusion unsurprisingly contrasts quite markedly with the essentially school-focused programme outlined in the Irish government's latest educational package, to be phased in over five years (DES 2005b). It seems therefore, that whatever assistance does flow from central funds in Ireland will be aimed directly at individual schools, who will then, having been isolated from their defining social context, be expected to deal themselves with the challenge of combating the worsening effects of an increasingly unequal society, while the structures driving such processes continue unabated.

The clear and present dangers inherent in allowing, and, in many ways encouraging, the unfettered workings of a longer established but nonetheless broadly similar education market in Ireland can be seen to be having effects displaying many commonalities with the situation as it currently stands in the UK. And while not wishing to downplay the obvious differences, particularly the continued popularity of single-sex schooling and how this ties in with the Catholic Church's continued involvement in Irish education, I would argue that this is chiefly significant for revealing how religion and social class have, for the Irish middle-classes at least, always been historically intertwined as a key source of social closure[22]. However, such differences notwithstanding, there are, it seems to me, broad areas of common ground upon which to base a richly illuminating comparative analysis. Having now conducted a thorough survey of the educational terrain in which these two schools are situated, it is to this task that the remainder of this chapter will now turn.

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[22] Space forbids further discussion here, but detailed overviews and analysis can be found in Lee (1989); O'Mahony and Delanty (1998); Brown (2004) and Inglis (2005).

COMMUNITIES IN COMMON?

Here, I want to start out by highlighting just how similar were the two schools'

location in their respective communities. As an opening example of this

correspondence, Bridgepoint High school, like St Oliver's Community College,

occupies a position in its local educational firmament that places it firmly in the

'vocational' sector of Crownport's hierarchy of provision. This ascription is a

legacy of the post-war tripartite education system, which, by the early 1960s,

had actually become a bipartite split between academically oriented grammar

schools and vocational 'secondary moderns' (later renamed as

comprehensives) (Chitty 2004: 24-8).

Such distinctions 'naturally' mirror what Tomlinson (2005: 16) characterises as

the "administratively convenient and educationally spurious notion" prevalent at

that time that indices of 'ability' could be scientifically measured at this

apparently randomly chosen age and used to differentiate pupils into an

academic-vocational divide[23]. Unsurprisingly, this process was, as it had been

since the nineteenth century, inherently class-mediated as familiarity and

success in competitive examinations allowed the middle-classes to monopolise

entry to the best state grammar schools[24]. Meanwhile, modern schools, often

hampered by inferior resources and less qualified staff, directed the majority of

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[23] This dividing practice derives from the burgeoning technology of psychometrics and IQ testing, whose leading proponent was Sir Cyril Burt. For a devastating critique of Burt's now largely discredited ideas, see Thomas and Loxley (2001: 30-37). Leo Kamin's (1974) work remains the most powerful indictment of IQ testing, while Stephen Jay Gould (1996) thoroughly debunks the notion of 'measuring' intelligence from a scientific perspective.

[24] See the classis study by Jackson and Marsden (1962), and Brian Jackson's (1964) later work on streaming primary school children.

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the nation's boys and girls towards the manual labour market and married domesticity respectively[25].

Another indication of the similar circumstances under which these two schools operate lies in the fact that, like St Oliver's, which, as we have already heard, was opened to serve the growing population of an expanding estate, Bridgepoint High's location in the heart of the burgeoning Bridgepoint estate was also intended to provide a convenient source of educational provision to the rapidly-spreading catchment area blossoming around it. And as was the case with most schools of this category, there was an emphasis on practical craft and trade skills that tended to characterise the curriculum priorities of comprehensives in this era.

Interestingly, this still applies at St. Oliver's, where there remains a heavy demand for engineering and joinery skills taught in woodwork and metalwork classes as well as technical drawing. However, over recent years, given the changes in school organisation in England alluded to previously, along with the restructured labour market caused by the virtual disappearance of manufacturing jobs, attention has turned at Bridgepoint from the hands-on teaching of practical skills to focus increasingly on improving exam grades as part of the government's preferred policy solution of building a 'knowledge-driven' economy. This trend is discernible in the steady upward trajectory that has elevated the school to a respectable mid-table position in the local hierarchy constructed through Ofsted Performance League Tables.

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[25] See McCulloch (1998).

In slight contrast, St. Oliver's, despite being situated in an overwhelmingly working-class district of the city as one of the new breed of 'community comprehensives' serving an expanding population in this area, initially carved out a reputation for academic excellence under the leadership of the original Principal, an Englishman armed with an Oxbridge doctorate who came to be known universally throughout the city as 'Dr. Keele'. Initial success soon resulted in the school roll literally bursting at the seams, with well over seven hundred pupils attending St. Oliver's at one point, many parents drawn in by this high-flying academic with a passion for raising achievement levels among young people on the new estate.

However, a number of factors worked to undo a lot of the early promise shown in these formative years. This included what one respondent, with a lifetime's experience of both the school and the area, described to me as "a dirty, filthy, vicious row over the entrance policy", which provoked a rift with the neighbouring primary school that the same person claimed had done "untold damage ... that led to a very cold working relationship ... that still hasn't been completely repaired yet". Subsequent problems also arose that, according to a number of sources among the teaching staff, could be traced to certain personal characteristics associated with the Principal that became increasingly at odds with the kind of community the school was immersed in, one of the more tactful and considered comments from a respondent being that "there was a standoffishness there ... his personal skills were absolutely dreadful ...". This led, eventually, to a reversal of St. Oliver's early fortunes, and the inevitable spiral of decline evidenced by a fast dwindling school roll, with the tipping point

finally arriving soon after the arson attack mentioned earlier (see chapter 4), when Dr. Keele chose to announce his voluntary early retirement.

His replacement as school Principal, Ian Miller, still only in his second year during my fieldwork, while having only kind and generous things to say about the previous style of management, was already toiling hard to rebuild bridges with the surrounding community, and a marked rise in pupil numbers attested to the fruits of that particular labour. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions he bemoaned to me the profound difficulties involved in "changing perceptions", countering the tarnished reputation of the school that he still regularly encountered as a continuing legacy of the latter period of his predecessor's reign. These points are touched upon, albeit obliquely, in this interview extract, as he reflects on the transformation St. Oliver's has recently undergone:

> **P.** ... it's gone from a school where there's seven hundred or seven hundred and fifty at one point, and it dropped dramatically y'know ... and my analysis of the situation would be that why did that happen, it happened because the school didn't change ... it didn't change with the children that were coming there, I mean ... and in fairness to [Dr. Keele], my predecessor ... [...] saw that ... and [...] like left early because he saw changes needed to be brought in ... now the proof really ... that we're doing something well ... is that I think the children now have a sense of being respected now ... I think they now have a sense of being listened to more y'know, erm ... and, like, I suppose in general from feedback people have said it's not as confrontational as it was ...

J. S. ... people I've spoken to say there is a more pleasant atmosphere in the school than there was say, three, four years ago ...

P. ... and in a way like, I suppose it's almost a contradiction, but like the notion of y'know, there are fantastic systems in the school, it's just the personal side that needed some tweaking ... and the kids have much more chance to express themselves ... and y'know, the children are much happier. ...

In summary, neither Bridgepoint High nor St. Oliver's are by any means 'failing' schools, and certainly in the case of the former, this is a matter of public record. Indeed, if one wishes to give any credence to these official statistics, then Bridgepoint is not even the 'worst' school on the surrounding estate, this unfortunate title belonging to its neighbour Queensmead High, which it has consistently outperformed for a number of years. In addition, Bridgepoint High's acquisition of specialist status has undeniably opened up new revenue streams, as have other sources of funding similarly tied to current government initiatives, which to some extent has offset the funding gap created when Educational Action Zone status was awarded to Queensmead, one of the less obvious consequences of which was to immediately place Bridgepoint High at a structural disadvantage in terms of financial input.

What I am really trying to get across here is that whether judged on the basis of local or national criteria, these schools are definitely not exemplars of some

locally contextualised 'worst case scenario' provocatively selected to somehow represent a symbolic indictment of the system as a whole. Rather, it seems to me that what I found at both schools, and here I would emphasise Bridgepoint High particularly, was a resolutely 'average' school in its strictly non-pejorative sense, somewhere that regularly confounded attempts to ascribe totalising judgements about what was 'good' or 'bad', as elements falling between both polarities routinely coexisted and intertwined throughout the very fabric of the school itself.

Similarly, in conversations with staff at St. Oliver's, they would include references to how they, in comparing it with their experience of other schools, found it to be "somewhere in the middle" and "not the best but not the worst either". However, what I, or indeed the other adults associated with these two schools thought about the workplace we shared is of less consequence than how the young people legally bound to attend them reacted to this experience on a day-to-day basis.

Therefore, I want now to draw on ethnographic data collected both inside and outside classrooms to glean some sense of what pupils themselves thought about the school in which they spent seven hours each day, and then go on to try to tease apart those factors that arise from within the organisation itself. For despite the tendency in some quarters to hold onto the idea that children and young people are quiescent receivers of the processes schools effect, this is far from being the case. Pupils are not in any meaningful sense passive. Indeed, as James and James (2004: 118) argue,

"On the contrary, what children learn through schooling is dependent upon the dynamic and complex interplay between a whole configuration of different variables, which may be unique for each different child".

Looking closely at how pupils relate, bring meaning to, and importantly, respond to, the particularities embedded in this constellation of educational experiences is a good way of mapping the impact contemporary education policies are having in positioning children within the process of schooling. This in turn gives us an indication of how they themselves, in their reactions to the authority and value systems in place, are actively redefining what things like 'childhood' and 'education' means for them in the light of these shifting circumstances.

Analysing how children and young people feel about being subjected to ongoing judgements regarding their 'ability' as school pupils may, on occasion, reveal points at which they actively seek to exert agency in responding to those doing the judging. On the other hand, precisely how much freedom or constraint is exercised in such situations can be indicative of the kind of pressures felt by teachers, who themselves are all too keenly aware of being routinely made the subjects of the same processes of hierarchical observation and normalising judgements (Foucault 1977).

For them, there is precious little room for manoeuvre in accommodating the particularities of a distinctive cultural locale under the gaze of the 'generic perspective' that dominates the inspection regime[26]. In amongst all of this there

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[26] See Thrupp and Lupton (2006).

is scope for us to draw a real distinction between school factors 'from above' that carry an external force of their own and can clearly be seen to originate within the legislative apparatus of the state, and those more intrinsic factors, which I earlier defined as 'school effects', that spring from something distinctive and particular about the school itself.

Whether this is found to be associated with the character of the personnel at the school, or something deeper that is embedded in the singular nature of the institutional culture is what I hope to uncover in the course of this comparative analysis. One obvious way in which the two schools differed was in the range of technological resources available in both settings, with Bridgepoint High wholeheartedly pursuing computer-aided teaching and learning while St. Oliver's struggled just to deliver any kind of technologically mediated curriculum.

This aspect of schooling in both contexts demonstrated that money alone cannot 'buy' engagement in education, and indeed, could be argued to be counterproductive if used to construct more barriers between teachers and learners. In what follows, I suggest that this provides a telling example of the way that something that starts out as a structural constraint paradoxically has an 'effect' that is entirely positive for teacher-pupil relations, whereas neglecting the value of genuine face-to-face interaction in favour of technological overload appears to have been negatively received in terms of the relationships that ensued.

Perform or Perish: Reconstructing School Subjects

I earlier highlighted (see chapter 3) that Bridgepoint High, in common with other schools in the local LEA, is acutely aware of the imperative to 'raise standards' in order to decrease the volume of ongoing criticism regarding the quality of schooling available in the city. This condemnation resurfaces on an annual basis and reflects a demand on the part of the local and national media to present a 'storied' account of the results of the National Performance League Tables. In a contemporary context where intensive surveillance by an 'evaluative state' works to effect the disciplining of schools at an unprecedented level (Beckmann and Cooper 2005: 478), the nationally trumpeted discourse of 'raising standards' here unequivocally translates into a desperate quest on the part of the school and its staff for year-on-year increases in GCSE grades.

Within the all-encompassing mechanism of these panoptical arrangements, there is for those working in schools, as Foucault (1977: 201) has forewarned us, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power". Moreover, the nature of this disciplinary technique results in everyone being "caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (Foucault 1977: 201). In practical terms, this means that the attainment across the entire pupil cohort of five A-C grades at GCSE becomes *the* dominant criterion for measuring success at both an individual and an institutional level. And as Shereen Benjamin (2002: 35) acutely observes, everyone involved therefore has very good reasons for wanting to demonstrate this 'success' as a top priority: "Student success ... becomes in turn the determinant of individual teachers' success, which becomes the determinant of

school success, local education authority success and, ultimately, governmental success".

The inevitable consequence of this relentless drive for 'continuous improvement' was thus seen to pervade the entire school culture of Bridgepoint High, in a 'pressure-cooker' environment that echoed strongly what Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 12) have elsewhere dubbed "the A-to-C economy". The need for teaching staff to work tirelessly and unstintingly on maximising the dominant currency of contemporary education effectively worked to subsume and override any sustained attempt to concentrate pedagogical energies on fostering broader educational considerations. As a result, opportunities to encourage societal values emphasising inclusivity, a sense of caring and tolerance towards others, or a deeper appreciation and critical reflection on processes of democracy and social justice were drastically diminished. The harsh fact is that in the current climate, the school had little option but to constantly keep in mind and at the forefront of its attention the continual requirement to improve exam grades year-on-year, simply in order to survive.

The intensified nature of teacher-pupil relations that directly arose from this pressure also militated against adopting a more holistic style of teaching that might have aimed to develop individual human potential in a diverse variety of forms, through what Patricia Broadfoot (2001: 143) has termed "the empowerment of learners". Instead, what struck one most forcibly was that the main focus, to a great extent, was on a fairly narrowly defined version of 'teaching to the test' (Ball 2001: 52). In conveying the depersonalisation these processes result in, Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 43) claim that:

"There is a very real sense in which participants on both sides of

the school desk feel trapped within a system where the rules are

made by others and where external forces, much bigger than any

school, teacher or pupil, are setting the pace that all must follow".

In terms of how this translated into the mundane reality of routine social

relations, I would contend that it should be held responsible for much of the

ingrained conflict and antagonism witnessed between teachers and pupils.

Furthermore, such hostility was not just confined to adults and young people, as

there was an undeniably aggressive quality underlying much of the interaction

among pupils themselves, with disturbingly regular acts of random violence and

fighting a routine occurrence during the course of an otherwise ordinary school

day. The frequency of these violent outbursts, which I initially found quite

alarming and began by trying to intervene in, meant that eventually they

receded in importance to a point where I too, like many teachers I had earlier

witnessed, simply chose to ignore them and hurriedly walked on past,

seemingly intent on a much more pressing engagement.

It was with a depressingly familiarity grounded in the experience of being

schooled in an era when the notion of 'cultural conflict' in working-class schools

really came to prominence that I realised that not as much had changed in the

interim as one might have hoped or expected. A significant number of children

and young people at Bridgepoint High, I was concerned to discover, were

continuing to react with predictable hostility to being force-fed what was far too

often a narrow, tedious and unengaging curriculum that appeared to hold little

relevance for the pupils it was being aimed at. In this, it bore more than a passing resemblance to what John Shostak (2000) refers to as a 'paranoid curriculum', a symptom of the contemporary demand that individuals' lives be monitored, measured and recorded as a constant spur to self-improvement, through which:

> "the paranoid curriculum emerges as a safety rail to guide the personal and social development of individuals through the uncertainties created by developing circumstances" (2000: 42).

Moreover, it often seemed to me, after sitting through hour after hour of powerpoint-dominated lesson plans, that many lessons were chiefly structured with ease of delivery in mind, rather than with any conscious bid to engage young people through a distinctiveness of approach in delivering subject knowledge. And though teachers were often honest enough in confiding to me that their preferred 'worksheet' based mode of delivery was, as one put it, "more like babysitting really, classroom management, y'know?", it hardly seemed surprising that the majority of pupils quickly grew bored with this 'pub-quiz' style concept of teaching[27]. There is little doubt in my mind that, for some young people, such forms of teaching actually deter them from sustaining any engagement in their purpose for being in school.

One particularly determined and unrepentant example of this thoroughgoing disaffection I came across was Carla, a girl in Year 9 who simply refused to participate in a series of lessons I happened to be attending, and instead

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[27] See Lupton (2005) for corroborating evidence that this is more common in working-class schools than elsewhere, with negative effects on teachers' expectations.

occupied herself by sitting at the back of the room and reading a borrowed magazine. Quiet and uncooperative, but not in any way unruly or disruptive, Carla had, since the start of term according to her teacher, just decided not to engage in the process of schooling. Having asked if we might talk for a while to pass the time one day, she responded with a kind of 'why not?' shrug and proceeded to converse in an amiable and quite open way with me for the remainder of the lesson.

Thinking that Carla might have a problem with the teacher, I began by asking why she did not like this particular lesson and she replied that it did not interest her, but when I suggested she could transfer to another option, she claimed with some resignation, "they're even worse than this". When I asked why this was, Carla told me that she had started out in other options but had left because "the' don't leave you alone there, there always on y're back about somethin'". Asked what she thought of her current teacher, she said that she was alright and that she thought that they got on well, and liked the fact that she allowed her to sit quietly at the back and read. When I questioned why Carla had ended up in this lesson, one she herself admitted she had little interest in, she said it was simply because "the teacher's nice and she's not on at you all the time, like the other ones were when I was there".

Talking to Carla's teacher after the lesson, she confirmed to me that she had moved into her class from another option, although, as she added, "I think that she was asked to leave actually". She also agreed with Carla's assessment of their relationship, and said that she had been no trouble at all once it was clear that she would not participate in the lesson. She ended by telling me, forcibly

enough to make me think it was directed as much at colleagues as myself, that, in her view, as long as a child felt safe and unthreatened in her class, she was happy to have them sit and do nothing, and if this was where Carla wanted to be, then that was fine with her. Although this might seem an extreme example of pupil disengagement, it was perhaps just a singular reaction on Carla's part to what was among many of her peers a fairly widespread disaffection with school, and may have seemed to the young person in question like the only response to an impossible situation. For it was clear that Carla had quite simply refused to comply with the normative pressure to perform that is now part and parcel of secondary education. And in a certain sense, it is almost irrelevant to speculate what her reasons might have been for this stubborn refusal to conform, because the only really salient fact affecting her life at the time our paths crossed was that she had effectively been prompted to completely disengage from schooling with over two years still to go in her now stalled educational career[28].

What was more troubling though, was that there was nothing in place at Bridgepoint High to actually address the underlying causes of this disaffection, other than exclusion from lessons and being dispatched to find refuge in the Pupil Support Centre. There, the overstretched but remarkably caring staff turned noone away, provided an educative environment when teachers did not feel compelled to do so, and took an unwarranted amount of criticism from staff for being too 'soft' with children. It is a measure of the atmosphere at

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[28] If there is any analytical usefulness in this kind of theorising, perhaps it revolves around the discrepant cultural forms arising from an acknowledgement that young people are "increasingly forced to chase credentials" (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 13). A potent recent argument is that a 'fear of academic failure', generating defensive behaviours such as disruption, resistance or even a refusal to work, "may be borne, in part, out of the very mechanisms and strategies ... implemented to attempt to raise educational attainment levels in schools" (Jackson 2006: 49)

Bridgepoint High that such accusations could be levelled at a facility that offered sanctuary to young people who were being excluded by those doing the accusing.

While I concede that many of the lessons I witnessed at Bridgepoint High were managed and presented extremely efficiently, in terms of the way technology was deployed to structure the narrative ordering of information, this technical expertise and adroitness only tended to render the actual teaching input anonymous and rather dry. It was as if the attainment of a reasonable level of technical competence obviated the need to expend any time or energy on actually teaching the topic in question. This had the effect of homogenizing the teaching experience so much that the individual concerned was often reduced virtually to the level of reading a script. Within such a pedagogical paradigm, it is surely inevitable that the chances of these children witnessing a 'memorable' lesson, in which they are excited and enthused enough to relate to the topic in a deeper and more meaningful sense, were drastically reduced.

Exacerbating this tendency even further is what I came to see as the fairly early onset of fatigue with the ubiquity of the technology-dominated learning interface that pupils are confronted with in lesson after lesson. It should be recalled here that Bridgepoint High has had Technology College status since 2000, and consequently has embraced computer-aided teaching to a greater degree than many other schools of its type. And while Bridgepoint may well be in the forefront of the city's educational establishments in championing the introduction of new information technology, this is simply a localised instance of

a global trend that is increasingly being seen as an all-encompassing technical solution to the problems perceived to reside in schools[29].

Starting in Year 7, children are routinely taught with a heavy reliance on visual aids such as projectors, electronic whiteboards and laptop computers, through which there is a pronounced emphasis on 'viewing' lesson-packages delivered through software programmes such as Powerpoint. But I found evidence that the reported improvements gained in learning through this medium were being fatally undermined by its repetition on a daily basis, as the impact claimed for ICT teaching and learning became swiftly diluted by its overwhelming over-exposure even among children at a relatively early stage in their secondary school career.

This was vividly brought home to me when I sat one day with a group of Year 8 boys in a science class, which consisted of a forty-minute Powerpoint presentation overseen by a female teacher. I say overseen because I arrived just after the lesson started and the lights had already dimmed, with the teacher becoming little more than a shadowy figure hovering by the side of the projection screen. The boys were in a boisterous mood when I arrived, which in fact was the reason for my presence[30], and, as I knew one of them quite well, I began by asking them why they were not more interested in what was happening on the screen:

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[29] As Larry Cuban (2001: 11) points out, "what dominates media and policymaker's discussions of education is that schools achieve success on business-style assessments ... . And no tool is better suited for those economic ends than computers. Securing more and better computer technologies for schools ... has been touted by corporate leaders and public officials as a splendid way to reform schools according to the market-driven agenda of the past two decades".

[30] During this period, I was acting as 'Learning Support Mentor' with Shaun, under the direction of the Pupil Support Centre.

Derek: We've seen it before, an' it was borin' then, but at least it was summat to watch ...

Trevor: Films are better coz y'dote 'ave t'copy stuff inter y'book ... ah dote like these coz y'ave to write stuff down but it olus goes off before y'can finish it. It's ter mek yer to work quicker ...

Shaun: These ones are all the same, y'ave to write it all down an' Miss just sez the same stuff every time ... we watch these all the time in this class an' they're all the same y'know ... the 'ave big numbers or a clock or summat, counting ye' down so ye' 'ave t'get finished ... this lot [waves arm at rest of class] get right into it but nowt 'appens if ye' dote do it ...

The boys told me that they 'watched' one of these lessons "at least once or twice a week" and that they had been doing so since they started at the school. They admitted to liking them at first, but claimed that they soon grew weary of them because "all the teachers 'ave the same discs and the' just put their own words in 'em". All three told me that they had access to computers at home, although when I asked if they did schoolwork on them, they thought this very amusing and said that they just used them to play games. It seemed clear that they were knowledgeable enough to understand the mechanics involved in producing these lessons, and, thanks to their familiarity with compact discs for data storage, the generic limitations imposed by the standardized packaging of software systems designed to deliver the curriculum in this format. But, given that every day they are confronted with startlingly new and arresting images

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from sources ranging from computer games and TV advertising to DVD's, one would hardly expect that their attention would long be captivated by a similarlarly media-driven, but far more rudimentary form of programming, which simply ensures that its impact is unlikely to be anything more than extremely shortlived.

The cumulative effects of this 'technology burn-out' could be witnessed especially among the older cohorts. Perhaps the most apposite comment I received from a pupil regarding the attitude they had to the wide range of audio-visually enhanced teaching they experienced was from a Year 11 boy, arguably the most 'media-saturated' group in school, following a science film projected via a laptop onto an electronic whiteboard, detailing various industrial processes they were duplicating in the classroom. When asked what he thought of it, he simply responded, in a wearied tone, "S'not as good as Sky is it?".

Teachers too, I found, were only too aware of this pedagogic 'law of diminishing returns', as I discovered in a meeting I attended with a group of NQT's and GDP's to discuss teaching strategies and classroom management skills. One of the main topics raised was how to vary the content and presentation of audio-visual material, as, it was claimed by one of those present, and endorsed by others in the room "they get turned off by it real quick if they've seen the format before". Interestingly, the solution offered by the Coordinator chairing the meeting was to pluck from her bag a CD that had stored on it many more formats than had hitherto been available to them, and which we were informed had just arrived from the United States. She suggested that copies be made for

everyone present at the meeting so that they could begin using them immediately in their classes.

It appeared from my observations at Bridgepoint High that what has been widely touted as a means by which to enhance learning, certainly in this context, has actually had the effect of accentuating young peoples' alienation from meaningful and productive learning experiences, while reinstating pedagogic distance and erecting yet another barrier between teacher and learners. Here we see the dangers inherent in placing too much emphasis on a "computer-type rationality" (Dreyfus et.al 2003: 74) that has been rather too enthusiastically adopted as a 'technical fix' in combating disengagement, without really thinking through the more complex social and cultural factors that continue to underpin working-class attitudes to schooling[31].

The reconstruction of teachers in technical/rational terms is also clearly evident here, resulting in what John Smyth (2001) identifies as the 'managerialist version' of teaching; "which is coming to mean the technical application of procedures, strategies and curriculum developed outside (and at some distance from) classrooms" (2001: 245). At certain times of the day it would occur to me, scurrying from one lesson to the next in the midst of a heaving mass of teenagers letting off steam in that brief informal period between classes, that Bridgepoint High was like a large factory, specialising in the mass production of well-presented, technically efficient lessons in a wide range of subject areas. But alas, few of the 'clientele' appeared to want to buy into these lessons, many were attracting little interest, and some were simply being completely ignored.

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[31] For an interesting US-based study reaching broadly similar conclusions, see Cuban (2001).

Another Year 11 pupil, Dean, summed up the feelings of many of his contemporaries towards their school in their final year when he declared to me, by way of an explanation as to why he lacked interest in completing a GNVQ coursework folder, "I just want 'em to let me get out of 'ere so 'ah can get on with me life!"[32].

"You Do Your Own Thing":

Irish Social Relations and the Positive Benefits of 'Inadvertent Autonomy'

For the teachers and pupils of St. Oliver's Community College by contrast, technology was something the local VEC appeared to have overlooked in planning its schools budget. Or at least, overlooked in the sense that they had omitted, for whatever reason, to make any kind of funding provision for rolling out ICT at the school. One was forced to draw this conclusion as, compared to the UK, or even in comparison with the easy availability of the latest IT equipment elsewhere in Irish public life, St. Oliver's was a veritable desert of modern technology, in which 'low-tech', or even 'no-tech', was the norm rather than the exception.

In a country where billions of euros were being invested in nation-wide broadband internet access, and some of the most technologically advanced production in the world was taking place in locally-based hi-tech multinational companies, the entire school had a single room with around thirty fairly elderly computers housed in it. Apart from this, there was hardly anything else that

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[32] What made Dean's steadfast refusal to complete his portfolio even more poignant was that he, along with others in the group, were actually given a completed version to 'copy' from by their teacher, in full view of myself. I suspect the teacher did this to underline the kind of pressure he was under (see Chapter 5), while not even the lure of an 'easy' 4 GCSE's (this GNVQ's equivalent) could persuade these young people to participate in a 'game' they know they cannot win. No meritocratic illusions here then, just 'partial penetrations'!

could be described as a vehicle for ICT teaching and learning, and no other facility for developing pupils' computer skills along with their eagerly anticipated readiness for the 'digital age'. Paradoxically though, the paucity of new technology at the school provoked no resentment on the part of the pupil population, but rather instilled in them a deeper sense of gratitude and respect whenever a teacher overcame, through whatever means, these institutional shortcomings. Thus, as a direct result of teachers' concerted efforts not to let the lack of funding at St. Oliver's have a detrimental effect on their pupil's educational experience, relations between staff and young people at the school were on the whole markedly better than at Bridgepoint High, being characterised by a warmth and shared sense of investment in the school community that was almost completely absent in England.

This extraordinary discrepancy in provision between the two schools could not have been more starkly evident. At Bridgepoint High, every teacher was supplied with a laptop, and this was also extended to pupils exhibiting an aptitude with computers, by loaning them one for schoolwork when there was no computer at home. St. Oliver's in contrast, lacking the wherewithal to hand out laptops, instead simply allowed staff carte blanche to make whatever arrangements they felt necessary, in order to deliver their subject in any way they chose. What I came to recognise before long therefore, was the dogged determination with which many of the teachers at St. Oliver's set out to construct their own personal system of teaching aids, utilizing equipment paid for by themselves, and usually fitted by them in their own time.

One brief example should suffice in illustrating the commitment evinced by this self-directed initiative. Brian Curtin, the Head of Geography, along with Connor Cleary, the RE teacher I have already mentioned (see chapter 4), actually spent an entire weekend helping each other set up their own personal projection systems in order that they could then display video or computer-based images or OHP material in their own rooms. Even with the help of both the caretakers, who assisting in installing the projector, this still entailed them both in the arduous task of running cables up in the crawlspace above the ceiling along the entire length of the school to their classrooms, which in Connor's case was one of the most outlying rooms in the building.

Marvelling one day in Brian's classroom, not just at the technical ingenuity required but how wonderfully it all worked in the context of his teaching with a group of sixth-year students, he was quick to point out to me that, for him, it was one of the 'unintended' benefits of working in a cash-strapped school:

> **Brian**. We might not have the money for this kind 'a stuff, but
>
> that means that if you want to do something and are prepared to
>
> pay for it, then generally its 'na bodder' like … anything that helps
>
> the kids like, that's the main thing … s'funny but in an odd way it
>
> gives you a kind of freedom that I imagine y'don't get in England
>
> much anymore … I suppose the main thing here is there's
>
> nowhere near the accountability … and we've got a lot more
>
> autonomy here, you do your own thing …

This was a refrain I was to hear time and again at St. Oliver's, the somewhat paradoxical nature of the freedom that comes from not actually having any money to spend. At times this would reach farcical proportions, such as when I asked Brian, only half-seriously I admit, how he spent his department's budget allocation for the year (five hundred euros), and he grinned and told me that "it doesn't even cover photocopying". But in a sense, they actually rejoiced in this relative penury, for it afforded them the opportunity, in spending their own money, to claim what I came to view as a kind of 'inadvertent autonomy' won from the State at the cost of their continued exploitation. I would contend that this was precisely their perception, as they were very well aware that things were unlikely to change as long as they kept on dipping into their own pockets. Brian summed up this predicament nicely:

Brian. It's incredible that education is so successful here really ...

J. S. Don't you find it strange that the government is so penny-pinching at this moment in time?

Brian. Yea, country's booming, absolutely booming ... but one difference here is that people ... I've spent two or three hundred euros of my own money on various things this year ... you'd never have to do that in England ... you do a lot of work yourself here, paint the rooms, whatever, and you make do ...and you shouldn't have to really ... but the government knows that you're going to do that anyway ... so the system just goes on ...

Nevertheless, despite their somewhat rueful acquiescence in continuing to subsidise their own workplace, funding was a constant source of frustration, and this was directed particularly at the government's consistent lack of investment in state education. There was an awareness of the huge gap in technological provision between themselves and their colleagues in England, but significantly, they were also conscious that it should not be relied upon as a universal panacea and must be deployed sparingly to retain any impact. These points come through strongly in the following extract:

Brian. Finances are totally different though ... I have a friend who teaches over in London and they get much more money to spend, they've got e-credits and whiteboards in every classroom ... but it may not be a novelty to kids when it's there in every class ... and they probably over-use them. The kids kind of switch off to a certain extent ... it's got to be limited y'know. 'Course we'd like to have some of the stuff ye have over there, but it has to be used sparingly y'know, and I think from what you've described it's further than I would want to go ... now yea, it'd be grand if the government gave us the option, but I think the department of education is trying to save money."

In marked contrast to the antagonism shown towards the teaching staff by the pupil population of Bridgepoint High (which, it must be said, was often reciprocated by many of the teachers), at St. Oliver's, the pupils were well aware of the extra effort their teachers made on their behalf and, in typically

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forthright Irish fashion, were not exactly slow in making clear their appreciation. Late in my fieldwork, I took over a free lesson being supervised by a teacher I knew well, took in a tape recorder, and gave a group of sixth year students the opportunity to tell me, in their own words, what they thought about the teachers they had spent the last five years with. Naturally, as anyone who has ever tried to tape record young people's conversation will affirm, there is a lot of swearing, even by Irish standards, but for me, what was more remarkable was how generally positive were the comments I gleaned from this informal session. The following are just a few of the clearer, more considered (and more printable) statements made by these young people:

"Mr. [teacher] ... 'e's a legend 'ere like, 'e does loads 'o stuff for us to 'elp with our work an' everythin' ... an 'e's a great teacher as well, y'can ask anybody around 'ere an' they'll tell ya 'ow 'e got 'em through the course ..."

"I think Miss [teacher] ... is really good at her job, she's always nice and makes the class laugh all the time ... an' she doesn't give anybody detentions!"

"We 'ave [teacher] an' 'e knows everything! I'm not joking boy, you can ask 'im anything an' 'e'll tell you the answer ... this school 'as the best teachers like ..."

"Last year we 'ad [teacher] for [subject] an' 'e was legend boy! What a teacher an' a top feller as well like ... even if 'e is from Kerry ..."

Of course, it would be foolish to claim that these glowing testimonials would have been elicited from every pupil in commenting on their attitude towards every single member of the school's staff. Indeed, I can say with some certainty that, in the case of a small number of individuals, the reverse would be more likely be elicited. But one of the things that made them stand out as individuals was that they so resoundingly bucked the trend and did not get on with, or disliked, a particular teacher, or teachers. For it would be accurate to say that at St. Oliver's, the vast majority of pupils had little but positive things to say when questioned about the school they attended. Naturally, there were minor quibbles, but it would be much more generally applicable to most pupils to echo what one young female pupil exclaimed when I asked her what she thought about her school; "what do I think? School rocks, that's what I think, it's great 'ere ...".

SUMMARY

I hope I have made clear in this chapter that while there is much that is similar about the conditions under which these two schools operate, there is nevertheless a profound variation in the way schooling is approached, a difference in outlook and attitude towards the education of young people that had far-reaching consequences for the social framing of interaction in each learning environment. The material presented in chapter 5 has already

documented how a culture of heteronormative masculinity coupled with a relentless drive to push up exam grades resulted in a confrontational atmosphere in which rancorous exchanges between teachers and pupils were a routine and regular occurrence in corridors and classrooms throughout Bridgepoint High school. And in this chapter I have pointed to one aspect of the approach to schooling at Bridgepoint that I believe actually exacerbated the disillusionment and disaffection felt by many of its pupils.

Many see increased investment in ICT as a 'magic bullet' offering a hi-tech solution to the 'problem' of educational disengagement among less academically oriented pupils. This, of course, is part of the broader trend towards schooling young people for a 'knowledge economy', in which computer literacy is already a prerequisite for many employment opportunities as a school leaver. But what I found at Bridgepoint was that the forms of pedagogy engendered by the overuse of computer technology gave rise to a heightened sense of alienation and 'fatigue' felt by pupils who saw little to relate to in the fare being placed before them. In effect, many pupils were being 'turned off' learning by the very mode through which it has been claimed young people would be 'switched on' to education. The consequence was a deepening chasm between teachers and pupils, with few on either side capable of bridging this cultural divide to forge more productive relationships founded in mutual respect and an atmosphere of reciprocal teaching and learning.

These insights, adding further to the analysis presented in the previous chapter, offers us a clearer understanding of why Bridgepoint High experienced tremendous difficulties maintaining the engagement of its pupils. As yet

however, this analysis remains incomplete, for what we now need to see is what it is that is so different about St. Oliver's that made it so much more productive a centre of learning. Thus, in the final chapter of this study I shall largely concentrate on detailing why this was so, in order to round out this comparative analysis on a somewhat more optimistic and hopeful note.

7

Explicating Irish Success:

Extending the Boundaries of Inclusive Education

Today, we live in an era in which an undiminished confidence continues to exist in the ability of education to positively influence both the welfare and prosperity of individuals, and the nations to which they belong. This conviction is one shared by developed and developing countries alike, underpinned by the belief that from it will blossom disparate aims such as greater social justice, mounting levels of social inclusion and heartening increases in national economic efficiency. In consequence, educational matters now occupy centre stage on government agendas wherever there is a desire to promote learning while furnishing the economy with an educated workforce[1]. Within this slightly rose-tinted view of education as a universal panacea efficacious enough to accelerate progress on a variety of different levels, there is a commonly-held assumption that educational institutions are somehow separate or work in isolation to the rest of society, allowing individuals equal access to develop their full potential whatever the nature of the world they inhabit outside the school gates.

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[1] Bottery (2000: 13) suggests that this phenomenon is a practical manifestation of 'managerial globalization'.

This line of reasoning, steeped as it is in the ideals of the Enlightenment and the much more contemporary functionalist-inspired 'ideology of meritocracy' (Young 1958), is however becoming increasingly hard to maintain with any degree of credibility, certainly if accusations aimed in recent years regarding its mythical qualities are anything to go by[2]. For the evidence shows that the social, economic and political changes of the last three decades have decisively altered the 'rules of the game' (Robertson and Lauder 2001:227), in a way that threatens to deepen even further long entrenched patterns of inequality in educational and occupational outcomes (Halsey et.al 1980; Goldthorpe et.al. 1987).

The search for empirical confirmation of these claims, or evidentiary data that might refute the same, has been one of the central aims of this study, alongside a critical interrogation of recent policy interventions designed to address longstanding processes of disengagement in schools among young people from working-class backgrounds. The consequences of this disillusionment with education, in terms of future destinies of social and economic disadvantage, has a higher profile and visibility in these communities precisely because it is here they bite deepest and carry with them the severest penalties. Therefore, any enquiry concerned to investigate the complexities surrounding these processes would arguably be most productively sited in educational establishments within just such communities. Thus, acting as a form of ethnographic 'journey of discovery', this study has done exactly that, to meticulously document the impact on secondary education of these new 'rules

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[2] For this argument, see Lucey (2001); Goldthorpe (2003); Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005); Byrne (2005) and the collection edited by Dench (2006).

of engagement', by focusing in on two different schools situated in urban working-class districts of two separate national contexts.

In the course of carrying out this task, I have found myself being constantly struck by the fundamental importance of what Stephen Ball (1998b: 119) has termed "the local particularities of policymaking and policy enactment". Ironically, one of the reasons for this is less for the way that policy shapes in a coercive way what actually happens in schools, which policymakers would no doubt argue is what policy is actually for, but for the way that it works to limit and close off alternative imaginaries that might recognise and give due weight to the particularities that inevitably inhere in locality. Viewed in this discursive sense, policy does its hidden and insidious work by effectively denying the possibility of true value being achieved through acknowledging what might be gained through a more all-encompassing interpretation of concepts like 'diversity of provision' and 'educational success'. The consequences, as I have attempted to show in the preceding chapters, can be real and profound, especially when they occur in a community already hard hit by changes in socio-economic circumstances, where traditional cultural attachments linger long after the forms of work in which they were forged have all but faded away.

For in the wake of sweeping transformations across the industrialised West to 'realign' economies in adopting a more favourable and 'flexible' position towards intensified global economic competition, the notion of becoming a 'knowledge economy' (Castells 1996) peopled by 'knowledge workers' (Drucker 1969) now constitutes the overarching goal of educational policymaking. Pursuing this technologically-enhanced vision of a viable economic future, and in keeping

with the dominant political view that we live in an 'age of human capital' (Becker 2002)[3], some of the world's wealthiest countries have been persuaded to radically reassess the role education plays in a post-industrial society.

For these advanced industrial societies, an unequivocal imperative to retain a competitive edge in a global economic environment has necessitated that their populations are urged to gain greater access to credentialized knowledge in the form of qualifications. A remarkably similar rhetoric has spread across many other countries, identifying a widespread and systemic dysfunction in schooling that forms a discursive justification for imposing educational reforms intended to tie learning ever more closely to the shifting needs of the 'knowledge revolution'. This rhetoric has, in most industrialized countries, now become such an article of faith that it has recently been dubbed 'the education gospel' (Norton Grubb and Lazerson 2006; see also Cuban 2001), for at the 'salvationist' heart of this gospel, acting as a promissory note in a certain sense[4], is the credential, the 'glittering prize' that is the key to a better life in an increasingly insecure world.

Thus, young people attending school in the UK, in the wider continent of Europe, as well as in the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are routinely assailed with the truism that 'the more you learn, the more you earn', a basic correlation intended to focus the youthful mind on the tightening bond between credentials and occupations carrying significant rewards.

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[3] For a critique, see Bourdieu (1986b).

[4] As Jonathan Kozol (2005) has acutely observed, for large numbers of black and ethnic minority children in the US, the promise of education can be likened to Martin Luther King's 'promissory note' of freedom, as alluded to in his famous 'I have a dream' speech, which came back marked 'insufficient funds'. One might venture that in a European context, the jewel at the centre of the 'education gospel', the credential, tantalisingly suspended as it is upon the twin poles of 'choice' and 'diversity', is also revealed as a fraudulent cheque offering what Ruth Jonathan (1997) calls 'illusory freedoms' for a significant number of working-class children.

Foregrounding this simple equation of qualifications = well paid jobs is sufficient on its own to breathe life into the much-cherished assumption that social mobility is available to all through meritocratic means. As part of the frenzied drive towards acquiring the status of a 'knowledge economy', these exhortations fulfil a dual purpose. They signal that educational routes to social mobility continue to be open to candidates of 'merit', while supporting the view that one can have complete faith that this system is the most efficient and fair means of social selection based on individual attainment (Brown 2003: 142).

Continued concern among current political leaders to keep alive the notion of meritocracy can thus be seen to be crucial in legitimating further moves towards overtly selective educative processes, while turning a deaf ear to repeated assertions that social class attributes exercise a key influence in easing entrance into desirable social positions (Goldthorpe 1997). Promising much to the many is therefore the official mantra in defending policies aimed at widening participation, as if this on its own is enough to erode decades of structural inequality, or the class strategies that have long acted to ensure its reproduction. Research evidence though, suggests otherwise, (Wolf 2000; Ball 2003a; Power et.al. 2003), challenging the veracity of such an account. Framed in simple terms, it is argued that while meritocratic principles still feature heavily in the rhetoric of public officials, and post-1997 policies aimed at tackling social disadvantage have had some short-term impact, it must be recognised that the overall image of education currently confronting us is one of a refurbished system of 'social selection by stealth' (Brown 1997: 400).

So it is worth restating once again that despite the avalanche of reform since the 1980s, social inequality in education remains a source of deep division and conflict that casts a dark shadow over claims made on behalf of a 'post-welfare'[5] society in which people 'learn to compete' (Tomlinson 2005: 216). Indeed, as I have argued throughout, for the most part, these reforms, especially as they impact on schools situated in working-class neighbourhoods, have in the main served to reanimate social class inequalities rather than diminish them, in the process reinforcing disadvantage from generation to generation. In such a context, the idea that occupations and status destinations are solely governed by merit becomes an increasingly moribund form of 'social mythology' (Byrne 2005: 140-1), obscuring the unpalatable truth that in actual terms, "the privilege of the already-privileged remain[s]" (Halsey et.al 1997: 5), despite its periodic ritual incantation by politicians of every stripe. Sally Tomlinson's (2005: 216) grim conclusion that "in England, any supposed meritocracy remains influenced by advantages of wealth, birth, nepotism, patronage and purchase" appears therefore to be characteristically unerring.

The knowledge that this 'epidemic' of reforms (Levin 1998) actually intensified under 'New Labour' has been greeted with vociferous criticism from a variety of authors[6]. Nonetheless, the new leader is on record as stating that their educational goal is to make the UK the "best trained country in the world" (Gordon Brown, cited in Brown and Lauder 2006: 318), with education, it appears, "now the mere instrument of the economy" (Tett 2006: 22). As Lawton (2005) convincingly argues, New Labour's commitment to market-oriented

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[5] The repercussions for an individual school are detailed in Gewirtz (2002).

[6] See Bottery (2000); Thrupp and Willmott (2003); Olssen et.al. (2004); Cribb and Ball (2005).

selective policies in education while clinging to that long-cherished touchstone of Labour Party ideology - the notion of meritocracy - lays bare the irreconcilable tensions inherent in satisfying powerful vested interests while mollifying the electorate with a carefully coded brand of moral inclusiveness[7].

Witnessing such blatant accommodations as they unfold in policy discourse, one is forced to conclude with David Byrne (2005: 151), that "even neo-liberalism with a smiley face cannot fool all of the people all of the time". For the last decade has shown that the notion of 'choice' that acted as the ideological 'sweetener' in the new educational settlement has turned out to be a counterfeit currency for large numbers of working-class parents. The fact that such a pessimistic verdict can be safely posted follows publication of a wealth of educational research painstakingly documenting how reintroducing selection under the guise of 'choice' and 'diversity' activated and encouraged the 'jockeying for positional advantage' (Jordan 1998: 137) that is the hallmark of a highly stratified state school system[8].

The consequences for the northeastern English city of Crownport, with a predominantly working-class population still struggling with the material after-effects of post-industrial decline, is that the majority of the city's schools now fall into what Richard Riddell (2003: 35) has called the 'bottom strata' of this spectrum of stratification. One of these institutions, Bridgepoint High, was the setting for the initial period of fieldwork carried for this study, and as I have documented, school experience here for both teachers and pupils was

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[7] Lawton's entertaining discussion of Labour's persistence in clinging to the ideology of meritocracy finds "particularly objectionable" (2005: 153) Tony Blair's repeated attempts to unfurl this particular 'Old Labour' banner.

[8] See Gewirtz et.al. (1995); Lauder et.al. (1999); Noden (2000); Edwards and Tomlinson (2002).

profoundly affected in two major ways by the debilitating consequences of policy enactment. First, the school's location on the Bridgepoint estate positioned it as a 'sink' estate school, within the narrow limits of a national policy discourse that encourages the view that schools can be demarcated using a strict good school/bad school distinction. This is largely due to the way that 'success' and 'failure' is measured (i.e. league tables) and the reputational status generated in local and national media reporting that takes its lead from these decontextualised comparative results (Rea and Weiner 1998: 29).

Bridgepoint High's subsequent difficulties recruiting or retaining high quality experienced staff are only the most obvious manifestation of the structural conditions that pertain in this area of the city, but the resultant year-on-year 'churn effect' among teachers and desperate over reliance on supply and substitute staff are also key features causing real problems in delivering consistent levels of subject delivery. Staff morale undoubtedly suffered as a consequence, with high levels of absenteeism and a lack of collegiality foregrounding the 'survival strategies' that many teachers adopt in coping instrumentally with working conditions in this unwieldy and relentlessly challenging environment. The lack of any school-wide policy to confront the widespread racism and homophobia in the school is also, I would argue, a major outcome of these deficiencies in the quality of teaching and school management.

The result was a worryingly over-populated and unstable school that was 'tough' to attend, and 'tough' to work in, exhibiting a pervasive air of simmering resentment that tainted relationships between teachers and pupils. The fact that

these inadequacies have subsequently been reflected in less than glowing Ofsted inspections (Ofsted 2005) simply highlights the officially legitimated operation of a vicious spiral of decline that can overwhelm such schools when they are situated in what is perceived to be an 'undesirable location'[9].

But what really magnified these unfavourable conditions and made life in school almost unbearably tense at times was the second outcome of policy reform, the pervasive culture, or "generalised spirit" as Lyotard (1984: 45) would have it, of 'performativity', that set teachers and pupils on a collision course of mutual conflict in the name of 'continuous improvement'. Relentlessly punitive technologies of surveillance exercised over both teachers and pupils under an imperative to 'perform or perish' largely expunged from teaching practice any notion that education might be about something more than exam attainment. The antagonism, hostility and high levels of disruption that greeted this approach was a telling, if inarticulate, response to being force-fed a unengaging, alienating curriculum that held little meaning for large numbers of the young people attending Bridgepoint High.

Bearing witness to this moral retreat from the social democratic values underpinning comprehensive education in favour of a competitive and utilitarian horse race in which all the thoroughbreds are schooled elsewhere left an indelible mark on this researcher. But what is particularly worrying is that Bridgepoint is not even a 'failing' school and there are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of other schools just like Bridgepoint enduring similar processes of managerialist-driven reform as a result of the current policy fixation on

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[9] Thrupp and Willmott (2003: 38-40) discuss the disadvantages accrued by schools situated on the receiving end of this process of polarisation.

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'academic achievement' (Ainley 1998). In these circumstances, the prognosis for public education in this country is potentially extremely pessimistic. For the indiscriminate sacrifice of a crucial public service to the vicissitudes of the market has left one of our key democratic institutions under serious threat, making a mockery of government claims regarding its commitment to social inclusion. One is left with little option but to conclude that the civic and social aspects of education, which are paramount in fostering democratic ideals of responsible active citizenship and norms of caring, respect and trust, are being fatally undermined by a pragmatic and politically self-serving adherence to the fickle fortunes of the global marketplace.

For I would contend that the real cost of reconfiguring education as a marketplace has been an intolerably high one, in terms of the damage done to a public service that has a readily acknowledged civic and moral mission to promote 'the common good' (Olssen et.al. 2004: 228). And there has been an untold human cost as well, as the constitution of a ruthlessly competitive system of 'winners' and 'losers' has commodified education to an unprecedented level, in the process excluding thousands of pupils and positioning them as 'failures' in a high-stakes game of social distinction. These young people, predominantly working-class and thus often at schools in disadvantaged areas, are, in Goffman's (1968) terms, quite literally 'discredited' by their educational experience, socially 'scarred' by the assiduous recording of their "blemishes of individual character" (1968: 14) and in danger of being excluded from full social acceptance by dint of their abject 'failure to succeed'.

With this in mind, my attention in this final chapter will be to try to explain why, in spite of the many marked similarities I observed in both educational establishments that formed the object of this study and their immediate surroundings, one school did appear to be largely achieving what it set out to do, while the other did not seem to be doing so with anything like the same shared sense of achievement among its pupils. I use the word 'achieve' for good reason here, not in the narrow instrumental sense that would have us believe that achievement can only be registered through exam results or the more nebulous and technicist concept of 'school performance', as it is formalised and enumerated in League Tables.

Rather, I employ it in a much broader sense, one that encompasses a more holistic interpretation of what educational experience can aspire to, both in terms of its capacity to promote individual development and in engendering a lasting culture of caring and respect for others that encourages young people to be active citizens within a just and democratic community (Tett 2006). These things are, of course, as yet uncertifiable in an educational context, but are unquestionably no less important for that. Therefore, in presenting a detailed interrogation of the reasons why such a discrepancy was discovered between these two school settings, I hope to go some way towards exposing the fundamentally flawed thinking that currently underpins educational policymaking in the UK, in its determined headlong rush to buttress a market system of schooling with a business-derived model of managerialism.

In a sense, the purpose here is to offer a complimentary perspective to that carried out in Chapter 5, where I explained what I saw as the lack of success

Bridgepoint High school had in properly engaging its pupils in a productive and participatory way. Scrutiny this time round therefore falls largely on St. Oliver's Community College, and how it dealt with the pupil population that it had responsibility for, in terms of what they brought with them as individuals belonging to a recognisable cultural community. I feel that this is a necessary step, for a critical assessment of what is happening in classrooms and corridors at Bridgepoint High only furnishes us with half the story unless we then go on to analyse what sort of conditions had to be in place in order for more 'successful' educational processes to occur.

One might want to think of this as a more 'wide-angle' approach, for here I train the analytical focus on what we might call 'school-effects without' by putting Irish cultural attitudes under the ethnographic microscope. Thus, closing this study by shading and colouring in a more complete picture of life at the sharp end of state schooling in Ireland, I look at the wider context St Oliver's 'performs' in, and the effects those contexts have on what goes on inside the school itself. Thus, ethnographic data from the Irish school setting will chiefly be concentrated on, with comparisons drawn with conditions at Bridgepoint High school. The data, as before, will be used in an illustrative manner to point up similarities and differences of approach that signalled a willingness, or otherwise, to recognise and take cognisance of the social and cultural milieu the school was charged with serving. The promise of the comparative method, I would suggest, has been fulfilled once more in bearing fruitful insights that further contribute to existing knowledge in this field.

And as I hope I have conveyed in the preceding pages of this study, the extended period of research conducted in Ireland threw up many areas of commonality with Crownport's Bridgepoint estate regarding the location and institutional settings in which these enquiries took place. This was particularly marked both in the community both schools were situated in, and in close resemblances found in the attitudes towards education among a large number of the pupil populations. But extending the scope of this enquiry to the Irish Republic also revealed that policy objectives already set in motion in England are in the process of being introduced into the Irish 'second-level' system. Yet again, the intention is to bring Irish schools 'into line' with the 'market-model' of education that has become such a global template for aspiring economies everywhere.

A clear tendency to adopt New Labour policy wholesale has been a conspicuous feature of recent Irish attempts to 'modernise' state education, in imposing social technologies of surveillance and accountability that those 'shamen' of the 'education gospel', the policy entrepreneurs[10], would have us believe are the key to higher standards. Crucial to the legitimization of these commodities in an internationalised educational and political market-place is the notion of 'policy borrowing' (Halpin and Troyna 1995), in which 'solutions' nurtured in the politically conducive 'laboratories' of the UK and New Zealand are disseminated through social networks operating at the level of high office (Ball 1998b). That this has not proved a total success in Ireland, and has, on occasion met with stiff resistance, is something that is worth noting, if only to

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[10] Stephen Ball (1998c: 77) castigates these "proselytisers of technically correct answers", whom he identifies as belonging to the school effectiveness movement, as they "tour the world with their overhead transparencies to deliver effectiveness 'gigs' to various audiences keen for a policy 'high' to 'fix' their school or school system" (1998c: 78).

underline the point that Ireland is, quite literally, another country, with a very different attitude towards education that closely reflects its unique social and cultural history.

For the educational landscape into which this agenda is being introduced is, as it has always been, a highly segmented one stratified by the intersection of deeply embedded social class interests crosscutting with even longer standing religious affiliations sutured deep into the organisational fabric of the system itself. An additional complication is a resilient loyalty towards the notion of single-sex schooling, especially among girls, which highlights how the historically embedded legacy of Catholic educational provision has more recently been hitched to efforts by middle-class families to consolidate cultural capital among their newly emancipated female offspring.

Therefore, what is occurring in Ireland is the attempted imposition of a UK-derived system of educational governance being mapped onto a terrain bearing many of the characteristics of an already existing marketplace, complete with the huge gulf in resources one might expect to find in a system that only embraced the principle of free mass education in the 1960s (Lee 1989: 362). Moreover, the rhetoric emanating from the Fianna Fail government is the familiar one of needing to drive up standards of achievement among the nation's most disadvantaged young people. Once more, this betrays the adoption of a pathologizing, 'deficit-based' moral agenda that, here too, casts a 'discrediting' light on those judged insufficiently motivated to fully participate in this increasingly acquisitive and socially divided society.

Given the argument mounted already, that such processes are increasingly being seen as antithetical to a more inclusive conception of education (Thomas and Loxley 2001), it has been all the more encouraging to witness at first hand that this does not, in fact, have to be so, and that social inclusion, as an ongoing process to be worked towards, can override the externally-imposed tyrannies of accountability and standards. Charting just how such policies have been received, responded to, and, on occasion, resisted at school level in Ireland, has been enormously significant in helping to gain a greater understanding of why Irish schoolchildren, or at least the ones I spent a year with at St. Oliver's, exhibited a pride in, and enthusiasm for their school that was almost completely absent in England.

So why was this the case? Why was Bridgepoint High such a hotbed of barely suppressed discontent while in contrast St. Oliver's was a relative oasis of relaxed and largely even-tempered engagement? For if the communities in which the research was conducted were found to be broadly similar and the young people attending the schools exhibited many of the same attitudes to education, what is it about St. Oliver's, or indeed Irish education more generally, that makes it more 'successful' in promoting a culture of learning while reducing disaffection among its pupils? In order to answer these questions, I feel it needs to be made clear what exactly I mean by 'success', so that where comparisons are applied, they are done so in accordance with the same criteria of reference.

Is it simply a matter of one school being blessed with a better group of teachers who somehow ensure that, in the main, Irish pupils remain in school long enough to gain the qualifications they need? Are Irish teachers for some reason

more capable of engaging young people in this goal who might otherwise have dropped out prematurely? Or then again, could there be a more complex, interlocking set of factors involved, partly to do with a moral conception of how school relationships should be organised, but also involving the wider issue of how education is actually conceived in Ireland? One might surmise that this would give rise to an overarching cultural framework that considers the work of schools as far broader than that of a mere assembly line through which to arm young people with sufficient credentials to last them a working life.

For I contend that within St. Oliver's Community College, there existed a genuine recognition and concern at the level of school leadership that whatever difficulties they did face, whether of underresourcing or the expectations forced on them by the credential 'points race', should not overshadow the fundamental 'moral' mission of the school. This was seen as providing a safe and conducive atmosphere in which young people could freely express themselves in a spirit of shared and communal affirmation, which certainly included celebrating academic achievement, but also strived to place equal emphasis on marking success elsewhere too, in whatever activity pupils chose to be involved in.

Premised in part on the guiding principles of Catholicism, but drawing equally on a widely shared sentiment of belonging and investment in the local community, which was generally taken to be the school's *raison d'etre*, life for the young people at St. Oliver's was a constantly empowering process, challenging them as individuals while never allowing them to forget that they were part of something wider and more encompassing. The net result, astounding though it may sound, was that the vast majority of young people

actually embraced it with open arms, throwing themselves with startling energy into its vibrant communal life and culture, an achievement made all the more remarkable given the parlous financial state the institution was more or less constantly mired in.

Pulling off the exceptional feat of engaging five hundred young people sufficiently that they want to come to school, show enthusiasm in participating fully in its varied activities, and evince a genuine pride in the school that they attend, is, I propose, exactly the kind of 'success' that is aimed at going well beyond the standard measurement of exam grades as a basis for judging 'school effectiveness'. But in doing so, I would argue that it also reveals a profound attentiveness to the broader purpose of education in facilitating learning as a central aspect of personal growth. For success here was not only about engaging pupils long enough for them to gain qualifications, but concerned just as much with enabling them to flourish freely and develop maturely as young adults in a safe, supportive and participatory environment.

Above all, what young people 'learned' from their experience at St. Oliver's, and the message repeatedly foregrounded by the general ethos of the school, was that education is about much more than a narrowly conceived focus on acquiring credentials, and is rather a collective process that supports and encourages the development of fully rounded individuals who then have the confidence upon leaving school to 'let their light shine'[11]. In finally teasing apart the various factors then that, when conjoined, resulted in St. Oliver's being such a 'success', both in the terms it set out for itself and in the view of this 'outsider',

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[11] Here, I am paraphrasing the oft-quoted and frequently referred to St. Oliver's school motto, 'Biodh bhur solas ag taitneamh', which translates as 'let your light shine'.

let me now move on to try to delineate the conditions that made the 'achievement' of St. Oliver's all the more remarkable.

EXPLICATING IRISH SUCCESS

Changing Principles for changing times.

In order to pinpoint why it was that St. Oliver's appeared to offer a much more conducive atmosphere in which learning could take place, it seems sensible to start at first principles as it were, and look at the way the school transformed its fortunes in the period immediately prior to my arrival in Ireland. And while I should say at the outset of this discussion that I do not intend to dwell too much on the personalities involved, or place more weight than is warranted on the effect one individual can have on an organisation, it does seem to me that it would be disingenuous to pretend that somehow 'school leadership' simply does not matter. For there is no denying that in both national settings, Headteachers, or School Principals as they are known in Ireland, are definitely in a position to wield more influence than any other member of staff in a school. Indeed, Stephen Ball (1987) has described this position as one of "licensed autocracy" (1987: 80), while Robert Burgess (1983), who carried out an ethnographic enquiry specifically concerned with Headship, went even further in suggesting that they are, above all, 'critical reality definers' in shaping the direction of educational establishments.

So while I would argue that it would be over-simplifying things too far to solely identify the change in Principal as the *only* factor in explaining what made St. Oliver's so exceptional, there is, equally, no doubt in my mind that the entry of this new incumbent, along with the ideas, enthusiasm and overall vision he brought with him, acted as a genuine catalyst in facilitating the more inclusive brand of schooling that I subsequently encountered during my time there. This was, in a sense, entirely fitting, as the question of what education should amount to in schools like St. Oliver's was undergoing a radical rethink at this time in addressing the challenges arising from marked increases in the level of social inequality that have been such sorely neglected features of the Irish economic boom (O'Toole 2003: 60).

As a School Principal who genuinely believed in the value of encouraging those around him to become active agents in the process of learning, Ian Miller's preferred role as a facilitator very much mirrored current thinking on Catholic school leadership as well as reflecting personally how he wanted education at St. Oliver's to be framed. A review of the US-based literature on Catholic urban education (O'Keefe 2000) suggests that the increased burdens placed on Principals to meet the diverse needs of children in situations of disadvantage has demanded a transformation from 'myopic manager' to 'boundary spanner' (Lieberman, in O'Keefe 2000: 226), in displaying high levels of competence in both instructional and pastoral leadership.

While I am sure the Principal would have few qualms about my placing him in the latter rather than the former category, as his incessant complaints about paperwork and tendency to don a tracksuit at a moments notice will attest, I

would add further to the use of ideal types by referring to Ball's (1987: 87) earlier typological distinction between 'authoritarian' and 'interpersonal' headship. I think it is fair to say, judged on the impressionistic accounts given to me by a number of teachers, that this aptly captures the differences in style between the old and the new regime at St. Oliver's. In a sense, and I acknowledge here that I am privileged with the benefit of hindsight in arriving a year later, starting out with an approach that was both more accessible and at the same time more receptive to the contribution of others must have felt like setting off a ripple-effect that spread out through the staff structure and into the pupil population as a whole.

I wish to make it clear at this point that athough putting it this way makes it sound as though what was being communicated was radically new as a framework for school-centred relations, in fact I believe this was far from being the case. For my suspicion is that actually it quite readily tapped into a longstanding feeling of collective ownership in St. Oliver's that had initially arisen when it and the neighbouring primary school were opened in the early 1980s. This was a time when the first influx of estate residents, moving 'up' in the world from Greenmere, brought with them what one respondent referred to earlier as the 'values' of the rural hinterland from whence they had originally come, and upon which they attributed their distinctiveness in comparisons with what they saw as their 'city-based' southside neighbours.

Such expressions of cultural differentiation, which were routinely glossed to me as 'rural' by local residents, are, I believe, those of the marginalised periphery of the city who, looked down upon by those of the urban centre, thus need to find

something to latch onto that will validate their positioning as northsiders. In circumstances such as these, references to 'rural values' speak of a desire to situate a more 'authentic' Irish identity deep in the discursive architecture of an agrarian pastoral creation myth of the state known as 'Traditional Ireland' (Lee 1989: 643)[12]. The subsequent deep-rooted cultural investments made by young people with burgeoning identities to construct in districts like Ballygowan are an important key to understanding the reason why St. Oliver's appeared to be achieving so much in successfully engaging its pupil population. On its own, however, this is not sufficient to furnish a complete explanation for the culture of cooperation that existed in the school.

In fact, as I will go on to argue, what was being attempted at St. Oliver's was a pluralist reawakening of a sense of 'spiritual community' that, while it may have flourished briefly in the early years of the school, actually goes far deeper than simply valuing an educational establishment for its own sake as a community resource. For I intend to propose that fundamentally embedded in this collective expression Joseph Lee refers to as "communal and spiritual solidarity" (1989: 650) are some seemingly unshakeable tenets of Irish Catholic identity itself that, even shorn of their formal religious grounding following a gradual disillusionment with the 'moral monopoly' of the church (Inglis 1998), are still held on to as a moral edifice in marking out distinctive aspects of northside culture. Reframed for a more secular and pluralist social landscape and thus operating as "more of a code than a conviction" (Lee 1989: 656), the perception that this had been somehow lost amid personal bitterness and emnity was

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[12] It is significant that the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' Ireland is also coded denominationally, with Catholicism equated with traditionalism and Protestantism standing for the rationality and enterprise of the modern (Cleary 2005: 8). In religious terms, I would argue that this has a considerable bearing on the analysis that follows.

motivation enough to embark on an educative 'mission' to once more seek to recover and celebrate the unity of purpose in "aspiring to holistic influence" (McLaughlin 1996: 150).

In order to fully comprehend this process, we must understand that when the two schools were initially built, with the assistance, I might note, of the local Catholic Diocese, they constituted, quite literally, the only community resource the fast developing estate had at its disposal. It is not surprising therefore that both schools soon became prized as valuable assets within the locality. Indeed one long-serving senior member of the teaching staff, and long-time local resident, did offer first hand corroboration of just how highly-esteemed St. Oliver's had once been, in observing that "any good that has been done has been done by both schools ... the schools have been the saving ... of the community really".

However, as I have previously touched upon elsewhere (see chapter 6) the ill-feeling generated by the longstanding rift between the two schools gives us good cause to comprehend why local residents increasingly ceased to view St Oliver's at least as a 'focal point', as long as Dr. Keele was at the helm. Hence, the reason why parental investment in the school as a local educational, social and cultural resource had diminished and lay dormant under the weight of some of the more repressive and autocratic tendencies that characterised the previous Principal's reign. Perhaps the most telling summation of how this operated in practice that I can offer was given to me by a staff member that had arrived just a couple of years before Dr. Keele's premature retirement, and who observed without any animosity that decision-making had been "almost like the

idea of a closed circle of one ... where all the decisions were made ... and there was only one person making the decision."

In marked contrast to this 'authoritarian' style of leadership, and I am sure, partly in keeping with his own local background and more easygoing personality, the new Principal actively sought to re-affirm something he must already have known was there, and that simply required a little unpretentious and self-effacing encouragement on his part to allow it to once again rise to the surface. For as he himself put it to me, "I'm from this area really, basically ... the other hill over the way d'y'know, and ... it has a different way of thinking ... the community does have a particular way, a nuance y'know." Throughout this interview, and indeed, during the entire period I spent at St. Oliver's, Ian Miller repeatedly stressed to me the need to "create a bond with the community", something he thought the school, for various reasons, had sorely neglected in the recent past. As part of that process, he clearly felt this had to start at the top, and, by way of illustration, here, he tells me about what he found when he initially arrived at the school:

"... I mean, it's a big change for a lot of people, who are not used to a particular style er ... for some, they're probably a bit confused, they're not sure about things y'know, the er ... I found that people weren't coming to the office as much at the start, now they probably are y'know, they would come to the office a bit more, they would discuss things ... I suppose what I've tried to do is encourage them to think y'know, to use their initiative because its probably one of the things that's most

lacking really, not so much in this school, but in education generally I think ..."

It might surprise some to learn that the Principal is not referring solely to the children here, but in fact to the attitude of many of the teachers he initially encountered at St. Oliver's, something he put down to a fear of stepping outside the rigid routines laid down under the old regime. Indeed, elsewhere in the interview, without at any time adopting a critical tone, he does state that his predecessor must have been "a very, very good systems organiser", based on how things were when he arrived. He goes on to describe in concrete terms what he means by this:

"I think that one of the things that surprised me most when I came into the school, one day I was asked by one of the staff, could he take a class outside because they were discussing colours and he felt it was best outside the school y'know ... and I didn't have a problem with that, I thought that was a good learning environment, but what was surprising was he felt he had to ask y'know ... and the second one then was when one of the teachers ... asked the question, 'could they be brought to an Art Gallery?', I thought ... it was almost a wind-up question y'know ...but they were very genuine and ... the idea of moving outside the school ..."

The new Principal's determination to implement what he himself called 'a long-term change programme' clearly focused on three specific areas, all of which are alluded to in this next extract:

"I probably took a different perspective [from the retiring Principal], maybe from the school motto, which is 'let your light shine' ... and at one of my first staff meetings I spoke specifically of the staff really letting *their* light shine y'know ... because I think it's important that people have the freedom ... and then I think, the other side is that er ... kinda looking at, to be ... proud of where they're from ... and the school like y'know, and to project themselves better like, coz there was a fear around the element of the school's relationship to the outside ... it was even a step for them to move the Mass from here to the church down the road in my first year, people were worried about taking four, five hundred students down two hundred yards like ... I think that's an awful indictment really that ... and the phrase that stuck in my head was that this is a community college and we can't be isolated or insular y'know, we have to project ourselves out there, get into the community and be part of the community, not just some school up on top of the hill that really just works away on its own like ... erm, and that has kind of worked. I suppose my belief is that if you believe in the children like, they'll really come through for you ...".

I am quoting at length here interview material carried out with Ian Miller in order to allow him to express in his own words how he saw his role in effecting positive change at St. Oliver's upon his initial instalment as Principal. In this particular extract, he defines the core 'perspective' that is intended to bring the school and its surroundings together, by forging closer links with the neighbourhood around it and encouraging everyone, both staff and pupils, to have pride in everything they achieve together as a school community. To some, this may seem like a standard response to the market situation of the school, and while one could not deny that finances were a factor, I am sure that this was not the primary motivation. The reality was that the school had clearly spent years isolating itself from its core constituency in the pursuit of a form of second-hand academic exclusivism transposed onto a working-class residential housing estate.

The result was a large number of alienated local families whose older children had attended St. Oliver's, but whose younger brothers and sisters were increasingly being sent elsewhere to neighbouring schools. The Principal's attempt to once more re-connect St. Oliver's to its immediate surroundings thus had a much more basic practical and even more important moral purpose. As I have already alluded to in the case study chapter (see chapter 4) the practical imperative given to Ian Miller upon his appointment by the VEC was to immediately address St. Oliver's rapidly dwindling school roll, so aiming to win over local parents clearly had to be a priority in reversing this downward trend in pupil numbers.

But there was an even more fundamental moral 'mission' underpinning this new willingness to reach out to the community. For encapsulated in Ian Miller's 'mission statement' is the second element of the National Council for Catholic Bishops (1972) landmark pastoral letter on ministry for Catholic schools; "to build community, not simply as a concept to be taught, but as a reality to be lived" (Hunt 2000: 47). Thus, the central Catholic emphasis on the 'communal' nature of human relationships is here seen to be the prime motive in requiring that St. Oliver's renew its foundational commitment as a community college, one that can fully serve as both a 'public community' in partnership with its surroundings, and as an 'ecclesial' community' in association with the local church (Groome 1996: 116).

In gauging both the extent of the new Principal's initial influence on St. Oliver's and whether it was his presence alone that established and sustained the conditions in which the school could more satisfactorily meet the needs of its surrounding community, a couple of further points need to be made. The first of these is that, as we have heard, promoting a sense of enablement was a key aspect of Ian Miller's strategy in giving free rein to staff to carry out their teaching duties with a degree of autonomy unusual even in Ireland. And far from being limited to staff, this 'invitation to participate' was quite deliberately extended to the young people of the school too, to build in them the confidence to speak up and begin to offer their contribution to the process of empowerment that was seen as the key to reengaging the school both with its pupils and its immediate environs.

This process of inclusive practice also reached out to those in danger of formal exclusion from mainstream education, such as the parents who, over a number of interviews and tours of the school, were persuaded that St. Oliver's would be a safe and supportive environment for their wheelchair-bound daughter. Or one could point to the nineteen-year-old who was invited to return to St. Oliver's to retake his Leaving Cert. after twice failing to complete while undergoing difficult personal circumstances. And while I have no doubt that there was a strong personal preference for this style of leadership on the part of the Principal, we should be careful here not to separate the individual from the basic moral values being adhered to in prompting and undergirding such actions.

For in fact, they are entirely consistent with the 'inspirational ideology' that has been identified by Bryk et.al (1993) as one of the single most distinctive features of Catholic schooling. This preferred form of institutional culture, or what Terence McLaughlin (1996: 143) has termed an 'organisational ethos', extends "an invitation to students to both reflect on a systematic body of thought and to immerse themselves in a communal life that seeks to live out its basic principles" (Bryk et. al. 1993: 335). Furthermore, commenting on the same research, Gerald Grace (1996, 2002) has highlighted some of the key elements contained within this inspirational ideology, namely that of the concepts of personalism, solidarity and subsidiarity[13], that together form a 'post- Vatican II'[14] declaration of how Catholic education should be conceptualised anew in light of the 'preferential option for the poor'. Grace's conclusion is that school Principals

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[13] According to Bryk et. al. (1993: 301) "personalism calls for humaneness in the myriad of mundane social interactions that make up daily life ... signifying a moral conception of social behaviour in a just community", while subsidiarity means that "the school rejects a purely bureaucratic conception of an organisation ... predicated on a view about how personal dignity and human respect are advanced when work is organised around small communities where dialogue and collegiality may flourish" (Bryk 1996: 30). A more detailed discussion of these principles, including that of solidarity, can be found in the collection edited by Vallely (1999).

[14] The most complete analysis of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), with particular reference to how they impact on Catholic schooling, appears in Grace (2002).

are best placed to act as the 'critical agents' charged with translating into lived school experience these formal requirements to "celebrate the primacy of the spiritual and moral life; the dignity of the person; the importance of community and moral commitments to caring, social justice and the common good" (Grace 1996: 71).

Seeking to establish a reconstituted value system that would provide an animating force for the entire educational enterprise (Bryk et.al. 1993: 279), Ian Miller's personal adherence to the Catholic faith offered two major advantages that assisted in this aim to construct a more conducive 'school ethos' that would be commensurate with the social and cultural context in which it needed to operate. Firstly, Catholicism possesses a highly sophisticated and theoretically coherent guiding framework on educational matters that meshed perfectly with the wider denominational interests represented on the St. Oliver's School Council. This meant that, once appointed, he would have a free hand as someone with considerable 'cultural capital' in the social fields of both Catholicism and education (Bourdieu 1986b), and was thus looked upon as a legitimate 'expert' who could carry forward the change agenda in whatever way he deemed necessary.

In addition, it carried the added advantage, embodied in the character of the man himself, of bringing to St. Oliver's a completely fresh and less rigid and formal outlook to what were, in fact, some fairly familiar moral principles that also stand as articles of faith for many others in the surrounding community. Allied to his honest and forthright cultural identification with what it means to belong to a particular locale, and of course his long experience teaching local

children, these aspects combined to unobtrusively direct his energies towards creating a less oppressive and more caring learning environment in shrewdly assessing how schooling should be conducted on the Ballygowan estate.

Bearing all of this in mind, I would propose that while the Principal undeniably represented an important figure in providing the initial impetus for a change in direction at St. Oliver's, the efforts of this one individual alone do not sufficiently, I think, fully explain why these ideas took such a decisive hold at the level of daily classroom life. For it seems to me that it is one thing to encourage teachers to adopt a more reflective and responsive approach to pupils in pedagogy and in pastoral care, but this surely would have remained little more than a gesture had it not been given such a positive reception in the staffroom. Equally, the wholehearted way in which young people gave of themselves in engaging with school activities demonstrated for me that his 'invitation' had not gone unheeded. Ultimately, my contention is that the 'success' of St. Oliver's depended just as much on how Ian Miller's ideas were received, by both the body of teachers who would be asked to implement them, and by the young people who would be invited to participate in the process of inclusion.

For it almost certainly could have attained nowhere near the level of internal consistency it had, unless this call to commit to a common cluster of educational and moral goals had not been quickly taken up with considerable enthusiasm by the majority of the school's staff and pupils. The reason why the whole of the 'school community' had responded so positively, which I argue is highly suggestive of an active investment on their part in a shared cultural heritage that continues to inform contemporary readings of 'Irishness' in the midst of

rapid social change, is to be the subject of the remainder of this chapter, and it is to this that I will now turn.

'Catholic' teaching in a pluralist Ireland

Now, it is, I hope clear from some of the data already presented in the case study chapter (see chapter 4) that there are strong indications that this was indeed the case, and that the teaching staff had taken up the challenge to find new ways to engage children and address the serious problem of early school dropout among the school's pupils. The JCSP Programme for example, which I discussed at some length earlier and took strenuous efforts by the school to win funding for, could be said with some certainty to have kept nearly twenty girls and boys in education when only a year before they were in danger of dropping out. Fieldwork observations also revealed regular instances of creative teaching practices, the like of which I cannot really recall seeing at Bridgepoint, being conducted on a more or less daily basis at St. Oliver's, by a number of different teachers across a wide range of available subjects. And while it may perhaps seem superfluous to relate yet more examples of this 'creativity' in action, I will offer just two brief ethnographic fragments to illustrate the 'routine' nature of their occurrence.

The first I have selected deliberately because it has already been referred to indirectly in Ian Miller's own words, as I accidentally, and quite independently of the Principal, actually witnessed the 'car park colour' lesson being carried out with a group of first year pupils. One afternoon, having just returned from an appointment in the Greendale shopping centre, I found myself besieged by a crowd of small but excitable twelve-year-olds clamouring for me to tell them

"what's the colour of yer car Jeff?". A quick consultation with the teacher, whom for anonymity's sake I shall not name here, revealed that the purpose of all the questions was to ascertain the precise, descriptive colour of all the cars in the car park, requiring an imaginative use of vocabulary that stretched beyond 'red', 'blue' or 'black' and into the realm of 'ocean blue', or, in the especially tricky case of my car, 'stratos silver'. Providing the girls and boys with the second half of my car's 'colour' set them off on a torrent of words that might, conceivably, be coupled with 'silver', an exercise in the creative deployment of words in relation to one another that would probably have seemed rather dry and unengaging in the confines of a classroom. Out here in the car park however, there was a clear sense that they were learning through 'play', having fun in interaction with one another and their teacher while applying what they knew to the real world.

My second example is again short and, I think, illustrates that sometimes what is not done is as important as what is, in pedagogical terms, and thus draws our attention to the vital importance placed on the pastoral aspects of Catholic education. Again, I fear the teacher must remain anonymous, and indeed I cannot divulge too much in the way of detail, for, as I later found out, what I witnessed was not an uncommon occurrence and was well known among St. Oliver's pupils. It will have to be sufficient to say only that the particular lesson in question was proving rather fractious, with a lot of time spent keeping pupils focused on the topic at hand, and a general restlessness about the group that did not bode well for maintaining control in what remained of the allotted time.

At Bridgepoint High, I had sat through dozens of the same sort of lessons, and the usual strategy was to isolate the main disruptive influence before

despatching them outside, to loiter in a hall or corridor until the buzzer sounded, or until they got bored and simply wandered off, which was frequently the case. Here though, the teacher's strategy was to abandon the lesson and, having now got the group's attention, to request that they fold their arms in front of them on the desk and lay their heads down with eyes closed.

Quite a few of the class, the boys especially, greeted this request with amusement, but the teacher calmly persevered until, within a couple of minutes, the whole group appeared to be asleep. The only sound in the classroom for the next ten minutes was the sound of the teacher's voice, speaking quietly to the group more in reassurance than with any intention to pick up the thread of the lesson. At the cessation of this impromptu 'chill out' session, there was a quite noticeably more relaxed atmosphere among the pupils as the teacher invited questions about what had been covered in the earlier part of the lesson. Afterwards, I asked the teacher why this ploy had been used, and the gist of the reply was that with still nearly half of the day's timetabled lessons to go, it would be inappropriate to attempt to coerce them into doing something they were obviously not in the right frame of mind to do. What was more useful, it was put to me, was to "lower the temperature of the whole group", to assist the teachers they would later meet, and to "give them a little space just to think".

While I have, for reasons of confidentiality, largely omitted any detailed context for this brief vignette, my long experience of working alongside this, and other teachers at St. Oliver's, leads me to conclude that, broadly speaking, they shared much in common in their attitudes towards their pupils. There was a definite and constant element of care for the children in their charge that was

conspicuous in its consistency, which one might trace to what Moore (2000: 94) has termed an "openness to people and ideas" that assumes the goodness of all the members of a Catholic school. This, it seems to me, signified a practical manifestation of Langdon Gilkey's (1975: 17-22) 'positive anthropology', which he identifies, from the particular standpoint of a Baptist Theologian, as a distinguishing feature in the unique configuration of the 'culture' of Catholicism.

Moreover, this striking attentiveness to the well being of pupils and unusually keen emphasis on the pastoral aspects of education reflected in a broader sense the 'humaneness in daily life' that is key to an understanding of personalism as it has developed in a 'post-Vatican II' educational climate. According to Anthony Bryk (1996), promoting personalism in Catholic schooling permits teachers an extended role, "encouraging staff to care about both the kind of person students become as well as the facts, skills and knowledge they acquire" (1996: 30). Thus, Gilkey's 'positive anthropology', when allied to the notion of personalism, confers an ontological commitment upon educators to engage with the 'being' of pupils as a way of nurturing social responsibility in the wider sense implied in the notion of the school as a 'community' (Groome 1996: 122).

One might even speculate, in the light of the material presented here and elsewhere in this study, that the contemporary emphasis on personalism that was so evident in teacher-pupil relations generally at St. Oliver's manifested a particularly localized inflection that gave it added symbolic weight. For while accounts of Catholic education generally tend to stress the socialising function of teachers, I would contend that the considerable number of locally-based (and

locally-educated) staff at the school, including, of course, the Principal, offered to the pupil population something significantly more meaningful than just a set of institutional role models forming an authority structure through which they would be socialized. For with their familiar accents, their lifestyle and leisure habits, and in their willingness to be seen as visible members of the estate community, many of the staff represented, sometimes quite literally, 'local heroes' who had made a commitment to re-invest in the futures of the next generation of Ballygowan children. In doing so, what was being affirmed was a pride in the status and viability of the estate as a distinctive cultural community, with the school acting as a conduit for the affirmative expression of these productive and worthwhile cultural sentiments.

Based on the evidence I accumulated over almost an entire school year at St. Oliver's, it is my belief that once Ian Miller set out to cultivate that sense of 'freedom' that is so important in authorizing innovation in teaching, the teaching staff, or at least the majority of them, quickly took up that entitlement themselves and used it to directly tailor their approach to the young people they were working with. And because the young people too were constantly reminded, both verbally by the Principal himself and in routine school practice, that St. Oliver's was first and foremost *their* school, the sense of ownership that developed from that promoted the feeling that teachers and pupils were working together and not in opposition to each other, and this was quite palpable in the emotional climate of the school.

This, I firmly believe, was the major reason why it was such a quiet and generally harmonious place to spend time in, exhibiting, on the whole, a

completely non-confrontational atmosphere that stood in such stark contrast to the habitual air of tension and uncertainty that was customary at Bridgepoint High. Lunchtimes seemed especially to exemplify this contrast, with St. Oliver's opening up its main hall to whoever wanted to stay, and teachers and children engaging in animated conversations over sandwiches for an hour, whereas Bridgepoint staff stationed themselves at locked doors and the pupils were confined to the year blocks throughout the lunch period.

Ian Miller characteristically offered me an anecdote when I asked him why he thought it was so vital to involve the children as participants in this process, as a way of explaining why there needed to be such a revolution in the relations pupils had with the school they attended:

> "I would regard myself as being approachable, and one of my abiding memories now was when I came first ... and came in the door and saying hello to the children, and they all put their head down ... and wouldn't say hello y'know ... not supposed to do this, it's the Principal like ... and it took easily about three, I suppose three, four weeks greeting them at the door y'know and saying 'how are ya' doin' or 'were ya watchin' the match last night' or something like that erm ... it took them that length of time just to ease off and let someone salute them y'know."

A desire to have the young people of St. Oliver's 'lift their heads up' and engage with a degree of confidence all of the adults in the school had therefore been fundamentally premised on the heartfelt belief, articulated in the earlier quote,

that placing trust in the pupils themselves had to be the starting point in establishing a new working consensus on teacher-pupil relations. And as we have heard, these are not the idealistic platitudes of a woolly-minded liberal trying to get 'onside' with 'the kids', but the firmly realistic, hard-headed assessment of a local, steeped in northside culture, and thoroughly imbued with an insider's familiarity of neighbourhood norms and values.

Returning once more to the question of whether what I found at St. Oliver's could be explained as a 'one-man effort', it should be underlined that there is an inevitable price to pay in voluntarily handing over trust that entails an acceptance that there is a degree of risk involved. While I hope the preceding pages have amply demonstrated the enthusiasm and commitment of the Principal in orienting the school towards a more 'participatory' approach, this alone does not tell us why the whole school had adopted this 'ethos'. If a more plausible explanation for St. Oliver's 'success' had more to do with the gradual flowering of a locally grounded sense of shared ownership among everyone associated with the establishment, I need to show that, at an institutional level, the whole of the school had fully accepted an element of unpredictability as a necessary fact of life.

For allowing young people the freedom to actively participate in certain ways in deciding just what their education should involve is not, I would aver, something that can be sustained by diktat. Therefore the degree to which an exposure to risk is tolerated at the level of day-to-day school life should, I think, provide a useful barometer to judge to what extent everyone else had invested in the notion of St. Oliver's as a collective educational endeavour. As an example,

reflecting on what was at stake in moving the Mass outside to the church down the hill, and over which such concern was expressed, Ian Miller was clearly aware of the pitfalls when he said that "they felt it was taking a risk y'know ... but I felt that it was worth taking the risk, an' it was great, fantastic y'know ... and we've done it a couple of times since."

So, having been given that initial nudge, did the rest of the school leap to embrace this shift in values, and if so, was it because the moral foundations were already in place, embedded in certain localised variants of the wider Irish culture? Like the Principal, I too would now like to present a story, one that I think illustrates that those initial 'seeds' of influence that Ian Miller cultivated so enthusiastically upon his arrival, had indeed fallen on fertile ground, taking root so effectively that they appeared to be thriving with a momentum all of their own.

Towards the end of my stay at St. Oliver's, the school's Intermediate age soccer team (under 16s) won through to a place in the final of the citywide school's Cup competition. The game was to be played at the city's professional football clubs' stadium and, in the excitement following the semi-final victory, representations were made by senior pupils about arranging for the school to support its team. With little fuss, a fleet of coaches were booked, and on the appointed day, I stood in the main hall alongside a beaming Ian Miller as over four hundred pupils[15], girls and boys, assembled in class groups before exiting for their allocated coach in boisterous but good-humoured high spirits. Talking to the Principal as almost the entire pupil population streamed excitedly out of

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[15] Some pupils unfortunately missed out as mock exams for both Junior and Leaving Cert. had been scheduled for this particular day. For this reason, a skeleton staff, including the Principal, remained at the school throughout the duration of the game.

the front doors of the school, he told me that, once again, fears had been raised

not only about the dangers of taking so many young people into the city at the

same time, but also about the costs involved for a school hardly awash with

cash for extracurricular activities.

He looked on at all the exuberant and animated girls and boys proudly sporting

their green and yellow uniforms and tracksuits and shrugged his shoulders as

he gave me his response. "I just told them that it's their school an' if they want

to support their team like, then we have to do whatever we can ... the money's

theirs after all, an' this is what we're all about, affirmation and celebration".

When I asked if he was at all worried about the prospect of letting them all go to

the match, especially as he himself would not be accompanying them, he just

smiled and said "well now, of course anything can happen ... but if you let that

stop ya', you'd never do anything ... and I'm sure it'll be fine".

A little later, I too jumped aboard one of the buses as we made our way down to

the stadium, the pupils all in fine voice as they enjoyed a rousing pre-match

singalong. The game turned out to be an entertaining, if one-sided affair with St.

Oliver's getting comprehensively beaten by a far superior opposing side,

although my abiding memory is not of the result, but the sustained vocal support

given to the team by their travelling army of fans. The massed ranks of St.

Oliver's pupils occupying the centre of the main stand directly on the halfway

line sang their hearts out throughout the game, chanting the school's name with

no encouragement from anyone but a real sense of pride echoing around the

ground as they let everyone there know where they came from. And in the

second half, when the team started falling behind, they redoubled their efforts to

rouse their fading heroes, a huge green and yellow mass of arm-waving, chanting girls and boys happy to be representing in public their loyalty and appreciation for their educational affiliation.

My fieldnotes of the occasion reveal that it was difficult not to make comparisons with the relatively sparse level of support given to the winning team. That their footballing ability certainly deserved it there is no doubt based on my own eye witness experience, but this may be explained by the fact that their school was located in a fairly well to do area on the other side of the river, where locality does not have quite the same resonance as it does on the northside of the city. For any neutral attending the game could not have failed to notice that one team at least had the full support of everyone else at their school, who had turned out in strength to advertise their celebration at the achievement of their fellow pupils in excelling collectively in a city-wide public arena.

Taking risks and trusting children to take responsibility was a price St. Oliver's had been prepared to pay to make school experience something worth getting up for, partly to engage pupils in schoolwork of course, but equally to engender among them a belief that their school was somewhere worth investing time, effort and enthusiasm in. Locally constructed loyalties towards community and place are thus turned to good educational advantage by embracing unpredictability and displacing the notion of school as 'dull routine'.

Catholic Education and cultural 'residues of faith'

So far, I have attempted to show that a significant element of St. Oliver's 'mission' to bring a more inclusive approach to schooling on the Ballygowan estate springs from its de facto denominational status as a Catholic Community College. Furthermore, in deploying the School Principal, Ian Miller's own words as a narrative device through which to weave the story of how a school that had lost its way once again found a path back towards a 'right relationship' with its surrounding community, I have deliberately chosen to foreground the overtly religious Catholic principles and social teachings that informed his actions at every step.

One might be forgiven for thinking therefore that this analysis of St. Oliver's success in marrying greater community involvement and a marked increase in pupil engagement is going to come down firmly in favour of faith-based education, or even more specifically Catholic education, as the main explanatory factor in differentiating the two schools included in this study. After all, as I pointed out in the case study chapter, there is a growing literature both here in the UK and in the US dedicated to proclaiming the superior 'effectiveness' of Catholic schooling. One might even hazard a guess that this thesis, were it to proffer such an argument, would, largely on account of its comparative content I might rather immodestly suggest, be welcomed with open arms as a useful additional confirmation of the positive reputation Catholic education enjoys both in these islands and further afield.

However, here, I would like to disavow any such notion, as it is my firm belief that the Catholic religion *in itself*, though undeniably significant in shaping the attitudes of St. Oliver's school leadership and a good number of its staff, does

not, *on its own*, provide an adequate explanation for what was being achieved at the school. After all, by most accounts, the school was far more overtly religious in its practices during the period when it suffered a downturn in pupil numbers, along with the alienation of large numbers of local parents. Being staunchly Catholic in orientation at that time, and couched in such an authoritarian manner, certainly appears not to have been 'effective' at all in preventing disillusionment on the part of either pupils or parents. Confronted with this apparent paradox, one is forced to conclude that something additional to Catholic education is playing a part in enhancing school experience at St. Oliver's for everyone concerned.

My intention therefore, in opening this explication of Irish school success with the Principal's own perspective, was to shed some analytical light on precisely to what extent the teachings of Catholicism did exercise a personal, professional and academic influence in motivating attitudes and behaviour on behalf of the school. By grounding such actions in the scholarly literature of Catholic education, I hope to have gone some way towards demonstrating that while there undoubtedly exists an implicit institutional 'Catholic ethos' guiding the school's direction and framework of relationships with both pupils and parents, it appears to be chiefly concerned with informing generally secular patterns of conduct, rather than explicitly inculcating a formal 'indoctrination' into Catholic religious belief.

For, apart from a short prayer at the close of assembly every morning, and the formal curricular subject of RE, which also exists in the UK, there was very little that went on at St. Oliver's that one could point to and identify as 'overtly

religious'. Beyond the genial presence of the school priest as a staff member who also doubled as a teacher, this was not in any sense a 'Catholic school' of the type described by Peter McLaren (1986), where a heady atmosphere of Catholic ritual symbolism was argued to be about 'making' good Catholics who would then become 'good' workers in the interests of social control. Rather, what I found, as someone with absolutely no previous experience of Catholicism, was that while the school largely exhibited a secular atmosphere in terms of symbolic imagery and ritual observance, values commensurate with certain aspects of 'Catholic virtue' often lay just beneath the surface of daily routine at St. Oliver's.

They were chiefly present in the attention paid to encouraging the children to involve themselves in all manner of school-based activities, among the most popular of which for the vast majority of pupils were the various charitable and 'cooperative' endeavours St. Oliver's undertook throughout the school year, only one of which I have found space to detail in an earlier chapter[16]. However, just as I was more than happy to participate in these instances of 'educating the virtues' (Carr 1991), despite not being a practicing Catholic, so everyone else in the school threw themselves into these events and activities regardless of their individual attitude towards the faith. Moving beyond formal adherence and becoming instead a central component of 'school culture', these undertakings represented a practical commitment on the part of St. Oliver's to affirm the value

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[16] However, another expression of this could be seen in the voluntary 'Meitheal Society' organised by Transition year pupils to mentor their younger schoolmates and participate in community projects in which the school could provide assistance. 'Meitheal' translates as 'mutual aid among neighbours', and is a Gaelic traditional practice revived during the latter years of the 19th century (for a discussion of Gaelic revivalism, see Matthews 2003).

of pursuing 'the common good' in confronting the unacceptable consequences of unrestrained market forces (CBC 1996; Hollenbach 1996).

For the plain fact was that, despite these 'Christian endeavours', the vast majority of children and young people at St. Oliver's, along with a significant minority of the school's teachers, were not regular churchgoers, reflecting a generalised process of secularisation that has been extensively documented, sometimes to an exaggerated degree, in Ireland since the late 1980s[17]. Indeed, Michael O'Connell (2001: 64) highlighted this trend among young people by showing that church attendance by under twenty-fives now represented the minority of that segment of the population. Terence Brown (2004: 371) is therefore probably correct in his assertion that "the conservative social construction of people, nation and state was no longer as securely in place as it had been for much of the [twentieth] century".

This is especially pertinent when one considers that for at least two thirds of that period, the state had been virtually synonymous with the unquestioned moral authority of the Catholic Church (Whyte 1971). For all of these reasons, Catholic devotion alone cannot fully explain why the mass of pupils and their similarly sceptical teachers nonetheless committed themselves so wholeheartedly to the 'ethical environment' I found at St Oliver's. Instead, we need to cast our net elsewhere to divine what there is in the local culture, or in broader aspects of Irish identity, that persuades those 'lapsed from the faith' to still participate in the shared aims of fostering an inclusive school community.

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[17] Comprehensive coverage of both the specifics and the general contours of this phenomenon appear in Moore (1995); Cassidy (1996); Inglis (1998; 2005), Kenny (2000) and Brown (2004).

One possible entry point for investigating what these factors of common agreement might be came to me one day in the course of an interview with Connor Cleary, the young RE teacher I have already referred to in previous chapters. Asked how he would define the atmosphere of St. Oliver's under the current leadership, Connor replied that he thought it had a "secular religious ethos ... that's probably more to do with respect, and treating people with respect". As one might expect from this devoted teacher of religious education, there is a strong element here of the humanistic ethic of personalism highlighted earlier, but I found it interesting that he chose to frame these values in a secular mode, making them available as universal principles that do not necessarily have to hinge on a formal adherence to the Catholic faith. On a similar theme, Thomas Groome's (1996: 123) sprightly social scientific dissection of the anthropology of Catholicity takes this one stage further, in noting that

"Etymologically, 'catholic' has its roots in *kata holou*, meaning 'embracing the whole', or better still 'including everything and everyone'. This suggests that the best synonym for 'catholic' is inclusive rather than the often used 'universal'."

So could it be that the renewed commitment to what is without question very much a 'post-Vatican II' cluster of 'inclusive' Catholic educational values pursued with such vigour at St. Oliver's by a number of teachers, found a ready concurrence with similar values held by their less religiously oriented colleagues? If this is so, it would explain the level of consistency applied over issues of discipline and social behaviour that formed a largely 'unified front' in overriding questions of religious adherence. One might also see evidence of

this in the strictly enforced school-wide policy of confronting bullying and racist and homophobic attitudes by challenging them face-to-face at the time of their occurrence. For unlike the Catholic Headteacher in Robert Burgess's (1983) study who found it difficult to persuade non-Catholic teachers to follow the church's educational guidelines, at St. Oliver's there was a rare degree of equanimity over such questions of 'whole school culture', despite the frequently asserted presence of a similarly diverse range of views[18].

Nonetheless, while one might expect the more devout members of the teaching staff to display attitudes reflecting an intense moral commitment to Catholic principles of the kind already alluded to, it became clear that other decidedly less devout teachers too exhibited the same sort of care and attentiveness towards pupils and their pastoral welfare that revealed the same sort of 'Catholic' values, in exactly the sense outlined by Groome. One might say, following Bourdieu (1977), that what is being adhered to in these 'dispositions' is in fact a lingering identification with a 'Catholic culture' that has been so assiduously interwoven into Irish identity that, given the accelerating abandonment of the Irish language, now remains probably the most distinctive mark of national character, and of cultural differentiation from notions of 'Englishness'.

In Bourdieusian terms, these "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1977: 53) are the product of a very particular history,

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[18] In fact, the only major bone of contention I came across among the teaching staff themselves had nothing to do with religion. Instead, it concerned a perception by some of the older teachers who had been particularly close to the previous Principal that academic standards were slipping in the drive to be more inclusive (see also the discussion in Chapter 4). To me, this smacked of a wish to return to the 'old days' by a number of individuals that, having been previously closely allied to Dr. Keele, no longer felt they had the ear of the Principal.

forged in the white heat of a revolution and bloody civil war that served to construct the Irish Republic as an unequivocally Catholic nation (Brown 2004: 19). The subsequent continuities and regularities embodied in this 'spiritual habitus' have, despite well-documented processes of secularisation, the enduring effect of producing in social practices a 'residue of faith'; "a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices" (Bourdieu 1977: 54).

In formal institutional terms, religious identity, which historically in Ireland functioned as "an alternative badge of communal identity" (O'Tuathaigh 2005: 48), underwent a profound reassessment in the late 1980s and early 1990s, from which sprang an institutional disenchantment with church morality largely stemming from the conduct of its earth-bound representatives. And the church was not alone at this time in being assailed by such problems, as the state too suffered a crisis of legitimacy in the wake of a series of 'discreditable revelations' (Brown 2004: 374) concerning financial corruption[19]. What finally emerged from this period of 'ecclesiastical traumata' was, in the words of Fintan O'Toole (1996: 197), 'the birth of a new morality', that no longer found it acceptable not to practice what one preached and therefore resulted in a reconfigured public consciousness that no longer cared to have its moorings tied so firmly to a formal adherence to the established church.

The religious sentiments Geroid O'Tuathaigh refers to, which had for so long served as a core signifier of what was distinctive about 'Irishness', underwent a crisis of faith, along with a concomitant cynicism regarding contemporary

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[19] Accounts of these scandals can be found in O'Toole (1995, 1997, 2003); Kerrigan and Brennan (1999) and Cullen (2002).

standards in public life, but surprisingly the moral vacuum that one might have predicted would follow somewhat unexpectedly failed to materialise. Rather, as Terence Brown (2004: 381) observes:

"good citizenship was uncoupled to a degree from the practice of religion, so a crisis in the church's moral authority did not mean society lacked moral guidance and a sense of its autonomous worth".

Key elements contributing to this reenvisioning of Irish identity were a determination to hold to account those individuals guilty of malfeasance, President Mary Robinson's outstanding achievements in celebrating Irish civil society, and of course the breath taking economic boom that reenergized national self-confidence precisely at the time of its most pressing need. Thus, while religion has undoubtedly diminished as a cornerstone of Irish identity, nonetheless those ingrained moral precepts forming the core value system of Catholic culture retain their meaning in enabling people to derive personal dignity and conscience through activities in the public sphere. It is my contention that this would have applied to teachers more than most, requiring a relatively minor readjustment in accordance with a 'post-Vactican II' imperative to embrace a pluralist vision, in seeking to advance the cause of solidarity and the commitment to 'the common good' (Hollenbach 1996: 97).

For teachers in Ireland occupy a unique position in the culture, history and politics of the 'Catholic Republic'. It is a profession that has long been viewed as a vocation in a way that tempts comparisons with the priesthood; although the

fact that teachers, both women and men, continue to command huge respect from the general public makes such comparisons difficult to sustain today. Nevertheless, the St. Oliver's school staff, as public sector educators dedicated to teaching in an underresourced state school, operated under the pervasive influence of a moral framework that inheres in the history of their professional vocation. Their current concern is to promote 'the virtue of solidarity' (John Paul II, cf. Hollenbach 1996: 96) in meeting a wide variety of diverse pupil needs, and this continues to inform the logic of a 'Catholic habitus' (Inglis 2005) in confronting the daily challenge of teaching in an inclusive fashion. Indeed, David Hollenbach (1996: 97) directly alludes to this in suggesting that:

"the effort to nurture this virtue of solidarity not only has distinctively Christian warrant in theology but is proposed as a worthy and in fact essential task in a secular, pluralist context".

The particularities of local context have a powerful salience here too, for much effort was expended at St. Oliver's to sustaining a sense of communal solidarity in the midst of extraordinary social change. Competing with a beckoning youth labour market and the accompanying lure of globalised consumption patterns in trying to extend school experience for local young people, teachers battled against the forces of market individualism that form the dominant ideology of neo-liberal education, as well as the atomising processes of social individuation that threaten to break the bonds of community interdependence. Such forces are recognised as representing the antithesis of solidarity as a moral basis for

the democracy and social justice that can contribute further to the common good (O'Keefe 1996: 190).

However, this is not to say that the importance of acquiring qualifications was in any way downplayed or undermined. Rather, the opportunity to maintain an engagement with education opened up the possibilities for a broader conception of learning that encompasses gaining greater moral and civic maturity alongside recognising a wider range of social achievement. This was a clear indication of the priority given to Bernstein's (1990) 'invisible pedagogy' that produces intangible long-term benefits in individual attitudes and demeanour rather than a narrow focus on a 'visible pedagogy' that places emphasis only on the "performance ... [and] ... external product of the child" (1990: 70). It is this aspect of pedagogical discourse at St. Oliver's that I suggest really caught the imagination of the young people, for in day-to-day life at school it encouraged the view that they were there to do more than collect credentials, and that moreover, what that 'more' might be was ultimately something they decided upon themselves.

SUMMARY

A combination of what Gerald Grace (2002: 49) has termed a 'person forming' rather than a market-driven 'product-forming' school ethos, in conjunction with an approach to personal relationships that emphasised nurturing communal solidarity, took on a noticeably localised character in the cultural environment of the Ballygowan estate. Adults at St. Oliver's, as I have stated already, often

cited 'rural values' in trying to answer my awkward questions about why the kids seemed so amiable towards them. They put this down to the legacy of 'country' backgrounds in many of the families on the estate and, as demonstrated in an earlier quote, pointed to the significance of this in marking out the boundaries of northside culture. For myself, as someone who spent the better part of a year working on the estate, while I understand what my respondents were trying to get at, I suspect that it has less to do with the 'rural' than they claimed. Indeed, if anything, it only points to the continued resilience of a traditional discourse of the 'leafy pastoral idyll', a construct that Lee (1989: 644) dismisses as "an idealised image of the past".

My own belief is that the young people of the Ballygowan estate, who in no sense could be described as 'rural', but could more accurately be identified as 'marginal' or 'peripheral', found themselves in an educational environment in which *their* culture and sense of belonging were being given a positive stamp of approval, encouraging in them the self-confidence to have pride in where they come from. For in this particular context, the cultural insularity of a peripheral housing estate, so often a source of conflict and alienation among young people as we saw on the Bridgepoint estate, is here turned into a positive resource for building dignity and self-esteem by being couched in a social and moral code that has deep roots in the Irish national psyche.

These young people, and indeed a good number of their teachers, no longer hold fast to religion, but certainly do display a heightened willingness to proclaim their own localised reading of 'Irishness'. Unsurprisingly, this 'residue of faith' bears the enduring imprint of a 'Catholic habitus' that, in this context at

least, has found a meaningful anchorage point through which to ground a central emphasis on affirming the solidarity of *their* community. As Tom Inglis (2005: 73) astutely notes:

> "The Catholic habitus is still embodied in the understanding and presentation of self. This reflex way of reading the world lingers long after supporting institutional structures and discourses have fallen away. The legacy of the Catholic habitus is such that it still informs and guides people as to what is right and wrong, good and bad, even though they may not adhere to many of the teachings of the church … . Being Catholic, identifying oneself as Catholic, thinking and acting in a Catholic manner and engaging in Catholic rituals is still a central part of people's cultural heritage and sense of self."

The youth of Ballygowan are, to use their own words, 'fierce proud' of where they come from, a cultural consequence of needing to look positively on a stigmatised local identity that is otherwise universally vilified. Just as the Bridgepoint boys aggressively asserted their estate heritage as a badge of honour, so the young people of Ballygowan thought of themselves in exactly the same way, but the difference was that the school that they attended had found a way to make those connections between affirming local culture and promoting a sense of community. A solid structure of Catholic discipline and a consensus with local parents provided a firm foundation, as did the highly motivated and creative teaching staff and the adoption of an 'inspirational ideology' that is characteristic of 'post-Vatican II' Catholic education. But what really lifted St.

Oliver's to another level though was the amazing convergence in values displayed by all of the members of the school, the result of a withdrawal from formal religion that left a secular, pluralist space where an Irish/Catholic moral code demanded an Inclusive/Catholic practice.

CONCLUSION:

Imagining 'Schooling Otherwise'?

There is a sense in which, in drawing together the various threads of insight that this study offers, we need to once again address the fundamental question posed at the conclusion of Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour,* namely that of "what to do about Monday morning?" (1977: 186). For the conundrum raised by this enquiry leaves us pondering the very same issue; how exactly one confronts the prospect of dealing at the level of day-to-day practice with the injurious consequences of an unequal system? And it seems to me that this is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago, not least for reminding us of the abiding centrality of social class differences as a referent through which people continue to categorise themselves and others. To those whose daily existence revolves around schooling at the bottom end of the education marketplace, this is a problematic to be confronted in the reality of their lived situation. For in the contemporary landscape of state secondary schooling, how, and in what way it is resolved makes a huge difference to the school experience of everyone concerned, when, as Madeline Arnot (2003: 37) incisively notes, "qualifications matter even more than before and the social exclusion of the manual working-classes is even harsher".

One could, of course, simply shrug one's shoulders and concede that "nothing can be done until the basic structures of society are changed but the structures prevent us making any changes" (1977: 186), although, as Willis points out, this would, in effect, be to default on the future itself. For myself, I firmly believe that

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such a resignatory attitude not only stifles faith in the human spirit, a vital weapon in the armoury of every educator, but also betrays a lack of belief in the dormant potential that populates every classroom. Rather, I propose that what is required is a recognition that what counts as 'success' depends largely on the context upon which success is defined and that it is perfectly possible to celebrate achievement using a wider range of criteria than those laid down under the limited parameters set by the state.

In drawing this study to a close, I want first to preface what follows by suggesting that while much of what is contained in the preceding chapters may leave one despondent over the future of state schooling in England, I would argue that possibilities do exist through which 'education' might alternatively be conceived. This will require a little further explanation. The substantive argument of this thesis, that large numbers of working-class young people in England continue to undergo a school experience that is fundamentally 'discrediting' for them, for reasons that point conclusively to social class inequalities, is one that has returned to haunt us, 'zombie-like' (Reay 2006) to interrupt the culture of complacency currently characterising attitudes towards socio-economic disadvantage.

It will therefore come as no surprise that most of the criticism levelled here has been directed squarely at government policy over the last decade, which, it appears to this observer at least, has actually made the situation more unequal than it was under Conservative rule. That this seems barely credible after a decade under a political party claiming to represent 'social democratic' values is broadly indicative of just how much the 'sands' of classed relations have shifted

during the 'New Labour' era. This has led David Byrne's (2005: 169) passionate

critique of neo-liberal governance to conclude with the verdict that:

"The policies developed by ... the Blair government promote

poor work, are in general an assault on democratic process, and

in practice promote social exclusion rather than do anything to

remedy it".

However, while wholeheartedly concurring with Byrne's sentiments, rather than

devoting my concluding remarks to a critique grounded in party politics, it

seems more productive to use the pages remaining to concentrate on whether

there is anything positive we can draw from the rather depressing scenario I

have outlined. Hence, I intend in this conclusion to focus on what possibilities

there might be for conceptualising 'schooling' otherwise, and what lessons we

might learn from elsewhere about how this might be undertaken.

In doing so, it is appropriate that the comparative aspect of this study has

proved to be particularly helpful, furnishing us with what I would claim is an

exemplary model of a school striving to provide something closely approaching

'inclusive' education, being all the more praiseworthy for being carried out under

extremely difficult financial circumstances. It should be noted however, that any

lessons we may be capable of learning will not so mush concern teaching

practices or implementing a more diverse and engaging curriculum, important

though these things are, but will, I feel, touch on more basic social issues

concerning the holistic framework of school relations through which such

practices and processes are organised. For if there is one insight that we can

draw from the Irish research presented here, it is that confronting 'the social justice challenge' (Thrupp and Lupton 2006) by working towards social inclusion is really most productively achieved where it matters most, at the level of the relationships structuring daily life in school. Therefore, without the presence of a whole-school consensus on a mutually agreed upon 'educative ethos', it seems to me that one is left with little more than a comforting and complacency-inducing rhetoric that can all too easily mask a tendency towards exclusionary intent.

Moreover, staying with the cultural emphasis that has characterised this comparative study allows me to focus on the current assemblage of values, norms and beliefs that appear to dominate educational thought in England, and advance an argument that under such circumstances these sensibilities, which amount to a 're-moralising agenda' (Cribb and Ball 2005: 117) do not offer a conducive environment for a genuine commitment to inclusive practice in schools. However, despite evidence that this culture of 'self-interested egoism' is infiltrating Irish education too, I will suggest that possibilities for working within and against the system to practice a more inclusive form of education have been brought to light. But they require that education be reconceptualised as something more than a mere engine of the economy, bearing all the hallmarks of a class-mediated process of selective exclusion organised around a 'scramble for qualifications'.

So, in aiming to end on a more optimistic note, I will point to certain aspects of the school culture of St. Oliver's Community College that, in evincing a genuine capacity to retain meaning despite being assailed by the pernicious cultural

effects of prolonged exposure to the hegemony of neo-liberal ideas, might possibly prove productive if adopted in the English context. For the best hope for the future of schools like Bridgepoint High school is that, in rejecting, at least at the institutional level, the primacy of market forces, the more likely they are to focus their energies and overstretched resources on finding ways to build communicative bridges with their surroundings, and in so doing, reinvent themselves as locally responsive communities of teaching and learning.

Schooling in an 'Inclusive' Society

The notion of the 'inclusive society' carries a great deal of political weight in the UK today, as it does elsewhere in the European Union. Nowhere is this truer than in education, which was first identified as a target for intervention back in 1997. From its emergence in the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration on 'special needs' education three years earlier (Dyson and Slee 2001), it became incorporated into the broader policy discourse of social inclusion under the influence of the 'Third Way' on a Blairite politics carrying with it the considerable ideological legacy of the 'New Right' (Levitas 1998; Hodgson and Spours 1999).

The resulting reform agenda bore a spectacular correspondence with that of the previous regime; under a 'global policyscape' (Ball 2001: 54) rationale that "binds together the discourses of modernisation ... globalisation, economic competitiveness and raising standards ..." (Alexiadou 2002: 73). Retaining and intensifying market principles in secondary schooling cultivated a choice-based performance culture of individualised achievement, placing ultimate value on the competitive acquisition of educational credentials as the most effective means of economic survival in an unforgiving global economy. The legitimacy of

this individuated, performance-oriented system rests on a revised discourse of meritocracy, now usually propounded through policies to widen participation for those fortunate enough to successfully negotiate the increasingly visible and thoroughly normalised sorting and selecting functions of schooling (Arnot 2003: 33).

Economic considerations it appears, and global markets in particular, are afforded a narrow primacy that, while historically influential, have now attained an unrivalled ascendancy due to 'post-welfare' reforms to institute the 'competition' state and privatise costly former activities such as education (Tomlinson 2005: 216). However, a moderate shift from classic neo-liberalism is also detectable, signalled through ameliorative strategies aimed at 'managing' or 'offsetting' the inegalitarianism and social disruption caused by what Cole (2005: 204) bluntly terms "capitalism's rapacious and predatory nature". Thus, the concept of inclusion is offered as a re-envisioned understanding of the outcomes wrought on the traditional terrain of social class processes and practices, as the "longstanding Labour Party objective of greater equality has been displaced in New Labour politics by the objective of greater social inclusion" (Fairclough 2000: 65).

Closely informed by theories of individualisation[1] and the 'market individualism' generated by deregulation (Lauder et.al 2006: 25), this has been achieved by discursively 'reducing' social inclusion to the responsibility to render oneself employable in the new 'high skills' knowledge economy. The effect, which one concedes has proved undeniably successful, is to underscore even more the

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[1] See Giddens (1991, 1994); Beck (1992); Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

vital importance of education as a personal asset, while legitimating individualist and instrumentalist attitudes that meritocratic ideals continue to hinge upon. Therefore, the image of the 'inclusive' society so energetically promoted by the state is that of a 'certified' society (Ainley 1999), in which each citizen is a self-interested maximiser pursuing rational choices in a competitive marketplace where education is conceived in its commodified form.

In this, economism, and its attendant principles of rationalism, universalism and instrumentalism become, according to Lingard et.al. (1998: 84), "articulations of a particular cultural standpoint", shaping, through the allied moral technologies of managerialism, competition and performativity, the behaviour and orientation of individuals in relation to educational aspirations. And as many studies cited in this thesis have shown us, when schooling is perceived as 'the only game in town' and the stakes could not be higher, it has come to be viewed as a market to be 'traded' in like any other, requiring "modes of engagement" (Ball 2003a: 168) that reward self-assuredness and adeptness in realising goals. The value structure arising from such an unalloyed 'fetishism of the market' stakes out a clear social and moral agenda that, as Bottery (2000: 39) notes, takes its cue from this purely economistic source:

"a market-based economic agenda will depict an image of humanity which is predominantly rational, analytic, autonomous, self-interested and pleasure and profit-maximising. This image, rather than being the effect of economics, then becomes the image to be achieved"

In a shrinking labour market where privileged access is predominantly brokered through certification, such values attain a crucial importance, as education becomes a rationed positional good set within a hugely polarised system designed to exclude many potential competitors (Brown and Lauder 1996). In the midst of such anxious educational circumstances, we should not be surprised that choice-based competition has largely benefited the middle-classes, as their strenuous efforts to maintain privilege have ended up perpetuating "a divided and divisive system" (Tomlinson 2005: 219). Yet there is a further sense in which a shift in value orientation has been identified, for the moral project embedded in this 'culture of enterprise' is one aimed at making 'neo-liberal subjects' (Walkerdine 2003; Skeggs 2005), who are 'responsibilised' into 'appropriate personhood' (Youdell 2004) as 'socially integrated' members of the 'redeemed social order' (Byrne 2005: 55).

'Business Culture' and the 'Just' Society

A culture in which social norms are secondary to those pertaining to the economistic is one hardly designed to promote a democratic and equitable system, whether in state education or any public service for that matter. Self-interest and the pursuit of relational advantage are only symptoms in one specific social field of the valorising of enterprising individualism over sociability and the common good, awarded a new legitimacy by a public morality hedged on all sides with fear, uncertainty, and a profound sense of insecurity regarding the future. This should be a cause for concern in any school claiming to take seriously the moral duty to work towards a 'just society', but I have argued that it takes on a heightened significance in a setting like Bridgepoint High school, where a combination of structural disadvantage and an unequal distribution of

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resources places 'unjust' burdens on the 'educative' capacity of the organisation. Alas, in the current climate, this was not found to be the case, with detrimental consequences for everyone concerned. Indeed, in writing of the importance of social justice as a basic aim of education and its centrality in the moral education of the young, Clarke (2006:282) sums up what erasing the social and moral dimensions of schooling can lead to:

"Sadly, in the push for credentials and the managed curriculum, all too often this end in favour of social justice is lost in the pursuit of individual material advantage which so disastrously undermines the common good".

Now, while I would certainly not claim to be first in arguing that the reductionism redolent in much neo-liberal thinking has had harmful effects on the social fabric on which it is imposed, education, and especially schools struggling with the pressures of managerialism, suffer more than most in trying to foster an ethic of inclusiveness within such policy regimes. This was clearly evident at Bridgepoint High, where difficulties with staff turnover and the higher demand for pastoral care among pupils documented elsewhere in 'bottom strata' schooling (Riddell 2003) constrained the amount that could be done to address social and developmental aspects of the 'character' education being offered. And while admitting that this is not that uncommon in schools where 'fire fighting' is the norm (Lupton 2005), the quite unrelenting pressure to perform did further untold damage to social relations, effectively functioning as another facet of exclusion in a school where the social conditions of existence for many pupils cried out for a more inclusive approach.

The undue emphasis on 'raising standards', driven by fear of the potential consequences of not doing so under the standardised criteria laid down by the state, meant that bureaucratic compliance took precedence over addressing in a positive way the learning needs of every pupil. Thus, the central principle informing inclusive practice was overruled by a desperate drive to achieve the measurable outcome of 'added value'. This probably tells us all we need to know about just how deeply the logic and value framework of market forces has penetrated schooling in this country, even in a sector of the hierarchy hamstrung by the disparaging social connotations routinely ascribed it. Education, at least in the diminished sense it was conceived at Bridgepoint High, was considerably impoverished as a result, by framing expectations exclusively in terms of exam performance, and thereby foreclosing on what might have been 'achieved' by "facilitating critical thinking, respect and empathy – bare essentials for a democratic, socially-just and socially-inclusive society" (Beckmann and Cooper 2004: 1).

What makes the prospect of change unlikely in the immediate future is the culture of 'moral condemnation' (Bauman 2005: 78) currently vindicating the pursuit of this "value added performance metric" (Cribb and Ball 2005: 122), so that 'exclusion' is justified on the grounds of individual irresponsibility rather than the "excluding effects of educational processes themselves" (Ball 2001: 46). This 'coercive', or 'punitive' turn in policymaking reveals the irreconcilable contradictions embedded in promoting competition at the same time as invoking rhetorics of collaboration and strengthening community values (Gereluk 2005). The Third Way's sociologically-informed 'neo-Durkheimian' talk of 'building social cohesion' appears at odds with political interventions that Stephanie

Lawler (2005: 799) claims, "tend to assume that the problem of class is a problem of getting working-class people to be more like their middle-class counterparts". Such rhetorical flourishes for political ends must therefore be objected to as cutting little ice amid the playing out of a cultural politics that seeks to reframe social inequality as individual pathology, erasing social class as a hierarchical system while normalising 'middle-classness' as an 'absent presence'.

Ultimately, one must conclude that as long as social inclusion relies on what Byrne (2004: 159) terms a 'rectifying deficits' model that distinguishes between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, then class interests, and the politically motivated accommodations designed to appease those interests, will continue to dominate educational policymaking. For, as Sally Tomlinson (2005: 179) writes, "The political reality ... [is that] ... governments were aware that any policies which threatened middle-class advantages, threatened electoral advantage". Given this deeply pessimistic prognosis, is there anything that we can draw from the Irish model of schooling presented here that might help schools like Bridgepoint High face the challenge of operating in such unremitting circumstances, and to do so in a way that is more attentive to the needs of the community that it serves?

Learning from an Irish Perspective

Now, the first thing to say is that there are no 'quick fix' solutions to be handed down here, and indeed I have been critical of those claiming that such thinking can be applied to the complex realities of contemporary education. Nonetheless, I do believe that there are areas where genuine progress could be

made, so rather than indulge in glib policy prescriptions let me instead offer some thoughts on how things might be done differently that draw on the Irish experience. For imagining 'schooling otherwise', aided by insights from a similar school setting in Ireland, means considering how the Irish people I worked with imagined education themselves, and how those ideas informed what they did in their daily work with young people.

The obvious place to begin is the wide variation between how importantly St. Oliver's viewed its relations with the surrounding community, and the complete lack of engagement on the Bridgepoint estate. The energy and determination channelled into making St. Oliver's a fulcrum of community participation, opening its doors for up to fourteen hours a day as a drop-in centre and facility for evening classes providing a local resource for those living nearby, offered a warm and welcoming environment not normally associated with schools in the Irish imaginary.

This did not happen of its own accord, nor indeed through policy edict, but through the dedication, commitment and unflinching belief in the 'rightness' of what they were doing, of all the staff at the school. From the teachers who gave generously of their time, to the ancillary staff of cleaners and caretakers who could still be seen on duty when I sometimes left at nine or ten in the evening, everyone cared enough about the overall purpose of what they were doing to 'go that extra yard'. For as local residents themselves, investing in St. Oliver's as a centre of learning and of neighbourhood involvement was seen as investing in the community as a whole, as they devoted time to furthering the wider concept of education envisioned at their local school.

Should Bridgepoint High school wish to attempt something similar with its surrounding community, major shifts in thinking regarding the purpose of education on the estate would be required, and what the school's role in that new vision might be. One thing is clear; as it stands, the school is neither a welcoming nor tolerant place to be for either its pupils or its staff. Nor is it a particularly productive place to learn, and in fact, could be argued to discourage learning in its wider sense. But the evidence of this study is that it does not have to be this way.

Investing as much time and effort in encouraging pupils and parents to actively participate in the daily life and culture of their school community as it did with facilitating certification, St. Oliver's attained a degree of consensus and partnership with its surroundings that engendered a 'community capital' from which all parties drew immense benefits. Embedded in this was a shared acknowledgement that schooling should be premised on "thicker notions of learning" (Cribb and Ball 2005: 121) encompassing not only the acquisition of qualifications, but in the very process of doing so, spending time in an environment where one could be introduced to social and moral values of care and respect for others, along with "a critical reflection on the social/political context" (Groome 1996: 116). What arises from these shared sensibilities, eventually and with the potential for setbacks on the way, is the basic building block of sociability, trust, "the cement of human relationships" as Bottery (2000: 71) puts it, something I witnessed in abundance at St. Oliver's.

Local parents, as the home/school liason officer often used to inform me, rate safety as paramount when talking about decision-making around school choice. The fact that the school leadership take this so seriously that they count it their top priority was manifest in the decision of so many to send their children there rather than elsewhere, a basic declaration of trust in St. Oliver's demonstrated in the steep rise in pupil numbers. Those pupils in turn exhibited trust and respect for their teachers, both to deliver pedagogically and to do so in a consistently approachable 'human' way. Most importantly though, a high level of trust is extended towards children and young people at St. Oliver's, offering them an opportunity to shape their own school experience as responsible members of the school community. This is a key area where change is necessary to create the conditions for 'schooling otherwise', in which Bridgepoint High reconnects with its surroundings and becomes a focal point and resource for 'community education'. Those primarily involved in educating young people on estates like Bridgepoint, namely parents and teachers, need therefore to forge much stronger links between home, school and community.

The Irish example is instructive here, for what drew these elements together at St. Oliver's was an appreciation of the value of local sentiments of belonging and fellow feeling, along with a willingness and enthusiasm for celebrating 'pride in place' that formed a relationship of mutual trust. This was essential in moving beyond exclusionary processes that erect cultural barriers to learning and learning environments. For in making genuine efforts to situate itself as an open, welcoming and respectful centre for community learning, the school created a space for engagement that was non-judgemental in its attentiveness

to 'unofficial knowledges' constituting what Johnson (1979) defines as 'really useful knowledge', as grounds for enhancing local empowerment.

The Bridgepoint estate could undertake a similar process of reorientation, the school conveying to parents that they have a positive contribution to make to all its endeavours, within an atmosphere of respect and recognition of their role as partners in their children's education. Properly resourced commitments to adult education would broaden the purpose and scope of the school as a learning environment, while dominant discourses that pathologise individuals could also be challenged in this setting through a critical interrogation of asymmetries in power relations through which these assumptions usually arise. In the same way, definitions of social exclusion based on the 'myth of meritocracy' need not be the sole criteria for ascribing 'success' or 'failure', for attending to social and moral flourishing within a more affirmative ethos generates increases in self-esteem and confidence that are arguably more important in fostering individual and collective well-being.

Stimulating change is never easy, especially in contexts where there is an understandable aversion to risk, but if change can be shown to be a positive process involving dialogue and greater participation, then benefits accrue on all sides in working towards a common goal. Embracing the notion of a community-based educational framework strikes me as a viable proposition for Bridgepoint High, so that judgements about 'excellence' and 'standards' have less to do with the reductionist criteria enacted by the state, and rest instead on how the school is valued by the community in which it is situated. One might speculate that replacing an overriding fixation with examinations with an emphasis on working

towards inclusive practice displays a readiness to listen to the needs of those families living nearby. It could be argued that a school viewed as 'successful' in these terms, and thus highly regarded locally, would be much more difficult to judge as 'failing', on whatever criteria one chose.

I opened these concluding remarks by arguing that doing nothing about the predicament of working-class schooling in this country would, in effect, be to give up on the future itself, along with the future life chances of many more children and young people who would then be destined to careers of restricted opportunity and even more limited ambition. The message that this study carries forward from Ireland is that there is an alternative to 'shrugging one's shoulders' offering genuine promise of hope for the future. However, in order to avail ourselves of this promise, we need to think seriously about how we want to go about 'schooling otherwise' in preparing our young people for that future.

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