

The Well of the Educator

An investigation into how well-being is maintained by
Educators working in Youthreach

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Abstract

‘As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject and our way of being together.’ (Palmer, 2007, p.1)

I believe that what is going on inside of an educator has a direct impact on the learner’s life and this impact has a ripple effect on their families’ lives and society. I see being an educator as a huge responsibility that requires thoughtfulness and self-awareness. This responsibility can be draining, as being an educator is an occupation that requires immense energy both physically and emotionally. In my role as an educator I aim to maintain my wellness and to have a positive impact on the learner and my colleagues.

In this research I am looking into the world of educators who in my eyes are successful at maintaining their wellbeing. They deal with stress well, enjoy their job and are productive. I will be uncovering what their thinking is about self-care and wellness, how they deal with stress and what commonalities appear between them. For some self-care is common sense but from my experience this perceived ‘common sense’ is not as common as people who manage to maintain wellness may think.

The similarities were surprising as the four interviewees have different backgrounds and are of various ages. I purposely chose very different educators from a variety of subjects in the hope of uncovering a wide array of experiences and knowledge. They coincidentally proved to have similar mind-sets and attitudes towards their roles and ways of going about maintaining their wellness. This research has been a transformative process for me and has been an opportunity for me to improve my self-care practice and in turn strengthen my ability to work as an educator with integrity.

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Chapter 1

My Story

‘The thoughts we think and the words we speak create our experiences.’
(Hay, 1985, p.1)

I was twelve when I read these words and I was not in a good place. For the first time I began to realize outside circumstances did not have to dictate inside experiences these words gave me some comfort. At this time my Mam began to read books like *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise L. Hay, as she was beginning to heal her difficulties and reflect on her life. (Hay, 1985)

Since I was a child I have been interested in the magic of the universe and the power of our inner world. My Mam and Dad are quiet religious and their spiritual beliefs have influenced my belief in going inwards for answers. I have a clear memory of my Dad saying, “Believe in God! You might as well; it’s something to help get you through”. The act of prayer and having faith has always given me strength. This quote illustrates the power of the inner world;

‘For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever.’
(Good news Bible with Deuterocanonical books/ Apocrypha, 1979, Corinthians 4:18)

School was a nightmare and for the most part an oppressive experience. The funny thing is I can remember being so excited to start. The prospect of learning to read and write seemed magical to me and filled me with energy and enthusiasm. But unfortunately I found it incredibly difficult to concentrate. I would get good grades in primary school

because I was quiet and I didn't cause a fuss. So my parents never realized I was struggling, every report card said, something along the lines of, "Sinead is a lovely child but she is always daydreaming". I felt lost in class and inadequate in comparison to the other kids. I was full of fear. I didn't feel like I belonged in school I felt like an outsider. The only thing that kept me going was Art class. I loved Art and my teachers would praise me for my work. While in secondary school I decided I wanted to become a secondary school Art teacher.

When I decided to go to Art College I thought I would be given a chance to express myself and to be who I am, instead I was met with a lot of criticism and unhappiness. I had already lost all of my confidence in primary and secondary school. Back then I did not possess a voice that could speak up for my work or allow myself to be vulnerably. I was afraid of being weak and letting my guard down. I felt the need to protect myself so I closed myself off from lecturers and other students. I felt a lack of support in college. I blamed myself and my insecurities for my struggles. In second year I felt envious of a friend that had decided to change to another course but I just didn't know what to do. I had not yet begun to listen, trust myself and live authentically. I just wanted to get a Degree in Fine Art so I could go on to do a Higher Diploma in Art teaching. In the end I didn't do as well as I had hoped so I didn't even apply for a Higher Diploma to become an Art teacher. With my disappointing results I thought maybe I wasn't cut out to be a teacher anyway.

While I was in college a friend had given me a copy of *The Alchemist*, alchemy is the ability to transform an ordinary substance into something extraordinary.

'He thought of the many roads he had travelled, and of the strange way God had chosen to show him his treasure. If he hadn't believed in the significance of recurrent dreams, he would not have met the Gypsy woman, the king, the thief, or... "Well, it's a long list. But the path was written in the omens, and there was no way I could go wrong".' (Coelho, 1992, p.93)

This book reminded me to have faith in the process and eventually I would find my place. There was still a flicker of hope within me along with the belief that everything was

happening for a reason. During this time I chose the theme of love to be the focus for the creation of my art work as this helped to keep me positive. I have come to realise is the solution to all of my difficulties. I had the answer then I just did not know it. I made 'The Kiss'(figure.1) painting in 2005. It was bought along with another by the Office Of Public Works and it hangs in the government buildings opposite Merrion Square in Dublin 2. It is 6 foot by 4 foot in size and its presence gives a warm energy.

'When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.'
(Coelho, 1992, p.23)

Unfortunately I was still not making decisions based on my happiness which looking back kept leading me down the wrong path. I had not yet developed the confidence to really listen to myself and go for what I wanted. I had not yet learned about being authentic. I began working as visual display manager; I quit because I felt it was superficial and meaningless. I began working in interior design, which for me was not only superficial and meaningless but also isolating, as I spent the majority of my time working alone. I was still not happy and I still felt I didn't belong. A friend of mine told me of a position in a day centre working with people with intellectual disabilities where I could teach Art. I applied and I got the job! For the first time I felt like I was in the right place, I belonged somewhere and everything seemed to flow. The connection I had with the participants gave me energy and it was easy to be motivated. Every night I would be looking for new projects for class. I was making Art with people every day and I was building my knowledge of my subject. In the process of learning about the people I was creating Art I was being taught by them, how they experienced life was changing my experience. I grew in compassion and it didn't feel like work. Although I had little complaints, the politics in the centre with staff was sometimes difficult and I did not yet acquire the skills to deal with that adequately. Unfortunately the recession hit and I lost my job. The good thing was that I knew teaching was for me and I knew I was good at it. I had a sense of purpose.



Figure.1

‘The Hug’

6ft/4ft commercial paint on canvas

I have struggled with depression all throughout my life till that point. Obstacles seemed to be continuously being put in front of me and I hadn't yet realized I was putting them there. Things finally got so bad that I decided to do something about it. I had always read books and been looking for answers in how to overcome depression and on how to become happier but I wasn't getting where I wanted to be. So I decided to go to a counsellor she recommended a twelve-week workbook called *The Artist's Way*. My life began to change and I began to find answers to my difficulties.

‘Anyone who faithfully writes the morning pages will be led to a connection with a source of wisdom within.’ (Cameron, 1997, p.14)

I was committed to change, uncovering my issues and healing. Being out of work was a horrible experience in some ways but I had to face myself and go inwards and this was a great gift. I began to become reflective. In *The Skillful Teacher*, Brookfield outlines 15 points on how to teach skilfully he calls these maxims.

‘Maxim 5: Regularly Reflect on Your Own Learning.....’

‘There is a good chance that those things that help and hinder you are the same things that help and hinder your students.’(Brookfield, 2006, p.266)

As I began to listen to myself and look at my experiences and the role I was playing in my misery, my life improved. I also began to see what made me happy and what fed my soul. Simone De Beauvoir is quoted in *The Artist's Way*,

‘It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for living.’ (Cameron, 1997, p.16)

‘Drawing strength’, being of the utmost importance. I often tell people that *The Artist's Way* has changed my life. For me, it was a transformative experience it taught me how to practice self-care and to live a more authentic life. I began to understand the power of reflection;

‘Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions. Reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid. Transformative

learning results in new or transformed meaning schemes or, when reflection focuses on premises, transformed meaning perspectives.’ (Mezirow, 1991, p.6)

Through working with *The Artist’s Way* I became more self-aware and present. I began to see the magic in life again that I felt as a child, before I had entered the education system. I reconnected with my creativity and it taught me to be who I am authentically.

I realize now that training as a secondary school teacher would not have served my highest good, as the traditional authoritative ‘banking approach’ (Freire, 1970, p.74) to learning did not work for me and is not in-line with my integrity. I would like to model to others, what in my view is a more healthy way of being and ultimately assist them in becoming who they are born to be, not what society is telling them to be. This is something we will create together but begins in my inner world.

‘The teacher is of course an Artist, but being an Artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves. And in doing that, he or she lives the experience of relating democratically as authority with the freedom of the students.’ (Horton and Freire, 1990, p.181)

As I completed the Higher Diploma in Further Education NUI Maynooth who I am and how I felt about education began to make sense. My confidence grew as I was introduced to theorists such as Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Jack Mezirow, Nell Noddings and Carl Rogers, they justified my thoughts. I felt I was given license to be my true self. This gave me a great sense of freedom and inner strength.

As I continue on my healing path I have taken part in a ten-day silent meditation with Vipassana. This experience taught me many things that have informed my teaching practice today. While meditating in silence for 10 days thoughts filled my head. I felt as though I was at war with my mind. After this I realized that these thoughts were inside of me, I was personally responsible for their creation and what I decided to do with them was my decision. I could believe what I thought or I could just witness my thoughts and let them pass. I did not have to react. This was useful in my teaching practice as I came in

contact with students who were highly vulnerable and who were abusive towards me. I had learned that what they had said to me was a reflection of their own inner dialogue. I had a choice in how I wanted to react. I could feel compassion for the learner who made abusive comments to me, as I knew that it was a reflection of their inner pain. I was not as sensitive to other people comments in a way that would disable me. This was a huge turning point for me because I would waste so much time being preoccupied about silly comments people would make. I was hurt easily and sensitive in a way that was detrimental to my wellbeing. Now I am sensitive in a way that preserves my wellbeing. This has helped me in my ability to build trust with students who otherwise might have pushed me away. Vipassana is a part of the Buddhist tradition and the Dala Lama eloquently sums up my experience in these words;

‘By observing ourselves we become aware for the first time of the conditioned reactions, the prejudices that cloud our mental vision, that hide reality from us and produce suffering. We recognize the accumulated inner tensions that keep us agitated, miserable, and we realize they can be removed. Gradually we learn how to allow them to dissolve, and our minds become pure, peaceful, and happy.’ (The Art of Living, 2011, p.17)

Although I had come along way my journey continued. I felt I needed something more and I was introduced to a personal development course called The Curriculum for living with Landmark Forum. This course gave me a greater insight into my life experiences and myself. Although it was not named I could see Mezirow’s theories in action such as ‘The Conditions for Rational discourse’ (Mezirow, 1991, p.77). A safe non-judgmental environment was created where people were supported in overcoming their life struggles and transforming. With this community created the participants could be open and honest and were able to listen to other people viewpoints. Because we were there to actively transform we took on the advice of the facilitator. This allowed me to see my life from various perspectives and gain new understanding of my life experience. One of the core points taught in this course is that any of your struggles in life can be traced back to our own inauthenticity. I could relate to this and this and this helped me understand my life

experience. The more I have worked on myself the stronger my connections have become with my family, friends, colleagues and the learner. I was able to see my experiences from different perspectives and see life through what I feel is a new and more informed lens.

All of these experiences have greatly informed my practice. In the past I was not in touch with my intuition and I didn't make decisions based on my happiness. I was so unhappy and I found learning difficult. My decision-making is now based on my gut feeling and my joy. I can understand why I rejected my innate wisdom as we are not encouraged to nurture our inner world. Bell Hooks illustrates this as she accounts her experience of starting out as a professor; this speaks to me of the tension that is in what we feel and know is right and what we are being told is right in society. I believe in it in our nature to do what keeps us well and joyful but we are given mixed messages through our lives that steer us in the wrong direction or go against what is our true path.

'It was difficult to maintain fidelity to the idea of the intellectual as someone who sought to be whole, well grounded in a context where there was little emphasis on spiritual well-being, on care of the soul.' (Hooks, 1994, P.16)

When we are not encouraged to take all parts of our self into account we cannot be whole. We try to fit in to what is going on around us and what is our norm, this can cause great conflict with the person we are presenting to the world and who we are authentically.

I realize now that doing what brings me joy is a part of maintaining wellness, this leads to my true path in life and most importantly by nurturing my joy I have more caring to give to the learner.

'We do not offer joy as a reason for particular acts, although we may, of course, renew our commitment to caring as we are sustained by joy.'

(Noddings, 1992, p.134)

The obstacles I have been through have taught me compassion and this helps me understand and connect with the students I work with. I had to face my demons and since then my life has gone from strength to strength. All of my difficulties in my life and

education have informed my teaching, I am grateful for that. I feel everything I have experienced has given me a vast well of deep knowledge to draw from.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

We can be so consumed with doing our job that we do not find the time to take care of ourselves. This is ironic because as educators our priority should be to influence the learner in a positive manner and to model healthy behaviour. By having our wellness as a priority we set a good example and we have more energy to give to our students and to do better work.

In this thesis I will be gathering information through reading, interviewing and reflecting on my own teaching practice and wellbeing. Within this piece of work I will engage with a broad range of literature on adult education and care but the primarily focus of this literature review will be of Cameron, Palmer and Skovolt.

This Literature review will be addressing the line of inquiry for my thesis. It began as ‘Self Care of the Educator’ and is now titled ‘The Well of the Educator’. From the start of this research the first title did not sit right with me. It took me some time to realize why this was. I knew I felt that this subject matter was important to me but there was something about focusing on the ‘Self Care of the Educator’ that was not quite right. As I have progressed in my research I realized that it is not ‘SELF’ care of the educator that I have wanted to uncover. It is the experience of the educator in maintaining wellbeing. Self-care almost implies for the educator to be well they should lock them self away and alienate themselves from the people that surround them. To me this doesn’t seem like much fun. And relying on the self (while a part of my research) does not seem to be the road on which I want to focus or to where the participants of my research are solely traveling. There are various routes and pathways in their journey to their wellness. It is what the healthy, happy, productive educator is made up of that really interests me. I don’t teach because I want to be alone I teach because I want to connect. I want to learn how to do this and be well as an educator. Self-care implies our wellness is created alone.

My own experience and research has told me that this wellness is created in the union of with our self and with others.

‘To care for another, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself.’ (Noddings, 1992, p.9)

As we care for ourselves we not only create our self-actualization but we model this for the learner. Cameron’s work has deepened my understanding of the care that Noddings speaks of and how to put this into practice in practical ways.

‘As artists, we must learn to be self-nourishing. We must become alert enough to consciously replenish our creative resources as we draw from them to restock the trout pond, so to speak. I call this process filling the well.’

(Cameron, 1997, p.21)

I see teaching as a highly creative occupation. We create every lesson, our identity as a teacher, our approach, methods and practice, every teacher is an Artist. When we teach we are giving of ourselves and our resources are always being exhausted. The educators I have interviewed have ways of refuelling and as Cameron puts it; filling their ‘well’.

As I have been delving into the lives of educators I have found that I am uncovering with what and how they fill their well. They each possess a collection of resources that keep their wellbeing intact. Their wellness is not just simply a practice of self-care it is much more complex than that. It is not just a solitary practice although going within is a part of this, their ability to be vulnerably, connect to others and maintain boundaries are all ways in which they fill the well; which they draw their strength, energy, creativity, health, productivity and happiness from.

I interviewed four educators and coincidentally one had read *The Artist’s Way*. To me they all follow certain guidelines that Cameron has put in place. They practice *The Artist’s Way* in their own way. As I began to unravel how these educators maintain their wellness I began to draw out the theory and ideas of self-care which led me to make connections with literature that was helpful to my own self-care.

There is no right or wrong to wellness as we are all individuals and we must listen and be true to ourselves. Cameron calls us to be authentic and to honour who we are these are key elements to my own wellness and the wellness of the participants in my research.

‘Do not think duty. Do not do what you should do; spiritual sit-ups like reading a dull but recommended critical text. Do what intrigues you, explore what interests you; think mystery, not mastery.’ (Cameron, 1997, p.21)

Cameron encourages the reader to cultivate a reflective practice called the ‘morning pages’ (Cameron, 1997, p.90). These are three A4 pages of automatic hand writing which free us up and prepare us for the day. She also asks us to give to ourselves in the form of an artist’s date, once a week; this is where we treat our self to going to a play or restaurant, something that we will enjoy.

Cameron urges us to practice these rituals as a way of connecting to our inner wisdom. When we take time for our self we hear our wisdom and although all of the educators I have interviewed do not write the morning pages or go on artist’s dates they have their own rituals and ways of reflecting. She also encourages us to reach out for support from people who we find nurturing.

In *The Courage to teach* Palmer also speaks about the necessity of reaching out for support:

‘If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft.’

(Palmer, 2007, p.146)

This book is written for teachers who care and want to improve their experience. Palmer brings us on a journey and gives us insight into reconnecting with our students, our colleagues and ourselves. He empowers us by informing us that we possess the answers to the difficulties we face in the classroom. We have the solutions we just need to go within to extract them. Palmer is not unlike Cameron in that they both believe in the power of reflection and inner guidance. They are both of the belief that when we connect to the self we connect to our higher wisdom and in turn we connect to others.

‘Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves.’

(Palmer, 2007, p.11)

What I admire most about Palmer is his willingness to be vulnerable and to lay bare his inner fears and insecurities.

‘The tension lies in the drama of my external response to classroom events and my internal sense of incompetence.’ (Palmer, 2007, p.29)

This willingness to be vulnerable and to embrace their sort comings was something that was present in the educators of this research it was as though they are comfortable with their humanity. They are not afraid of failure or imperfection.

I am drawn in and inspired by Palmer as I find myself connecting to his vulnerability. He also eases my insecurities as he normalizes the fears I to have of inadequacy and failure. This vulnerability may have been what drew me to the participants of this research. Palmer also talks about teaching as being a paradox. He says, we are born paradoxical creatures but we are raised to see life as black and white. This way of seeing the world is what has us confused about vulnerability. Palmer lets himself be vulnerable and in turn he gains strength. In society we are conditioned to protect ourselves and separate ourselves from others so we can remain in what we been led to believe is authority and control.

‘We lose heart, in part, because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability.’

(Palmer, 2007, p.17)

We are vulnerable whether we like it or not because we are connecting with other human beings and by not embracing this vulnerability we are exhausted. We do not know how to manage this vulnerability because the world teaches us to look at situations in black and white, right or wrong, while successful teaching requires us to dance with and bend the rules the world teaches us. When we are able to be vulnerable we are not only a teacher we are a student. We cannot be put in a box as we are constantly changing, learning and growing.

Palmer says good teachers use identity and integrity:

We must be true to ourselves but like the other pieces of literature I have chosen it involves knowing ourselves through self-exploration.

‘When I devote myself to something that does not flow from my identity, that is not integral to my nature, I am most likely deepening the world’s hunger rather than helping to alleviate it.’ (Palmer, 2007, p.31)

These books ask us to honour ourselves by getting familiar with who we are; by exploring our identity we acknowledge our being and this will in turn fuel our work. Inner work may seem self-indulgent or narcissistic as it requires us to look closely and analyse ourselves but I believe it is where our true power exists.

‘In a culture of technique, we often confuse authority with power, but the two are not the same. Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out. We are mistaken when we seek authority outside ourselves, in sources ranging from the subtle skills of group process to that less than subtle method of social control called grading. This view of teaching turns the teacher into the cop on the corner, trying to keep things moving amicably and by consent but always having to recourse to the coercive power of the law.’ (Palmer, 2007, p.34)

In my experience old, out dated authoritative methods are not serving us. I feel leadership skills, equality and community as what is necessary to empower young people. Bell Hooks speaks of these power dynamics and the need for change.

‘Yet the classroom should be a space where we are all in power in different ways. That means, we as professors should be empowered by our interactions with students.....’

This is one of the primary differences between education as a practice of freedom and the conservative banking system which encourages professors to believe deep down in the core of their being that they have nothing to learn from their students.’

(Hooks, 1994, p.152)

It is 'the core of their begin' that needs to be transformed. Hooks suggests that with that transformation;

'The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and of our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This education is a practice of freedom.'

(Hooks, 1994, p.152)

This freedom starts in the inner world of the educator and their inner world becomes the learner's world, their freedom is exchanged. The educator is modelling a way of being every day in the classroom. An awareness of self, the 'conscientization' (Freire, 1981, p.35) of the educator is called for in making this change a reality. This requires praxis, as with reflection and action the educator can begin to make better decisions.

This is why I feel wellbeing is so important for the educator. I believe we create our outer world with our inner world. If a teacher fails to maintain their wellness and to be self-reflective they will unconsciously cause issues in the classroom that I believe are preventable. When we practice self-inquiring we get to know who we are this helps us relate to others and a greater bond can be created with students allowing a deeper level of learning to happen.

Palmer raises the question;

'How can the teachers' selfhood become a legitimate topic in education and in our public dialogues on the educational reform?' (Palmer, 2007, p.3)

He says that in the teaching practice a lot of questions are asked including;

'What will we teach? How will it be delivered? Why will we be teaching this?

But rarely do we ask 'Who is the self that teaches?' (Palmer, 2007, p.4)

He asks why teachers do not look at who they are and how this affects their working life in and outside the classroom. Palmer states that three parts of the teacher must be looked at to chart their inner landscape the, 'intellectual, emotional, and spiritual'.

(Palmer, 2007, p.5)

I believe that all aspects of our lives affect our performance consciously and unconsciously if we are not nurturing to our self we may react in ways that are not in line with how we wish to be as an educator. When we do not look at our intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions and heal our pain we will not be who we strive to be in the classroom.

‘Freud called this phenomenon of the past being constantly revived ‘transference’. The tendency to repeat past patterns of relating is a universal phenomenon and occurs in any important relationship. Freud came to the conclusion that no experience is ever lost it remains stored in the mind and ready to be re-awakened in any situation that resembles the past in some way. Thus contact with the teacher is likely to revive in the student many of the emotions that he experienced in the past in relation to his mother and father.

(Salzberger-Wittenburg, Henry, & Osborne, 1983, P.33)

Palmer says he is frequently asked for advice by teachers in how to survive the classroom. He suggests that the teachers themselves are the best persons to answer this question by taking note of what is happening when they are teaching in the classroom, to be aware of ‘What is happening inside us as we do it’ (Palmer, 2007, p.6)

As we come to know ourselves we can begin to solve our own issues. Although Palmer does not name it, mindfulness is required in the classroom and a reflective/reflexive approach is necessary. In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* Donald Schon states that reflective practice is “a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilful.” (Schon and Schon, 1990, p.31).

In my own experience of developing a reflective practice my whole mind-set has been transformed, I feel I see things more as they are in reality and not only how they seem to my initial experience. In engaging in a reflective practice I believe I can begin to understand and empathize with other peoples perspectives, which allows me to connect with the learner and in turn create a sense of community. Brookfield states the importance of this activity;

‘Far too many teachers view even a cursory reflection on their personal experience as essentially worthless. I believe that the opposite is true, that the starting point for dealing with teachers’ problems should be teachers’ own experiences.’(Brookfield, 2006, p.14)

To practice self-care the educator needs to look at their failings and their strengths and be willing to learn and grow from this. We first need a healthy relationship with ourselves before we can have that with our students; the act of reflection allows us to do that.

The pieces of literature I have chosen require the educator to engage in a process of inner work. They state that inner work is essential to remain strong and healthy. The difficulty is that all educators may not be willing to go within and to take personal responsibility for their experiences in the classroom. I feel that those educators are the people that need the most compassion, support and understanding. Instead of turning our back on a difficult teacher why not try to understand them and offer support in a healthy manner. What I mean by a healthy manner is to offer support by listening without criticism or trying to fix the problem. Palmer and Cameron are both big advocates of the power of listening and when we really listen to someone sometimes they can hear their own solution. The simply act of listening can build collegiality in the workplace and a sense of unity that is beneficial to all.

‘If we want to support each other’s inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard.’
(Palmer, 2007, p.156)

I have found that when I have a resistance or dislike for someone this can be eased when I listen with the intent of understanding their world. I become lighter because I am free from resentment and I have a greater sense of connection. Through practicing compassion for others we give this care back to ourselves.

In *The Reflective Practitioner* it states that the typical type of person drawn to teaching is a caring individual that is use to tending to others needs but may not have the skills to tend to their own needs. It is suggested that this lack of understanding may result in their burn out.

‘Exhausted when saying yes, guilty when saying no—it is between giving and taking, between other-care and self-care. This is a universal dilemma in the human drama. It is just more intense for those who are, by nature and inclination, emotionally attuned to the needs of others.’

(Skovholt, Thomas, & Michelle, 2010, p.3)

We are also asked to look at the joys of teaching and how teaching can fulfil us and enrich our lives. Through examples and questions we are directed to see what we gain from the teaching experience. I find this to be a helpful and energizing way of thinking.

‘I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but by helping the other grow I do actualize myself.’ —M. Mayeroff.

(Skovholt, Thomas, & Michelle, 2010, p.12)

The Reflective Practitioner goes on to explain that in order to maintain our wellbeing and to connect with the learner we need to make ourselves vulnerable although we also must know how to detach in a healthy manner and maintain healthy boundaries. There is a quote, which uses an analogy of the turtle to explain this....

‘With the hard shell, we cannot get hurt, but we cannot attach very well either. So we must continually present our soft side and attach with it. And we must do this with individuals who are often struggling with emotional, intellectual, spiritual, or physical needs. Learning an optimal level of attachment—in which the practitioner experiences the world of the other, but is not overwhelmed—is an essential professional skill and a complex one. Learning how to regulate and modulate the level of emotional attachment in the curative relational process takes time. It is a paradoxical skill—learning how to be emotionally involved yet emotionally distant, united but separate. Baker (2003) described this as self- other differentiation and discussed how this is an important part of practitioner self-care.’ (Skovholt, Thomas, & Michelle, 2010, p.24)

This is a great example of how vulnerability is a powerful and necessary tool in the classroom and of a wellness practice. When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and connect to the learner we learn from this experience and grow in skill. Although we need to be open enough to connect we also need to know what our boundaries are so we can protect ourselves. As I attempt to bring equality to my classroom I am aware of the power dynamics at play. Although my intention is to create equality I am not the same as my students. As I have the power to grade their work and to decide what their learning material will be. The quote above states there is a ‘self-other differentiation’, which we must consider. This balancing act within our relationship with the learner requires a teacher to have a critical/reflective thought process and to act upon their findings.

The writer also highlights the importance of caring as an educator. He mentions a survey where a group of people were questioned about their favourite teacher, caring was a common theme that was found. It wasn't their experience or qualifications or delivery of subjects it came down to the simple act of caring. This is important for teachers to be aware of, as something so basic can be taken for granted. The act of caring can be overlooked as caring comes naturally for some it takes thinking, time, effort and genuine sincerity. As meetings, deadlines, grades, and productivity are of the utmost importance the simplicity of the act of caring can fade into the background. I believe that the educators who have the most to give in terms of caring are the ones who practice self-caring.

‘...teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that “the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people.”(Hooks, 1994, p.15)

In these words we are encouraged as practitioners to continue to care throughout our career. As the act of caring maintains our wellbeing and our connection to the learner which brings us energy and prevents burn out. We are given questions on each chapter

and reflective exercises. These encourage use to critically reflect on the teaching profession as a whole and our own practice.

Chapter 3

Methodology: Becoming Well

I see this research as the next step in my growth and the development of my wellness journey. By embarking on this research I aim to learn and to grow from the participants who I interview. I would like to maintain my wellbeing throughout my career and continually improve my practice.

From being passionate about self-care I have created ways of being in my life that I did not know were possible to create. These ways of being were what I hoped and prayed for. Ways of being like being able to see the truth. Before I had worked on myself I did not trust my own judgment because I was so insecure. Now I can make distinctions between my emotions and what is true. I realize now that what I think is not always true as we can take on societies and other people's views. To get to my truth I look a little deeper. I now trust my instincts and I know what my intuition is. This has helped me make wiser decisions and choices. I am happier now and I have a clearer head, which allows me to be more effective as a teacher and gives me peace of mind. The happier I have become the more my ability to learn has improved, it as though I am removing the noise from my mind that separates me from the truth. I can get along with colleagues listen to them and I can now take criticism. In becoming self-reflective I have naturally been led to the creation of healthy boundaries. To model healthy boundaries is vital to the learner, as I would like to inform their approach to wellness. Taking part in the masters has been a lesson in compassion as I have learned about the learner's position in society and how we are coerced and controlled to serve the agenda of the elite.

Antoni Gramsci adopted the Marxist view that there are two classes in society the proletariat and the bourgeois, the oppressed and the oppressor. Gramsci believed capitalism maintains power through violence, political and economic pressures but also through dogma.

Gramsci's autonomous sentiments united him with his people. He said;

‘I am pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will’.

(Arora, 2010, 14.15)

He was a believer in becoming conscious through knowledge and he had a great belief in the strength of individuals. He valued human being this quote shows admiration for the 'will' people possess.

I think care of the educator should be high on the agenda of educational centres' and educator training institutions. On looking at my own journey of self-care through partaking in reflective practices such as writing, education and healing of my own issues through counselling, I know that my ability to work with others and to interact with the learner on a more efficient manner as been greatly improved. I feel that whatever is going on in the world of the educator is transferred to the learner. For this reason it is necessary for the educator to practice self-care if they wish to provide a service that is beneficial to the learner, themselves, their colleagues and to the institution that they work for. My findings have begun to give my practice a depth of knowledge and useful information on how to improve my self-care and strengthen my approach.

Throughout my research I am 'actively constructing knowledge' (Mason, 2002, p.52) through interacting with and developing relationships with my colleagues I am continually in a process of growth. I am also enjoying getting to know my colleagues better and as I conduct interviews I have gained a greater understanding of their situation. This experience is improving my work environment and is of benefit to my teaching and self-care practice. As I listen to my colleagues I am given an opportunity to learn, they are given an opportunity to be heard, vent and to be validated for the work they have done and the knowledge they have required and created. My main problem with this ethnography is choosing which information to analyse, as the information I have acquired so far has been vast and abundant. I am 'caught up in the 'hermeneutic circle' of the initial questioning'. (Mason, 2002, p.14)

I will never be done learning about this subject, it is a process and not a product, it is a continuous cycle and there is no perfection. All I have learned can easily be forgotten and in this work I am reminded to nurture myself and practice self-care in new ways. I have learned to take responsibility and clean up my mistakes. Even with all the knowledge and learning in the world I am still only human and I am fallible. A practice of forgiveness

also gives me strength. Most importantly I have a sense of enthusiasm and joy for my work. I have always just wanted to be happy and this is being realized.

The learning I have gained about myself has helped me to know where I should work and where I am most suited to work. I have learned how to be vulnerable and to use vulnerability to connect. I have come full circle and now teaching full time I can put all of my learning to practice. The journey of becoming a teacher came very slow to me and perhaps if it had come to me more quickly I would not be as content in my work today.

Although I have come a long way I realize I have to maintain my wellness. In this work I am learning from other educator's practices in maintaining their wellness. For me, this thesis is a nurturing endeavour as I connect to my colleagues and learn from their experiences and wisdom. I realize what I am seeking is unity and how to create and manage this while being authentic and true to whom I am. 'The Educators Well' has served as the perfect metaphor for this need for community. Before we had individual water systems in our homes we would go to the well to draw water, this was a place where people would meet and community would be created. When we 'progressed' and gained individual water systems we became more separate and the conversations and exchanges at the well were lost. This thesis is my well.

In my view managing our wellbeing is a very personal endeavour but maintaining it calls for others. As I wish to learn from the wisdom of educators whom I feel are successful at maintaining their wellbeing, listening, unpacking and analysing their stories seems to be a way of achieving this. Clandinin and Connelly speak of the value of this;

'Experience is a key term in these diverse inquires..... For Dewey, experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present.'
(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, P.2)

Methods

Background to the study

‘Success occurs in clusters. Drawing a sacred circle creates a sphere of safety and a centre of attraction for our good. By filling this form faithfully, we draw to us the best. We draw the people we need. We attract the gifts we could best employ.’(Cameron, 1997, p.206)

As I now rely on and trust my intuition in my decision making process I found the results to be surprising, full of coincidence, unforeseen connections and insightful. In this process I selected individuals who I viewed as successful in achieving wellness. I drew to myself the lessons I needed. This selection process has taught me the importance of having faith in my knowledge and decision making; as the interviews were fruitful and rich in unforeseen commonalities it became apparent that unconsciously I may have been making connections that already existed. These commonalities to me signified their importance and that the selection process was the best option.

I am currently working full time as an educator in a Youthreach and this is where I conducted my research. I was careful in the selection of the interviewees. This was done by observing and getting to know who they are and how they are as educators. I chose educators who I felt I could learn from, educators who I find inspiring and who I would like to be more alike. In interviewing work colleagues I was very mindful of confidentiality within the work place. I was also mindful of the importance of honouring and respecting my colleagues and their generosity in allowing themselves to be vulnerable to my research. I was very fortunate to have an insider/outsider point of view. I chose experienced educators from various subjects two male and two female.

For this I conducted qualitative research with an interpretive approach. I will be interviewing and gathering information on the lived experience of educators. As this research was conducted in my place of work, with my work colleagues I have had the luxury of being immersed in the research. This gives me the ability to have a certain amount of empathy with the subjects of my research; to have insight into their everyday

experience and the context of the information that I will be gathering. I feel this approach is most useful for this piece of research as it allows me to learn from an individual's unique experience and apply their knowledge to my practice. Although, for the most part I considered my position in this research to be a blessing I was aware of how my relationships with my colleagues could be affected. If the participants revealed something I did not like how would I feel and act? Would I alienate myself from colleagues who I did not ask to take part? Would I be able to be objective? That is why I took my time in considering; who would be taking part in this research. I had to make some decisions; I decided to be non-judgmental, remain open minded and compassionate. I also decided to keep the research low key in the workplace and not to discuss how I was conducting my research or with whom. I was also aware that being as objective as possible would be of benefit. To maintain objectivity I kept a diary and looked closely at my reactions to the interviews. Although I am aware that my objectivity is compromised as this is an interpretive piece and my perspective on life has coloured this research largely.

I interviewed four educators who I have been working with since September 2014. In having a working relationship with the subjects of my inquiring I have had the opportunity to observe who they are and what they do in terms of their self-care and how they fill their well. I have an, 'insiders perspective' (Mason, 2002), which also gives my research an ethnographic slant. I have been able to decipher which of my peers are the most suitable candidates for my investigation into self-care. I have had the opportunity to build rapport and I have also been able to create a space where an open honest dialogue can take place. I feel this allows for a rich multi-layered and textured discourse.

'Most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced, the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced.' (Mason, 2002, p.62)

I invited my colleagues to be interviewed based on how well I feel they deal with stress,

their attitude towards their work, how long they have been teaching, their openness as a person and my intuition about them. Although I feel a qualitative approach is worthwhile for this research piece I am aware that I need to take my own biases and assumptions into account. The longer I am a part of the work place the more I question my choice of who to interview. As I get to know my colleagues the more I realize I may have made wrong assumptions. This research approach calls for me as the researcher to be highly critical.

‘Reflexivity in this sense means thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see.’ (Mason, 2002, intro)

My intention was to be reflexive throughout as issues such as my own biases and worldview could blur my vision of the truth. Throughout this process I kept a reflective journal where I jotted down my feelings and experiences during the research this helped me to be more self-aware and have some objectivity.

I used these questions as a guideline:

Questionnaire for Interview:

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. Is self-care something you have considered?
3. What strategies have you used over your career to maintain your wellbeing?
4. In relation to this what have been the best advice you have received from other educators?

5. What advice would you give someone beginning their career as an Educator in maintaining their wellbeing?

Although these questions kept the interview focused on the subject matter, I intended for these questions to be used only as a guide,

‘emotionalists suggest that unstructured, open-ended interviewing can and does elicit authentic accounts of subjective experience’. (Mason, 2002, p.69)

While I feel the information uncovered was authentic I still was aware that with various perspectives there are variations of the truth. I attempted to negotiate the truth by questioning myself and my research. By embarking on this research I was searching for something, what that was, revealed itself at the end of this process. Silverman argues ‘that while “open-ended interviews can be useful, we need to justify departing from the naturally occurring data that surrounds us and to be cautious about the “romantic” impulses which identifies “experience” with “authenticity”’. (Silverman, 2004, p.138). By trusting myself I was true to my authenticity throughout this process and for me that has unearthed the real reason and need in me for this research; the need for unity.

I valued listening to these educators’ accounts because the educators experience gives a glimpse of what is happening in the world it is a reflection of a larger picture. Clandinin and Connelly speak about the ways in which narrative can capture experience of the educators;

‘We see teaching and teacher knowledge as an expression of embodied individual and social stories, and we think narratively as we enter into research relationships with teachers, create field texts, and write storied accounts of educational lives.’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, P.4)

I will analyse these interviews with the intention of discovering themes for further investigation.

‘..organizing and sorting are not conceptually neutral activities, and that you must

be aware of the kinds of analytical and explanatory possibilities not only that you open up, but also that you close off, by organizing your data in certain ways.’
(Mason, 2002, p.173)

My intention all along was to uncover useful information that I could apply to the subject of how the educator fills their well. My relationship in gathering information from these educators was in ‘the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it’. (Mason, 2002, p.62) I felt together we made discoveries as they spoke and I listened.

I intended the information gathered to be of benefit to myself and of other educators. I did not know to what depth this learning would be. For the most part I feel this work benefits myself. Which at times has led me to feel a little selfish and I have questioned the integrity of my intentions. But in hindsight I see myself as a pebble; I will through myself in to the still water of my work and affect others in the way I have been taught to be. For me this research is discovering a way of being. I feel that the educators being and wellness has a massive impact on the learner’s educational experience. The act of teacher is an occupation where a person can become exhausted of their inner resources. I feel this investigation has improved my practice already.

Responsibility and Ethics

The role of responsibility and ethics were of great importance in this work. As my intention has been to improve my practice and this research has taken place with my work colleagues. I knew this would be a delicate exchange of information as we would both become vulnerable in this process. I was open in my approach and practiced ongoing informed consent. I was very clear about their anonymity being respected and that I would not be using their real names. My intentions of this research were made clear. I made the participants aware that I was interviewing them because I have admiration for how they are as educators. My focus was on what they do right and not to criticise or pick them apart. I felt a need to protect them as I was grateful for their generosity in participating. I was careful not to discuss my research with other members of staff, as I wanted to respect the participants trust. Before the interviews took place I

sent the questions that would be asked along with the consent form. After the interview I also sent my transcripts and highlighted the parts I would be using. I also made participants aware that if they had a change of heart they could discontinue being a part of the research at any time.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

Throughout this process I have been able to develop a greater connection to the educators who I have interviewed. This experience has enriched my own practice and has allowed me to create a greater bond to my work place and the people within it. In conducting this research I have been ‘filling my well’. It has been an exercise in self-care as I have been able to create a support system for myself made up of the colleagues who have taken part. I also think that the participants gained a lot from being interviewed, they enjoyed the process and they all felt good about passing their knowledge on. I think being a part of this research gave them validation for the good work they have done and hopefully some inspiration to continue.

When I approached the participants I made them aware that I was interviewing educators who I felt I could learn from; as I feel they have healthy coping skills and manage themselves and their work in an effective manner. It was an opportunity to acknowledge the work they do and give them recognition for their efforts. I think teaching, at times can seem thankless acknowledgment is something that does not happen enough. We don’t always have an opportunity to acknowledge our colleagues and in doing this I have strengthened my relationships in my place of work, which in turn gives me strength in knowing I have support.

Many themes arose in my research; the participants are more similar than different. They all showed the ability to reflect and to grow from experiences and take action, they all value people and connection with others (as a priority), they all know how to connect with others and build rapport while maintain healthy boundaries, they are all willing and are skilled at using vulnerability in their practice, they all believe that personal responsibility is important and are open to continuously learning.

Analysis Breakdown

When it came to analysing and coding the data I had created a set of rules.

I had broken my findings into three categories connection, personal responsibility and growth; within these themes there are more detailed themes and within these there are overlaps.

- Connection: Vulnerability, Authenticity, Caring, Equality.
- Personal Responsibility: Boundaries, Self-care, Integrity.
- Growth: Self-awareness, reflection, praxis, flexibility.

I went through my data highlighting each theme that would arise. I felt a sense of achievement in doing this, I felt organized. Then as I came to write about each theme I felt very stuck I didn't know where to begin. I had planned to speak about the connection theme first and discuss this through all of the interviews. I couldn't move forward. This was too difficult because of the overlaps in the themes and to write like that seemed unnatural. I wanted to stick to my plan. I couldn't see a way forward. In my rigidity I had created writer's block. Something had to change if I was going to resolve this conflict. A new level of flexibility was necessary and a willingness to take a risk. As I highlighted before these educators embrace their imperfection, they are not at war with themselves. That is what I needed to do, to find the way forward in this thesis and my teaching practice. There was not joy in my unyielding want to stick to rules that do not matter and more joy is what I am seeking.

‘If a work does not gladden me in these ways, I need to consider laying it down. When I devote myself to something that does not flow from my identity, that is not integral to my nature, I am most likely deepening the world's hunger rather than helping to alleviate it.’ (Parker, 2007, p.31)

Luckily I found myself at a 'well' that well, being over tea and in a meeting with my lecturers and colleagues. As I spoke about what I was doing, I realized how I was holding myself back. I created rules to cater to what I was telling myself I should do, what I thought my lecturers wanted to read, I wasn't being true to myself, I wasn't being authentic. I was being led by my inner critic and my fear not my inner wisdom. After speaking I decided to throw all the rules out the window and write about each interviewee individually. To write in a way that was authentic to me. This was a big breakthrough for me. I realized how much I do not accept myself and still have a lot of self-doubt; even after all of the internal work I have done over recent years. But this has taught me how quickly my well can run dry. This practice of 'filling my well' is forever a daily ritual. It can't be faked and it can't be cheated, if I don't do right by myself, my colleagues, the learner and I will suffer.

The Educators

Lee

I begin with Lee, Lee was my first interview. He is an educator with nearly 20 years of experience working in Youthreach. He is now a part of the management team.

This interview was quite lengthy nearly 2 hours, probably due to the fact that at this point I was unsure of what exactly I was looking for.

At the time of this interview I had been working in the centre with Lee for 5 months. I had found him open, honest and someone I could trust. He always seemed to be in good form and from my observations seemed to enjoy his work. He has a great way with people, which is something I admire. His door is always open and he is always willing and wanting to connect with students and other staff. He values relationships and he knows the power of connecting and building rapport. He is someone who I look at and wonder, 'how does he maintain his energy and enthusiasm for the job?' That is why I knew he would be perfect for this research.

Lee followed his bliss in life and made decisions based on his happiness.

Before working in Youthreach he earned his living as a carpenter, he worked on building sites but didn't enjoy that, he preferred working on small jobs. He strikes me as a man who enjoys meaningful connections with people. These smaller jobs allowed him to build relationships around him and work on higher quality carpentry. He is most definitely someone who values quality over quantity.

He puts people first and is not willing to work in a job he does not enjoy. This informed me of the connection Lee has to himself, his self-awareness. He trusts his inner guidance, which allows him to be authentic. This was only supposed to be for a couple of hours a week; which would allow him to continue his own business. It soon became full-time. He said it was very stressful working in Youthreach at that

time as the students were much more volatile and aggressive. In the beginning he found it very difficult to deal with students but he was willing to learn and grow.

Lee: "I actually love the job. The first six months in the job, I hated it! I mean I hated it with a vengeance. I wasn't going to stay."

With the help and guidance of his work colleagues he grew to love the job. For me this demonstrates his flexibility.

Lee: "Life's about learning and over the years you learn, you learn, you learn."

Lee is not afraid of being vulnerable, he will ask for help and he will admit his weakness, this has allowed him to constantly move forward and be happy in the job.

Sinead: "What would be your advice in maintaining your own wellbeing?"

Lee: "The same advice as I told you when you started, exactly as I said to the new teacher the other day. You don't walk out of this building if there's anything in your head that you're not happy with, you come talk to me and you get it out in the open and discuss it and talk it out and put it on the table before you go home."

"Don't let it build up, no matter how trivial something may be you can tell me."

Lee creates a space that allows people to approach him and open up to him. This space allows people to be vulnerable. I have not always experienced this approach from people in management positions. The approach I am more familiar with is an authoritative, detached, aloof approach. Lee's willingness to be vulnerable may look to others as if he creates work for himself and in a way he does. He could easily hide away with his paper work, keeping himself unapproachable in the hope that there are less difficulties to deal with. Instead he embraces difficulties. I believe as issues get ignored and swept under the carpet they become bigger and bigger until we are forced to deal with them at which time the damage is done. People are Lee's priority and this is why he makes himself available. He deals with issues from the root and he manages to pull the weed before it becomes bigger than necessary. I feel this is a part of how he maintains his wellness, his willingness to listen, his ability to learn

from others and the joy he gets from connecting with people. He is also able to receive joy from these connections.

Sinead: "So you get a lot from helping people?"

Lee: "I sometimes think I get a lot more back, than they get from me."

I think that his need to connect and create a sense of unity is inherent in his personality. These needs are met in his work.

Sinead: "Do you think having something else helps you cope with the work in here?"

Lee: "Yea, I do because I have all my life loved working with wood. The biggest nut job ever, I am one of those guys that would say, I love my job."

Lee deals with a lot of stresses in work and embraces issues so they can be dealt with. He seems to counteract this stress by keeping busy outside work. He has a lot of passions and hobbies such as his family, carpentry, gardening and watching football. It is also apparent that spending quality time with his family is a priority, as he works on various crafts projects with his son. He continuously seems to keep himself challenged with activities that he enjoys. He says that when he engages with these activities he comes up with solutions to work issues.

Sinead: "Do you ever find that you bring it home and you can't leave it behind?"

Lee: "I say to the staff all the time; don't take work home with you, mentally dump it here. But a lot of times its dumped on my shoulder. So I go home sometimes and I take things home with me and I think about stuff but I always find that I can come up with a better solution and a better plan when I'm in the garden."

He feels that his knowledge of self-care is common sense. He didn't take it seriously or think about it too much but just considers it to be something you have to do. To take care of himself is his norm. When asked about how self-care could be improved with teachers he said...

Lee: "I'll tell you what missing it's the fact that they won't look at themselves in the mirror and ask themselves; now why am I feeling this way?"

This was a very clear indication that he sees a need for educators to be reflective.

Sinead: "Personal responsibility?"

Lee: "Yes, one hundred percent, personal responsibility. Why am I a bad teacher? Because half of them won't admit that they are bad teachers and they just expect people to, you know, do exactly as they say."

"They blame the students and they hold grudges."

This struck me to be a commonality between students and teachers who suffer. As I see the students who blame others seem to struggle the most. A lack of personal responsibility seems to be a great source of unhappiness for students and teachers."

From Lee's interview I learned that self-care is unique to every individual it must be teacher centred it begins with the individual.

Ann

Ann has been an Educator in Youthreach for 13 years. From working with and observing Ann I have experienced her to be someone who is reflective, continuously learning and someone who is content in her work. She is also very open and for these reasons I knew I would learn a lot from her experience and her views on self-care.

The interview was very rich as Ann is a very outspoken and passionate woman. We also have some things in common as we attended the same college course for our undergraduate Degrees. At the time of the interview I had been working alongside Ann for eight months. I feel these factors put us both at ease allowing us to have a discussion about the personal nature of self-care.

Ann has an authentic way of dealing with students; she is not afraid and is strong enough to be vulnerable with students.

Ann: "If I lose it I will go back and say I am sorry".

She told me a story of when her child was a baby she had been up all night with him she went into work without having slept, she was absolutely exhausted. She got frustrated with students not doing work and one student said to her, "You're like a hell's bitch today!" Ann's response was not that of a typical teacher, instead of being angry with the student and getting offended Ann explained why she was short tempered and apologized. The student was compassionate towards her and even took leadership of the class he told the class to "get to work!"

While Ann is not afraid to be vulnerable with the students she also mentioned that she doesn't think it is acceptable to be upset in the classroom on a continuous basis and while it is important to be open and honest with students there must be boundaries. She does not feel it is fair to put her problems onto students because they, "don't need that," that is one of the reasons why she feels it is so important to take self-care seriously as a teacher.

Ann also mentioned taking 'ownership' of her feelings and how important it is to be personally responsible of what we are feeling and going through. Ann also spoke about perfectionism and how she sees that as crippling students all the time. She possesses an attitude of self-acceptance which is important to her and as she says "I'd love to say I meditate everyday but I don't". She is okay with who she is.

I saw many parallels in our lives, all of which I was not aware of till interviewing Ann. Likewise, Ann has had her own struggles in life and while reading the book *The Artist's Way* she uncovered and healed some of her issues. This book also introduced her to becoming reflective on a daily basis. Her reflective practice was further developed by a course she took part in with work. This was a course in Rational Behavioural Educational Therapy, which was being delivered to some of the teachers to help them deal with students more effectively. This course helped Ann discover what she needed for her own wellness. She said the training opened her eyes to thought patterns, "how we think about things and changing that, once you change that you can change the behaviour". This training was in alignment with

Ann's personal beliefs about life and she received a tremendous amount of confidence from this, "in a way it confirmed what I thought about life." She began to practice what she had learned on herself and her students.

Ann believes that, "to be functional and to be able to do your job we have to deal with our issues". As she says that, "whatever your issues are they are reflected back at you", Ann refers to Youthreach as being much more 'intense' than secondary school teaching. This intensity is meant in terms of relationships with students as Youthreach has a more holistic approach and close relationships are formed with students as numbers are smaller. Ann feels that empathy is important for building rapport with students and being able to help students through difficulties.

Ann: "I had to take self-care into account or else I wasn't gona make it."
The way in which Ann talks about her journey leads to me thinking that Youthreach can be a place of self-discovery and awareness for the educator. As students tend to be allowed to be open and are unafraid to say what they think as educators we get to see who we are.

Ann is always looking for learning and this seems to be a part of her self-care practice. She has done a lot of training through work that she has enjoyed. She also has her art practice and will be building a purpose built studio in her house. Her authenticity and reflective nature give her the ability to listen and learn from the students. As she has the strength to be vulnerable she has been able to create a classroom that is a space for collaboration.

Over the years as Ann has become reflective and as she has grown in awareness she has sought out healthier relationships. She has learned to put boundaries in place, "I know my limits". She also brings up personal responsibility and the importance of being self-aware in dealing with our struggles, "The only person that can change that is you".

Eve

Eve in my eyes is an educator who is very compassionate, calm, caring, balanced, wise, kind and approachable. She is someone who is clear about what her role is and is confident in fulfilling this role while also being flexible and able to take her lead from the learner. She is self-aware and reflective. Throughout the interview she expressed the importance of investing time in her self.

Sinead: “Is self-care something that you have considered?”

Eve: “I think it is something I do anyway, it’s something I do regardless of what job I am in. In terms of just investing time in myself I know what I get enjoyment out of, and you know when I am stressed or something is bothering me, I know what works for me at this stage so it’s something that I do continuous.”

Eve likes to go out into nature, she likes to read, take part in training and get away with family and friends.

Eve: ‘I have always had an interest in self-help books.’

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho was the first book that developed Eve’s interest in self-discovery. This book emphasizes the journey of life over the end result. It speaks about the importance of discovering our ‘destiny’ and being true to ourselves. Throughout the interview I can see how this book has influenced her practice. This book was also very significant in my own journey which highlighted another parallel in my life and the participant’s life. I continued to see myself and parallels of our lives in the participants throughout the research. In *The Artist’s way*, Cameron speaks of synchronicities and when we experience them that we are on the right path. I saw this coincidence as a step in the right direction within my research. Paulo Coelho also speaks of taking note of these good omens as they will lead us to our destiny. This gave me affirmation that I had chosen the right person to interview.

Eve: “When I was a kid or young teenager and younger, I used to find it very comforting looking at the stars at night and realizing how insignificant I was, not in a negative way but really in a way of what’s going on.

What stresses me is nothing in comparison to the big whole grand concept of things. I do believe in the whole interconnectivity of everything.”

From listening to Eve I gathered a sense of wonderment towards life, a belief in something bigger and an acceptance of her uniqueness and vulnerability. I believe Eve brings this thinking into her practice. Her outlook on life and the feeling of connectedness she has towards life translates in her being an educator who the learner can connect to easily. Her inner belief is that we are universally connected, which dictates the way she approaches and deals with the learner. She feels this sense of insignificance, “not in a negative way” but in a way that we are all equal and we are connected. This way of seeing life gives Eve the ability to see herself in the learner, allowing her to learn and grow from the learner. This in turn empowers the learner as they are listened to and respected by Eve. Eve is also empowered in this approach because she can experience growth in her practice through learning.

Her sense of wonderment tells me a lot about who she is and how she experiences life. This also informs me of how she manages to succeed in maintain her wellbeing. In practicing equality with the learner she takes the pressure off herself and opens herself up to more knowledge which can only help to maintain wellness. As Eve is self-aware and connected to her being she inevitably connects to the learner.

In her youth Eve would gaze at the stars and learn from this act. By nature she is a reflective person; she thought about what these stars meant and where she belonged in this story. This experience also tells me that Eve has a great thirst for knowledge.

As educators we are given the opportunity to learn every day. I believe this learning is much more accessible to us if we have a sense of wonderment, reflectiveness and a thirst for knowledge. I think Eve’s sense of wonderment; reflectiveness and thirst for knowledge are what drives her. They are possibly all needs within her and they seem to be met in her teaching practice. In her role as an Educator she is being true to herself and fulfilling what in *The Alchemist* is referred to as and what I believe is her destiny, which is....

‘...what you have always wanted to accomplish. Everyone when they are young knows what their destiny is.’ (Coelho, 1994, p.12)

This book describes our destiny as being created in the ‘soul of the world’ (Coelho, 1994, p.12), which we are all connected to. If we follow our intuition and joy we connect to the soul of the world our life flows and we are rewarded.

‘The soul of the world is nourished by people’s happiness.’ (Coelho, 1994, p.12)
When Eve was in secondary school she tutored a friend and this friend went from failing to achieving a high grade. This experience gave Eve a lot of joy; I got a sense from Eve that this joy was her reward.

‘Life is really generous to those who pursue their destiny.’ (Coelho, 1994, p.94)

Sinead: “What do you enjoy most about the job?”

Eve: “I think it is the interactions with the students connecting with them. You feel like I suppose you’re making a difference in some way.”

Eve worked in other jobs before going into education full-time. Through getting to know herself and becoming an educator she is being true to who she really is authentically. In being in the right profession she can maintain her wellness because she wants to teach, being an educator is being true to her identity and her destiny.

Eve knows how to keep herself happy whether that is practicing mindfulness, going out into nature and walking, talking to family or friends, reading or doing a course. She is always looking for new learning and looking at herself to grow and improve.

Eve has taught me to have faith in the magic and mystery of life.

Bill

Bill is an experienced educator. He has worked in Youthreach for 6 years. In my view I have seen Bill to be a very thoughtful, helpful and a compassionate educator and individual. His positive attitude is exemplified in the gratitude he has for his work. He possesses a great ability to attach and detach while at the same time knowing how to create healthy boundaries. He values his friends and family and gets joy from connecting

with others. He is very aware of the value and benefits of building rapport in relationships and this plays a big role in how he motivates students. He is also self-aware and he knows the power of bringing equality into the classroom. He speaks to the learner at their level. He has learned throughout his experience and he has improved his practice accordingly.

Sinead: "Have you ever thought about self-care for your job and for dealing with stress?"

Bill: "Never!"

To Bill self-care is not something he has considered but as our conversation unfolded I discovered it is something that he does and it comes naturally to him.

Sinead: "So what strategies have you used over your career to maintain your wellbeing? For instance FETAC's are going on and there could be a lot of negativity or personal problems going on with staff. How do you deal with that?"

Bill: "To be honest I don't really care about any of their stuff, their problems are not my problems."

"...at 4 o'clock I go home and I don't think about it [clicks his fingers]"

Sinead: "So you just switch off?"

Bill: "I'm at home, chat to the lads, maybe tell them. I don't tell them anything about what happened they don't care. I play football twice a week. I would be more thinking that I am lucky enough that I have a job."

Bill has a natural ability to create boundaries this allows him to leave work behind and refuel at home. He is also self-aware and he knows what works for him.

Bill: "...since I was a kid 16/17. I have always been playing football. So it's just..."

"Even in college we used to play two or three nights a week, friends together."

We speak about when students approach him with their personal struggles and how he deals with that.

Bill: "...I wouldn't bottle it up, like I wouldn't be losing sleep at night over it, Now, not out of badness, but out of...when I'm here I will do whatever I can to

help the student to link them in with people but then come 4 o'clock it's just switch of, it's my time."

Sinead: "And how? Because not everyone is able to do that. So how are you able to do that, do you think?"

Bill: "It's just the way I am, laid back. My life is my life."

Bill values his relationships and I see this as being a part of his tool kit as an educator. I think he is genuine in his caring for the students as this connection would be very difficult to fake.

Bill: "I try to get on with all the students as best I can. If I build up a good relationship with them I find that they work more in the classroom. That's why I don't sit over with the teachers as much. I try to sit over with the kids to build up more of a rapport with them."

"I find they come in and do the work..."

"...I find that, if I'm closer with kids and down to their level and don't be talking down to them."

Sinead: "Equality?"

Bill: "Yea I never talk down to them. I don't be thinking I am better than them or else you will never get anywhere with them."

Bill says his advice to any new educator in Youthreach would be...

Bill: "Don't take anything too seriously especially in Youthreach, try to bring humour into the class with the kids, try to see things from their level and never talk down to them or treat them as kids. If you do that you've lost them. As long as you're down to their level but not that they think you're a friend and that the balance is there."

Sinead: "Did you learn that in your training?"

Bill: "No, that's just my, my personal...I think it's the way my personality is."

All of the interviewees like Bill found the job difficult at the start and were unsure if they liked working in Youthreach or would stay. Bill as with all of the participants persevered

and grew to enjoy the job as they adjusted and learned how to cater to the needs of the students and tend to their own needs. They were all willing to learn, grow and adapt to the situation.

Connection

‘It was his own humility and capacity to love that made possible his communion with the people.’ (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.170)

Connection is a lot of things and sometimes it is so powerful that it really cannot be described with words. When we connect magic happens, we can come alive and make sense of the world. When we connect on a deep level we can transform and I believe; be returned to who we are born to be but we need the other to do this. As Palmer says, ‘Knowing of any sort is relational’ (Palmer, 2000, p.55). Between the educators who participated in this research and the learners who they work with I can see how the knowing they collaborate on creating is beneficial to both. As Antoni Gramsci puts it their relationship with the learner is an; ‘active and reciprocal’, one whereby ‘every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil is a teacher’. (Mayo and Medel-Anonuevo, 1999, p.47)

All of the participants interviewed had the ability to connect with others they used vulnerability, caring and equality to connect to the students and staff members. They all display, in various ways that they care about the learner and the other staff. They are all compassionate people who are not unnecessarily critical of others or themselves. Their ability to practice equality in the classroom is very evident and this motivates the learner. This is made possible because of the love they have for their work, other people and themselves.

‘Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.’ (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.89)

I think it is in this dialogue that these educators find ways of being well. These educators may not be familiar with Paulo Freire but they do practice dialogue in a way that creates democracy. They are humble in their interaction with the learner.

‘It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours.’ (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.96)

They are affirmed in the good they do, by the learner and this gives them meaning. They also are constantly held accountable by the learner and faced with themselves; they have no choice; grow or wither. And because of their love for their work they choose to grow.

‘In a lovely little book, *On Caring*, Milton Mayeroff describes caring largely through the view of the one-caring. He begins by saying: “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself”. (Noddings, 1992, p.55)

In caring the educators care for themselves and receive back good energy. I compare this to good karma, to me caring is....

‘In energy terms this ritual liberates our spirits from painful learning cycles and redirects us into the creative, positive energies of life.’ (Myss, 1997, p.228)

Growth

All of the participants interviewed experienced difficulties when they began working in Youthreach, I can relate to this. When I first experienced working in Youthreach I did not know how to handle the students. I was in unfamiliar territory, the teacher was not the boss (not like in mainstream secondary school) and I wasn't sure of what my boundaries were. I had only experienced non-authoritative approach in the higher diploma in Maynooth College. What I thought education to be in reality was something else in Youthreach. Before I completed the higher diploma in further education a lecturer asked, “Would you work in Youthreach?” I said “No way!” Ironically, and like the participants

of this research, I love working in Youthreach. I have gained the skills that I needed. I was up for the challenge and I knew Youthreach had a lot to teach me. Sometimes what we fear can teach us what we need to learn. To me teaching is a dance; we need to learn the steps and as there are always new students; there is always a new dance but from time to time the old routines come in handy. In the poem *Among School Children* by W.B Yeats, he states:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
(Yeats and Finneran, 1996, p. 217)

To me this represents how we can do good work when love, joy and above all care are present. I was ready to work in this environment because I feel I had the correct knowledge to allow me to do it in a way that I could honour who I am and the people I work with.

I think working in Youthreach has challenged my perceptions and the perceptions of the participants of what the norm in education is. For the most part I had not experienced a learning setting like Youthreach and either had the participants before working there. I think it was a shock to our systems but a shock that has caused tremendous growth in all of us.

For this reason an educator has to have staying power, compassion and grit to stick it out in Youthreach. Then when the initial growing pains are over and we adjust, it becomes easier. There are still challenges but these are outweighed by rewards. For me these rewards are my growth and the feeling of constant progression.

Eve: “In Youthreach you are constantly being reflected back at yourself.”
We constantly have to deal with ourselves. They all have a reflective practice;
‘Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions.
Reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises
are found to be distorting in authentic or invalid.’ (Mezirow, 1991, P.6)

I can tell this occurs in the stories they tell, how they have grown from their experiences in Youthreach and their willingness to transform. This sums up how I perceive their thinking to be and what I see as their non-reactive approach to students...

‘The first stage in dealing with a problem is to think about it. You probably cannot do this while you are in the middle of it so you will need to take time out to think about it – that is to reflect on what you think is happening and why you think you are reacting as you are.’ (Gray and Freeman, 1988, p.1)

Personal Responsibility

‘We are attracted to becoming more “conscious”, but at the same time we find it frightening because it means we must take personal responsibility for ourselves and our health care, attitudes, and thoughts. Once we accept personal responsibility for even one area of our lives, we can never again use “tribal reasoning” to excuse our behaviour.’ (Myss, 1997, p.111)

All of the participants are willing to look at themselves to improve their work. They do not spend time blaming others or complaining. They all, in various ways know the power of their thinking and they are secure in the knowledge that they are in control of their lives. They are all confident not in an arrogant way but in a self-possessed way, they know who they are, what they want and they are willing to work towards their goals. Furthermore they willing to admit their short comings and apologize along the way.

‘Pupils tend to want to find out the teachers weak spots in order to feel superior.’ (Salzberg-Wittenberg, Henry, and Osborne, 1983, p.24)

In Youthreach I found this to be true the learner will try to find a soft spot to exploit the educator. Even if a student would attempt to provoke them they are aware that their emotions are their responsibility. As I spoke to these educators they mention not taking things personally this reminded me of a book I had read once called *The Four Agreements* one of these agreements are ‘Don’t take anything personally’, I am only beginning to grasp this now, but I can see in the participants I have chosen that they already have a knowing for this law.

‘Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their own dream, in their own mind; they are in a completely different world from the world from the one we live in. When we take something personally, we make the assumption that they know what is in our world, and we try to impose our world on their world.’ (Ruiz, 1997, p.48)

These educators are not victims or slaves to their emotions or to their work they have conquered the art of detachment. They have the power to step into the lives of the students and empathize with their pain but they can also step out and return to their world. Beattie refers to this as; "a healthy neutrality."

‘Detaching does not mean we don't care. It means we learn to love, care, and be involved without going crazy. We stop creating all this chaos in our minds and environments. When we are not anxiously and compulsively thrashing about, we become able to make good decisions about how to love people, and how to solve our problems. We become free to care and to love in ways that help others and don't hurt ourselves.

The rewards from detachment are great: serenity; a deep sense of peace; the ability to give and receive love in self- enhancing, energizing ways; and the freedom to find real solutions to our problems. We find the freedom to live our own lives without excessive feelings of guilt about, or responsibility toward others.’ (Beattie, 1986, p.63)

To me Beattie illustrates the balancing act of caring. She speaks of how it is not black and white; it is fluid always moving and changing form. We cannot exactly pin it down or put it in a box because it is our individual wisdom and the assessment of what our boundaries are that helps us create true care. And real caring may not always look like care from the outside because we may need to tend to our own needs first. But when we honour our wellbeing we create that for others.

Chapter 5

Barriers to the Well

Gramsci was concerned with the way education was going and coined the phrases 'Fordism', he felt that the education system was creating workers for a conveyor belt to suit the needs of the economy which does not provide the learner with the opportunity to follow their true destiny and reach their potential.

In the words of a centre Coordinator in Youthreach, 'the screws are being tightened'. When he began 20 years ago the main focus in Youthreach was on personal development and building trust with students, he said it was a lot easier for the students to gain certification which spurred them on the continue education. He is constantly being reminded at Coordinator meetings about 'value for money' and how all spending needs to be justified with time consuming paper work to the extent that it makes purchasing equipment for the centre difficult. He also is faced with threats of cut backs to staff if numbers are not met with daily attendance of students. As Youthreach is the second most highly funded educational body after university he feels that the government are trying to dissolve it gradually. As he spoke, I thought about this situation and the connection to the water charges, the goal for the government seems to be to control every aspect of our lives and it all comes down to numbers.

It seems nothing has been learned from our past. I can see the needs of the students and teachers I work with and how caring is so necessary but our government is still acting like the old style authoritarian teacher who won't listen, is afraid of vulnerability and is separate from the people. In recent years teacher supports from the psychology team have been cut for teaching staff in Youthreach. All of these pressures and tightening of necessary resources exemplify of how care is not being valued in our society.

At present in Youthreach there is still a focus on the holistic development of the student, which I think is vital to a healthy, happy, well-adjusted and fair society. I have witnessed prejudice towards Youthreach as an organization; I gather from speaking to friends and

family people tend to think of it as being a place for failures and misfits. Even some of my students feel they are less than their peers because they did not succeed in mainstream. The care the students receive here is not valued but it is a perfect environment to create what I see is real change....

“We should think like Gramsci, work as he did in trying to understand his own realities better in order to transform them.” (Landy, 1994, forward)

My mind has begun to work in a new way in recent years as I have been trying to understand my own reality way. For example if a student says something that brings up emotions in me, I ask myself; what do I believe about that? Through being reflective I have learned that if I have a strong emotional reaction to something a student says I must believe it to be true or maybe it is an issue I need to look at. This way of being has freed me up to be open and more focused on the student. This growth is one of the greatest benefits I receive from this connection but it does require my personal responsibility.

The snobbery that is around Youthreach and the failure the students feel illustrates further how we as a society are not encouraged to value care. The message out there seems to be students do not need nurturing in our capitalist world. They need results and they need do as their government tells them, so they can be good citizens who become a part of the work force, autonomy is not high on the agenda.

This lack of reverence for caring seems to be a cultural norm. I also see this in the way Mothers are looked upon in society. In my view the expectation on Mothers is to have a career and at the same time rear their children. We admire the person who does it all, has nice cars, fancy clothes and foreign holidays. We admire the ability people have to spend not the ability they have to care. In my view being a fulltime Mother is not revered as a worthy admirable use of a life. In our capitalist society it is every individual for them self, caring may be viewed as a fool's activity.

So it is no surprise that the care of the educator is not valued as much as I feel it should be. The teacher must turn up for work; get results and nurturing relationships are not a priority. Our wellness is not the responsibility of the employer it is our responsibility.

The staff I am currently working with have previously been funded and given time to undergo training such as RBT (rational behavioural therapy) training but as austerity measures have been enforced staff are now expected to take part in training outside of work hours. This gives a sense of how individualization of practice suits a neoliberal-based education structure. It passes responsibility for growth on to individual educators rather than a sense of a collective, including employers, being responsible for educator growth. Staff may take part in short training sessions in subjects such as mindfulness or conflict resolutions while the root issues are not addressed. The issue of self-care is passed onto the individual when If it is to be truly addressed and changed in an appropriate way there needs to be a meeting of minds from management, staff and students.

I believe that care is important in all occupations but as teaching involves directly working with influential and vulnerable human beings it is of the utmost importance that it is taken seriously. We cannot be conscious if we do not look after our well-being and practice self-care. I believe a lot of teachers go into the profession because they are caring but we only have so much to give until our well runs dry and we face burn out. We need to know how to replenish so we can provide our students with the education that they deserve. When unity and consciousness are present we can give ourselves and our students what is needed and this in when I feel real progress happens. Gramsci's theory of Hegemony has caused me to look at myself more critically. It is confusing and difficult and at the same time freeing and enlightening for me to consider what my truth is. I have become more conscious and I am constantly unpacking what the norms are that I have adopted. This may take a lifetime to unravel but has made me more aware and hopefully and more effective in my teaching practice. I do attempt to see things from all viewpoints, such as putting myself in the place of the students and attempting to understand their world and their worldview. I believe we are one and my position is a mere series of events and circumstance and so is theirs. I could be them they could be me. Through building trusting relationships I have come to have a greater understanding of their situation. This allows for growth to happen for both parties, which is necessary for any healthy relationship. This helps me create a sense of unity with my colleges and students.

The Journey to the Well

Anthoni Gramsci said;

‘My practicality consists in this, in the knowledge that if you beat your head against the wall it is your head which breaks and not the wall - that is my strength, my only strength.’ (Arora, 2010, 14.15)

Gramsci was a believer in unity. The above quote reminds me to surrender to my practice, stop trying to force things, to go with the learner and my colleagues, to let them speak and to never shut them up, to listen to their truth and learn from them and to also trust myself. If these ideas were a tree it would be a willow, the willow is flexible and does not fight the elements it simply blows in the direction of the wind but returns to itself and stands strong. That’s how I aim to be always flexible and willing to bend but always true to my authentic self. This quote teaches me how to foster unity.

My thesis is ‘The Well of the Educator’. I believe wellness for educators is difficult if not impossible without consciousness and unity. This consciousness and unity is not only needed from other staff members but also from students. For what I consider as deep meaningful and real learning to happen the teacher and the student need to grow and learn together to create healthy change. This way of being is not always natural to us as living in a capitalist society as and we are taught to compete, overpower and step on the competition. As our government enforces a more neo-liberalist agenda, our education system is becoming more focused on numbers rather than real long-term educational development, its product of process.

Being taught to strive for only for ourselves is what alienates us. We are not taught to be one and to serve others; which in my view is essential for our wellness. To really provide what is necessary for our student’s success and our health we need to connect with ourselves in becoming conscious and connect with our students by working together instead of pushing our ideals and agendas onto them. The teacher needs to possess flexibility and a willingness to take their lead from the student while guiding their journey. This is almost letting go of control and may seem to be reckless but Gramsci

believed that people are born with wisdom and given freedom and knowledge a better society would be created. This approach takes the pressure off the educator and fosters care as the teacher can learn from the student and both are empowered.

Gramsci founded a paper and called it 'L'unita' which means 'Unity' which was homage to the working class. He felt this would mean something to the oppressed in society as when people are oppressed they are alienated and made to be the other, we are separated and this is how we are controlled politically. Gramsci looked at the role of the intellectual he believed the intellectuals have the power in society and the people are made to believe they have no authority. The authoritarian approach to teaching exemplifies this, which is still for many teachers the norm. Freire was greatly influence by Gramsci and illustrates this transference of untruths.

‘Internalizing paternal authority through the rigid relationship structure emphasized by the school, these young people tend when they become professionals (because of the very fear of freedom instilled by these relationships) to repeat the rigid patterns in which they were miseducated.’ (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.155)

Gramsci believed that the intellectuals should be integrated into society, for change to happen mass consciousness was necessary which would take education. He saw education as a way of creating unity, changing society and helping the masses see how they were being controlled and serving the status quo. The student and teacher would have to work together he be believed in the power of their connection.

‘An active social relation of modification of the cultural environment involving ‘the reciprocal influence between master and student.’(Thomas, 2009, p.125)

I see this in the educators that were a part of this research they are not all aware of these theories but they know the significance of working in union as student and teacher and what that can bring about, they know this instinctively and they are energized by this connection.

Gramsci believed that education should be a dialogical practice between student and teacher where equality is present. When Youthreach began the emphasis was on the holistic development of the student. While there is still a holistic approach,

deadlines must be met, although students are given plenty of time to achieve certification. In comparison to mainstream education the class sizes are small and the students can receive more time, attention and care.

I am fortunate to be able to assist students in this way but I don't always think Gramsci's approach would be possible to this extent in other teaching positions where time constraints, student numbers and exams pressures may create an obstacle between the student and teacher being connected and unified. I do think this way of being is possible in any teaching scenario but I would question to what level equal collaboration can be achieved with large classes and bureaucratic issues. Having the opportunity to connect to students and provide the information they need is of great benefit to my wellbeing and personal growth. The unity I feel with the students and being able to help in this way gives me a great sense of satisfaction and energy. Unfortunately the space is not always created for teachers to connect with their students. For teachers who are invested in their student's success this lack of space for connection takes a toll on the wellbeing of the educator.

Care of the educator is important to me because I am aware of the responsibility I have over my students. I am aware of the power I have to affect their lives and I take this very seriously. Being conscious and growing in awareness has helped me find ways of resolving issues, creating unity and gives me a platform for resolution which is vital in my care as an educator. Gramsci's theory on hegemony has fortified the importance within me of how I need to constantly reevaluate my beliefs and investigate my opinions. As what I think may not be the truth, it may just be the political agenda or norms that are being pushed at any given time.

‘The common school, or school of humanistic formation (taking the term “humanism” in a broad sense rather than simply in the traditional one) or general culture, should aim to insert young men and women into social activity after bringing them to a certain level of maturity, of capacity for intellectual and practical creativity, and of autonomy of their orientation and initiative.’

(Landy, 1994, p. 82)

Gramsci encourages me to give to the learner the qualities that I want for myself, which are confidence, authenticity, independence, useful knowledge, freedom and unity. To transfer this kind of knowledge is empowering for me and the student.

We can experience unity by making ourselves happy; this is when we are doing what we are created for, this feeds and nurtures our soul, we are stronger, have more to give and we in turn allow this joy for others. I believe all things are one when we follow our destiny. But this takes knowing of ourselves, knowledge of our world and praxis. I feel in this process I have become more human as I have become politically aware and aware of possibility of care. In the words of Freire.....

‘We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism that we are witnessing at the end of this century, informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against the lives of the majority. In other words, those who cannot compete, die. This is a perverse ethics that, in fact, lacks ethics. I insist on saying that I continue to be human ... I would then remain the last educator in the world to say no: I do not accept . . . history as determinism. I embrace history as possibility [where] we can demystify the evil in this perverse fatalism that characterizes the neoliberal discourse in the end of this century.’ (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.26)

The act of charging for water in my eyes is an act of aggression to the people, a lack of ethics and an act against care which dehumanizes us; we literally and metaphorically fill our well by refusing to accept this. The protests over recent water charges and the way people have taken a stand and become involved in politics and the reclaiming of their communities exemplifies what I can be with educators and what is possibly in the realm of care for educators. The theme of water has poignancy in relation to our well-being, as it is essential for growth, vitality and our survival and ironically our government (the people in charge of our care) are seeking to take this human right away. But just as people are taking back their communities all over Ireland by forming groups and taking action. I believe that this can happen in an education centre; people can come together and take a stand and create change and wellness for each other.

In the beginning of my journey to becoming an educator I began in a job that I loved but I found the politics with other staff members very difficult to deal with. I still had a sense of separation from others that I had felt since beginning school in my early childhood. This was based on my fear and caused me a lot of unnecessary stress and was most definitely a barrier to my wellness. I have come to understand this on a deeper level and why this was;

‘We collaborate with the structures of separation because they promise to protect us against one of the deepest fears at the heart of being human-the fear of having a live encounter with alien “otherness,” whether the other is a student, colleague, a subject, or a self-dissenting voice within. We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may not wish to hear.’

(Palmer, 2007, p.37)

I am strong enough now to embrace otherness. I feel I have learned a way of being more fluid and accepting others instead of going against the grain I am able to go with another person; to listen and learn with the intention of being able to understand their world so we can work together. This way of being is difficult for me to truly articulate because it is paradoxical, always changing, cannot be pinned down and there are no rules. I now realise that what I was searching for was a greater sense of unity and the knowledge of how to do this. I do not have to alienate myself as I did in previous years because I know how to be with people in a productive way.

Conclusion

The writing of this thesis has been a very emotional, spiritual and moving experience for me. I have had a huge shift in my perception that at times has moved me to tears, when I consider how I've grown and what I have learned. I have been given the gift of a new sense of energy and joy for my work. I have been shown care and given care and been renewed through this. Caroline Myss speaks here of what I have been looking to uncover and why I have wanted to uncover this;

‘Striving to become supportive and non-judgmental of the people with whom we live or work also creates a channel within us for divine energy. People who radiate this supportiveness and love are rightly recognized as possessing ordained energy.’

(Myss, 1997, p.88)

My Mam said to me once, “all you have to do is make yourself happy then the rest will fall into place”. We take care of ourselves first and we are given a well that will never run dry. We are able to offer support to others and accept our differences because that is our relationship to our self.

‘As teachers we all bring different gifts and handicaps to the table. A team that works well is aware of the different talents of its members and attempts to mix these as equitably as possible.’ (Brookfield, 2006, p.148)

I have a greater love for those around me people I know the act of care for others is an act of loving myself. I created ‘The Hug’(figure.2) in 2005 it is the partner to ‘The Kiss’(figure.1). It illustrates visually where I am at now. I could be either the person leaning on the other figure or the person standing strong as I am able to be vulnerable and accept care but I am also strong and able to give care.



Figure.4

'The Hug'

6ft/4ft commercial paint on canvas

With the connection of the learner I experience growth but I must be personally responsible if I am to experience the learning that is offered to me. If I do not hold myself accountable by listening and taking action on my inner dialogue the growth will not happen in a healthy way. The themes of connection, growth and personal responsibility are endless and circular with these as my mantra; the educator I will be in a year will be different from the one I am today. I am open to a continuous transformation as I embrace my work, others and my never ending journey to the 'well'.

'True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis.' (Freire, Ramos, and Macedo, 2004, p.50) I began with love and I will end with love. I believe that if you through enough kindness, compassion and love at something, only good will come. Yes, I am an idealist but I am not naive, I see the wrong that people do but I see it at a deeper level of understanding than before. I know negative cycles of behaviour can be changed with help from others, we are stronger and more powerful together. By embracing others I embrace myself and my willingness to transform is made available because I need others to exist and transform. I need difference and the contract of others to evolve. This creative process means I am consciously transforming.

I did not know what I was trying to achieve for the most part of this thesis but I now have a sense of completion. I believe I have achieved what I needed that is, comradeship, joy, confidence, belonging, creativity, energy and above all love.

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Images

Figure. 1 'The Kiss', Artist: Sinead Cunningham 2005

Figure. 2 'The Hug', Artist: Sinead Cunningham 2005

