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Classroom Assistants' Use of Talk in the Construction and Negotiation of Identities.

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own, except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Kevin Wright

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Abstract

Since 1998 there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of paid, additional, support staff, employed in Scottish primary schools as successive Scottish governments have attempted to raise standards by freeing teachers from administrative and 'housekeeping' duties and allowing them to teach. Of these additional staff, currently just over 4000 are classroom assistants, with a remit to provide general class learning and teaching support, including social inclusion and pupil discipline, under the direction of a fully registered teacher. Classroom assistants in Scotland are almost exclusively White women, typically aged 31-50, but concentrated in the 41-50 age range, partnered and with children of school age. These women exist on the margins of school hierarchies as witnessed by short-term contracts, low pay, limited access to formal training and low status. Nevertheless, many classroom assistants seem willing to accept poor working conditions as a trade off for family friendly working hours.

Given these working conditions the study sought to consider several key questions:

- *Why are classroom assistants willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity?*
- *How do classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work?*
- *How do classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities in this context?*
- *Why do classroom assistants appear to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression?*

To achieve this the study used a critical ethnographic methods to explore the lived experiences of 13 classroom assistants as they supported pupils in two Scottish primary schools.

The key insights were firstly that a Bourdieuian account of class, combined with an understanding of patriarchy, provided an explanation of these women's labour market decisions. In addition, 'preference theory', was rejected in favour of a range of constraints, particularly having children and the associated childcare costs, that were considered much more important factors. Secondly, classroom assistants performed versions of 'emphasised femininity' as part of their identity as 'classroom assistants'. Thirdly, the notion of 'respectability' was a crucial analytical tool in explaining not only these women's constant struggle for recognition, but also their continuing oppression. And finally, classroom assistants told a particular type of talk, the 'atrocity story', which contributed to the social production of occupational boundaries.

The study concluded that from their position of insecure and poorly paid employment, classroom assistants justified and reconciled their position by drawing on talk of moral superiority associated with mothering and caring to construct and perform identities that created the spaces and boundaries from which they positioned themselves as superior to both parents and teachers. As a result they were able to negotiate their roles within the micro-political world of the school.

Dedication

For my sister, Karen.

Acknowledgements

List of Tables

I was just guessing at numbers and figures

Pulling the puzzles apart

Questions of science, science and progress

Do not speak as loud as my heart.

Coldplay (2002) 'The Scientist', from *A Rush of Blood to the Head.*

London: Capital Parlophone

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

The term 'classroom assistant' is both generic and specific to describe a range of paid additional support staff employed in Scottish schools. Classroom assistants are almost exclusively women (Schlapp *et al.*, 2001; EOC, 2007). These women are typically aged 31-50, but concentrated in the 41-50 age range, partnered, and with 80 percent having children of school age (SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007). Schlapp *et al.* (2001), referring to Scotland, also commented on the under-representation of minority ethnic classroom assistants in the workforce. Classroom assistants are often from the local area (EOC, 2007) and are likely to have had experience working with children through previous school based activities such as being voluntary parent helpers, playground supervisors or 'dinner ladies' (SCER, 2005).

Although such staff have been in primary classrooms since the late 1960s (Duthie, 1970; Wilson *et al.*, 2003), in Scotland it was the Classroom Assistants Initiative, (SOEID, 1999a) which significantly raised numbers and formalised their role. This introduction of 5000 new classroom assistants was intended to raise standards by freeing teachers from administrative and 'housekeeping duties' and allowing them to teach (SCER, 2005; Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). However, it was clearly stated that these classroom assistants were to work, "under the direction and supervision of teachers" (SOEID, 1999a: 1). The Classroom Assistants Initiative was later complemented by the McCrone Agreement (McCrone, 2000; SEED, 2001a), under which the equivalent of a further 3500 support staff, including classroom assistants, were appointed

The work of classroom assistants is primarily about supporting pupils and teachers in the learning process (EOC, 2007). However, the Warnock Report (1978) in the United Kingdom, and in Scotland, the HMI Report (1978) and the

subsequent Education (Scotland) Act 1981 (HMSO, 1981), which all advocated the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs[1] (SEN) into mainstream schools, extended the range of tasks classroom assistants were expected to undertake. In Scotland this range became even broader with the widening definition of need resulting from the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning Act (SEED, 2004). The most recent figures from the Scottish Government show that classroom assistants make up 58 per cent of all support staff and almost 25 per cent of the Scottish primary school workforce[2].

Research evidence on the effectiveness of classroom assistants is mixed, and generally, despite general feelings that classroom assistants have had a positive effect on the lived experiences of pupils and teachers, there is little concrete research evidence to support these assumptions, and indeed the most recent research, the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS), which critically examined the effect of teaching assistant support on the academic progress of 8,200 pupils, based on observations of 700 pupils and 100 teaching assistants, data from 17,800 questionnaires and 470 interviews, actually contradicts this (Blatchford, *et al*., 2012). However, whilst the evidence may be mixed, qualitative evidence, based on the views of head teachers, class teachers and pupils, found that classroom assistants made positive contributions to children's development and learning experiences (Wilson *et al*., 2002; Dillow, 2010).

Classroom assistants' levels of skill and dedication are undervalued in terms of career structure, salary and job security (Barkham, 2008: 839). They are amongst the lowest paid Scottish local government workers and also have to contend with short-term contracts, limited access to formal training and 'low status'. Despite these conditions, levels of trade union membership and militancy remain low. Classroom assistants remain on the margins of school hierarchies often in a vague, ambiguous and insecure position where their worth and importance appear

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[1] Now referred to in Scotland as Additional Support Needs (ASN) since the introduction of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.
[2] *Statistical Bulletin, Education Series: Teachers in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government (2014)

uncertain. Here, they can feel disempowered, ill informed, confused and un-included (Sorsby, 2004; Mansaray, 2006). Nevertheless, the job of classroom assistant is still very popular regardless of the low pay and poor status.

Purpose of the Study: Research Questions

Given the very particular context of classroom assistants' working conditions this study focused on several key questions:

- Why are classroom assistants willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity?
- How do classroom assistants maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work?
- How do classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities regarding their work?
- Why do classroom assistants appear to be complicit to some extent in their own oppression?

Answering such questions was not attempted with the purpose of merely making the data intelligible. Rather, it was attempted with the purpose of providing an original perspective on the phenomena, developing previous work, and, potentially, furthering information about similar types of phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, before attempting this a researcher needs to be clear of their own position, they need to know which side they are on, which group they are fighting for, and then position their research there (Becker, 1967). Therefore the key epistemological assumptions within this study were based upon seeking an understanding of the way in which individuals' understanding of the world contributes to its construction. As such it focused on diverse perspectives, valued the subjectivity, and revealed the significance of the personal knowledge of a marginalised, and largely silenced, group of classroom assistants (Barkham, 2008).

The study was informed by the principles of critical ethnography, an approach that is overtly political in its attempts to expose inequalities and effect change. Critical ethnography begins with the premise that social science can and ought to be relevant to contemporary issues, and is based on a history of ideas which, from Marx onwards, has asked why we should be content to understand the world without attempting to change it. Critical ethnographers therefore attempt to expose the hidden agendas, challenge oppressive assumptions, describe power relations, and generally critique the taken-for-granted. Critical ethnography expresses any attempt to use knowledge for social change, but especially to expose and deal with systematic social disadvantage and unequal access to resources such as health, wealth, education, and jobs. In terms of making sense of observations, critical ethnographers do not simply seek to explain the meanings of actions within a given context, by asking how they make sense for the participants. Rather they also look for the meaning of participants' meanings and how these connect to broader structures of power and control (Thomas, 1993). Researchers using critical ethnography try to probe the surface of everyday life, exposing acts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977).

This particular study attempted to challenge the complacency of views that make classroom assistants invisible, or those that "pathologise through ignorance and assumption" (Skeggs, 1997: 14). The motivation behind the research was the development of the kind of theory whose function is to contest and overturn the type of social relations that are obviously inequitable (Lyotard, 1979). Whilst not pretending that a critical ethnography in two sites can allow me to claim generalisability, this study did have the potential to illuminate themes that may be related to other sites (Barkham, 2008). As such it sought to join the body of research that "examines critically the possibilities for social transformations as a result of the overcoming of society's widespread cultural denigration of women's work as mothers" (Elliot, 2002: 105). The study sets out with a very personal agenda and a very particular purpose; to champion the role of classroom assistants, and highlight the oppression they face. But I am unapologetic in this

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for as Butler (2002) stated, "…what good is thinking otherwise, if we don't know in advance that thinking otherwise will produce a better world?" (2002: online).

Significance of the Study

Generally, there is an absence of classroom assistants' voice in research (Mansaray, 2006; Sorsby, 2004), resulting in their work motivations being largely unexplored (Butt & Lance, 2009) as "almost nothing has been written about the role and continuing professional development of an invaluable, yet apparently invisible group of professionals" (Dyer, 1996: 187). As classroom assistants have a lowly position in schools due to their lack of social and cultural capital (Minondo *et al*, 2001; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Sorsby, 2004; Bourke & Carrington, 2007) they are seldom identified as major stakeholders, and denied a voice in making decisions concerning their work, so their views are rarely heard amongst those of the "privileged and the powerful" (Barkham, 2008: 852). Yet, these are women who hold "strong and principled views about many aspects of the work they do" (O' Brien & Garner, 2001a: 4). Therefore, as listening and hearing others is an important factor in the production of accountable and responsible knowledge, we must take into account classroom assistants' lived experiences if we hope to address their issues (Mansaray, 2006). Not to do so would be to produce irresponsible knowledge (Skeggs, 1997).

O' Brien & Garner (2001a) argued that previous research has been 'about', rather than 'with', classroom assistants, with little focus on their world views. Such research has ignored the 'day-to-day experiences' of classroom assistants and hence failed "to incorporate the views, expectations, aspirations, beliefs and values…nor any of their critical reflections on the job they were engaged in" (O' Brien & Garner, 2001a: 2). Although research that focuses on teacher voices does exist, it is argued that teachers and classroom assistants, as a result of differences in their economic positions, professional status, life experiences, beliefs and values, lack congruence and do not share a common outlook on children's needs (Tyrer *et al.*, 2004; Mackenzie, 2011).

This study then aimed to explore the world of classroom assistants using their own words as far as possible, and presents their talk, on the human aspect of their day-to-day involvement with parents and teachers (Lawson, *et al.*, 2006). The study was not just an attempt to plug one small gap but rather to address the vital absence of knowledge of the ambiguities, contradictions, tension, resistance and also pleasures within the lived experiences of classroom assistants. The study attempted this by exploring the processes by which these women negotiate and understand themselves in terms of gender, class, mothering and care (Skeggs, 1997). Such a study was of the utmost urgency because without it there was a serious danger that the classroom assistant voice would continue to be silenced. Without this we will not properly understand the critical role these women, despite their low status as school staff, play in supporting and maintaining some of the most challenging pupils in mainstream education (Stead *et al.*, 2007). In addition the study may also help to provide insights in to the worlds of other poorly paid workers supporting professionals whose numbers are growing.

However, whilst attempting this it was recognised that any account of classroom assistants' views would be partial and subject to the selective processes inevitable in the research process. It is also recognised that drawing out themes, commonalities and implications of the responses would inevitably involve the interpretations and subjectivities of the researcher

Personal Relationship to the Research and the Researched

Our relationship to our research, and to the researched, changed from the 1980s onwards as a result of an intellectual movement that introduced the idea of 'reflexive turn' (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Geertz, 1988). The reflexive turn questioned the very nature of reality and how this is understood. Researchers began to ask how we could know anything for certain as everything is sifted through personal experience. The danger is being ethnocentric – making sense of the world by relating it to what we already know and believe. As a result of the reflexive turn, ethnographers began to look more critically at the ways in

which ethnographic fieldwork was, and is, produced and written. Consequently, it is no longer possible to pretend we are not part of the world we study. Human actors who make a variety of choices both prior to, and during, the study construct all ethnographies. These choices include decisions about what to research, how to interpret what is seen and heard, and how data is analysed and written up. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that all these choices are made in the context of the researcher's own personal biography and are often positioned in particular disciplinary environments. Critical ethnography acknowledges such choices and positions by incorporating reflexive inquiry into its methodology. By employing such an approach the researcher articulates their own perspective, recognising and acknowledging the biases that their own limitations, histories, and institutional standpoints bear on their work. Such an approach also acknowledges that the researcher is, in addition to speaking on behalf of subjects, intrinsically linked to those being studied and thus inseparable from their context. Given this, an essential point of departure is that I share some of my own, relevant, autobiography.

I want to focus my autobiography not in an "all that David Copperfield kind of crap" way (Salinger, 1951: 1), but as something much more central to the theoretical framework of the study. I want to make clear my own 'self' through a reflexive process influenced by Skeggs (1997) notion of 'respectability' - the constant performance of trying to get it 'right' and be 'proper'. I want to argue that, just like the women in the study, in trying to better myself to become respectable, I have experienced a constant sense of not belonging, of being out of place, of being judged by dialogic others. Such feelings, whether real or imagined, ultimately influenced how I positioned my research, and have shaped its development at every stage of the research process. So in a series of broad vignettes I offer some self-reflection on my own history and culture, my shifting identities through "class re-inscriptions" (Hey, 2013: 106), and discuss how this has shaped my own sense of identity (Hey, 1997). My study then is not value free but contaminated with 'self', although, as I argue later in the study, I firmly believe that this does not undermine the scientific nature of my work. Crucial to

this process is an understanding of the role of my own agency and its relationship to structural influences, especially that of class. Class has been, perhaps, the most powerful force on the development of my autobiography and as such cannot be overestimated. However, as Hey states, there is no untainted way to discuss the personal aspect of class. For, to ignore class represents a "betrayal", whilst to focus on it can appear as "meritocratic self-justification" (Hey, 2013: 119). Nevertheless, and with these caveats in mind, I will attempt some form of reflexive narrative using an authentic, rather than an academic, voice.

I was born in 1963 and spent my formative years in Swadlincote, a coal-mining town in South Derbyshire, England, in a house where the TV was on all the time (Hey, 1997; Skeggs, 2011). My dad was a lorry driver and my mum did various part-time jobs. I have one younger sister, Karen, who I was never really close to until we were both adults. As my dad was often away from home due to working long hours he featured less in my childhood than my mother, grandma and other female influences. My grandma Walker was a particularly strong matriarchal figure that I had a great deal of respect for. My parents performed very gendered domestic roles around the house. Gender, in the guise of heterosexual normativity, was unquestioned in the 1970s South Derbyshire of my childhood; hence I was aware of class politics long before I was aware of gender politics (Hey, 1997). All my friends were boys and our games were mostly soldiers or football. We would have never dreamt of playing with girls. We were also unaware of any kind of diversity. We were all working class, we were all White[3], we were all able-bodied, we all had mums and dads. Or so it seemed at the time. I now realise that this was merely childhood naivety. My childhood was happy and relatively comfortable. I was loved and content. Although I never seriously went without anything I was conscious of sometimes thinking that I did not having exactly the 'right' toys and clothes that some other friends had. This led to feelings of sometimes not fitting in and it is only with hindsight that I now realise money was sometimes a struggle for my parents.

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[3] Throughout the study 'White' is used with an initial capital to avoid the normalisation and neutralisation of whiteness, that those positioned within its boundaries are not viewed as unremarkable and unremarked upon (see Apple, 1997).

I was educated in local state schools. I have only vague memories of infant school, watching an Apollo launch on television, but much more vivid ones of junior school where I was happy and relatively successful. However, although I was always in the top groups I felt aware of others who I sensed were doing better than me: Nigel Dutton, Julie Dolman, Neil Hudson, and Ann Petcher. In reality these peers never really built on the academic potential I believed they had. In particular Nigel and Julie, constrained by the subcultural influences of class and gender, underachieved. I feel somewhat bewildered that academically I achieved more than them. I enjoyed school and was generally happy. Not everyone must have been happy though. For some of my peers school could be cruel. Based largely on the grounds that they were scruffy and, by childhood logic, smelly 'flea bags', Charlie Hull and Michael Holden were routinely bullied. Ironically, none of us would have won any best-dressed awards; this was the 1970s after all. In spite of all being working class some families were not quite as respectable as 'ours'. This divided us and was something I was well aware from the talk of female family members. There were definite signifiers of respectability centering mainly on issues such as cleanliness, hygiene, clothes, mothering, working/claiming benefit, and housing. We were always clean and well presented. We had a mortgage whilst others lived on council estates, when, pre-Thatcher, council housing was a real stigma. The 'estate' was different and mum was keen for me not to play with the boys there. At the other extreme was Neil Hudson, whose dad had a white-collar job, and whose family lived in large house with a fantastic garden. I used to go there for tea once a week after school, and each time I felt that this was very different to my home. And it was tea, not dinner. Such cultural dialects are very real and important signifiers of class (Hey, 1997). When Neil visited my house I was conscious of what he might be thinking. Nevertheless, this worked in two ways and sometimes I was picked on because we were somewhat 'posher' than other kids. Humour was helpful in such situations but being 'bright' never helped. In the working class culture of my childhood being bright, especially for boys, was nothing to shout about, it was tantamount to being gay, and probably still is.

My other vivid memory of junior school was the opening of a 'Special Unit' in the school grounds for pupils with Down's syndrome. This was a state-of-the-art modern building in contrast to our Victorian school. We were told nothing about it and there was no real inclusion, or even integration, of 'the unit'. It was called this by pupils and teachers alike. I have no idea where the pupils came from but they cannot have been local. Our attitude to the pupils there was just awful. We spoke about them in the most discriminatory manner and made fun of them whenever we could. "Mongs" was the preferred term of abuse, but there were others. This was a time before political correctness, when 'The Comedians', with stars like Bernard Manning, was a ratings winner on Saturday night television, and Irish, racist and sexist jokes were de-rigueur for working class kids, and probably for much of society. Years later I read an article in the Times Educational Supplement about the unit and how cutting-edge it was at the time. Although I had no idea at the time I do believe now that in some ways it did influence my future career path. Subliminally at least, my teaching career has been a cathartic way of dealing with the guilt I still feel from this period of my life.

The first couple of years of my comprehensive secondary education were nothing more than an extension of junior school, but on a bigger scale. Teaching was in mixed ability groups and I continued to do well despite aligning myself in terms of social grouping with the 'lads' rather than the 'crawlers', as they were known. It was all very reminiscent of Paul Willis. In third year though came the defining moment of choosing what 'O' Level exams to sit. This choice was more than simply choosing exams though, since I was also choosing to cut myself adrift from the majority of the lads and move in to a different social circle of peers. I felt in limbo for a period of time afterwards. This was a period of my life that I did not really enjoy and my exam grades were, at best; average, reflecting both my indecision and a lack of commitment. The next decision was what to do after 'O' Levels, study for 'A' Levels in the sixth form, or leave and get a job? This was pre-miners strike and jobs were readily available with the National Coal Board (NCB). These manual occupations were typical of the local environment and

nothing else was really considered as an option. I knew I did not want to work for the NCB but my imagination was so limited that I could not think of an alternative. In the end I decided on 'A' Levels simply as it delayed making a decision about a job. This period of my life also revolved around constant culture clashes with old friends now at work, and to some extent, with my dad, as I moved away from his working class roots. Sixth form was not great. There seemed to be the feelings that kids like 'us' were not university calibre, and generally, I felt that the school failed to provide support for pupils choosing between career and university. Eventually I had to resit a very disappointing set of 'A' Level results. This did little for my self-esteem and also let down my mum, and wider family, who were expecting me to go off to university.

I finally got to university in 1983 to read sociology with a minor in politics, which in reality was another three years of not having to think about getting a job. I chose Lancaster because I once went through it on a train and it was sunny. I never considered academic criteria, as I was just amazed that somewhere had actually given me an offer. I assumed it was a clerical error. My dad drove the family and me up there on the M6 one Sunday. As we reached the university campus if either my mum or dad had suggested doing a U-turn and heading back home I would have jumped at the chance. After they all left I lay on my bed and cried. University was uncomfortable, and sometimes embarrassing, for a young working class man seemingly surrounded by confident middle class peers. Class differences are lived and played out on numerous macro and micro levels, even my vernacular pronunciation of 'bus' as 'buzz' betrayed my working class roots (Hey, 1997).

Without the emergence of The Smiths things would have been even worse. Morrissey's lyrics said something to me about my life. Music had always been important in my life but during this period its influence grew. I took a popular culture option taught by Scott Lash and it was through the connection of music, politics, literature and film that my political views crystalised. The Jam, The Clash and Billy Bragg politicised me. This happened in tandem with the particular

disciplinary environment within the sociology department at Lancaster at that time. John Urry, Nick Abercrombie and Roger Penn, in particular, worked within a traditional Marxist paradigm that further influenced my politics. My studies also coincided with the miners' strike. The strike was national but also very local to me. Only just over ten percent of South Derbyshire's 3000 miners supported the strike and the stockpiled reserves of coal from working pits in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire meant that blackouts were avoided in the winter of 1984 (Richards, 1996). In 1985 Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire miners formed the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) after a bitter split with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which signaled the death rattle of the strike. This made me angry but also very embarrassed. Many of these miners were lads I had been at school with. Despite the strike ending, deep coal mining had no long-term future in South Derbyshire and the last day of production was Friday 25 March 1988 with the closure of Cadley Hill Colliery in Swadlincote. The death of coal mining and, ultimately, the end of class politics, were compounded by the death of my dad after a struggle with cancer during my second year at university. I coped by just carrying on with my studies. I was a White working class male; the only emotions I knew were silence and rage. I still regret that I could not talk to my dad and tell him just how I felt, but I had moved outside of his world.

After graduation I went to work for the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) in Ealing, West London. Given my politics it was a job I was never particularly comfortable with, but it was the only one I was offered and beggars cannot be choosers. However, my role as 'visiting officer' was perhaps the best position I could have hoped for. Firstly, I got to visit people in their own homes rather than have them come in to a grim office for an appointment. This was always appreciated. Secondly, I viewed at first hand the very real poverty many people had to cope with. This was in stark contrast to the 'lazy scrounger' mentality of many of my colleagues in the office. Finally, it also meant that I could justify giving grants rather than loans without too much surveillance from my superiors. Whilst working in London I became a member, and branch official, of The National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS) and was involved in

industrial action on a variety of occasions. I never really enjoyed London though and was ill at ease with the national north-south divide. Eventually I took the chance to move to Glasgow as the DHSS became outsourced to a 'call centre' type operation. In career terms this was a mistake though as my new role was as an internal financial officer. The post was dull and managerialist. I coped with it for a while but then decided that I needed to do something else with my life. However, beyond teaching, opportunities were rather limited.

From 1991 to 1992 I completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at Jordanhill College in Glasgow. I loved every minute of it and was successful both on teaching placements and with the academic work. At last I felt that I had found something that suited me. In 1992 I took up my first teaching post in a large primary school in the east of Scotland. Staffrooms can be very conservative places and I often felt uncomfortable with the pathologising of certain families, especially working class ones, where the mother usually seemed to be constructed as the scapegoat.

Being a male teacher in a primary school I was in the minority and felt viewed with suspicion. At best I was homosexual, at worst a paedophile. When I got married I am sure I heard an audible sigh of relief. During my teaching I particularly enjoyed my work with pupils on the margins and other staff commented positively on my skills here. This resulted in me completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs and eventually moving into a Support for Learning role and then on to a Principal Teacher of Special Education. Here I worked with children with a range of complex physical and cognitive disabilities in integrated support bases within mainstream schools. This felt like consciously and concretely making amends for my past indiscretions of behaviour towards children from the unit. It was in this role that I started working with classroom assistants, who were now more numerous after the Classroom Assistants Initiative (1998), in supporting pupils recently included into mainstream schools. It was hard not to be impressed with the care and dedication shown by such women. Yet at the same time I was struck by the lack of

acknowledgement, financial reward and respect that they endured. These were strong women who reminded me of female family members; indeed by this time my sister was herself working as a teaching assistant at a primary school in England.

In 2005, after completion of a Masters degree, I had a chance meeting with an ex-colleague who informed me of a Teaching Fellowship at the Moray House School of Education. After a successful interview I started a two-year post and was eventually given tenure as a lecturer in Primary Education. This new position served to rekindle my perplexity of earlier years. If I felt discomfort studying at university then being a university lecturer was even more uncomfortable. I felt caught up in a sense of masquerade, one in that I would be found out at any minute (Hey, 1997). But in addition, this accrued educational, social and cultural capital served only to increase my sense of marginalisation. I now felt as much of a misfit at work as I did at home. As Hey (2013) argues, for the working class "shape-shifter" personal identity can very often act as a very real barrier when entering elite spaces (2013: 116). Positively though, what work did do was introduce me to post-structuralist thought, especially the work of Bourdieu. This explained things in terms beyond the merely economic. For me this, combined with more traditional, structural Marxism, and my own past history of working closely with classroom assistants, provided the analytical gaze needed to undertake this study of the lived experiences of these women.

Overview of the Study

This chapter has provided information about the background, significance and purpose of the study, as well as my personal relationship to the research and the researched. With this in mind a broad overview of the rest of the study can now be mapped out.

Chapter 2 sets out the economic, historical and social contexts of classroom assistants in Scottish primary schools. It begins by examining the numerous titles

and terminology applied to the role before reviewing the origins of classroom assistants in Scotland. The chapter then pinpoints the legislation and initiatives that led to the rapid increase in numbers since the late 1990s. The role of classroom assistants, or more precisely, confusion over roles, is then considered before a brief focus of their perceived effectiveness. The chapter moves on to examine the social characteristics of classroom assistants before summarising their pay, status and conditions. It concludes with information on the training and qualifications of classroom assistants.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature crucial to the study's research questions. It commences by focusing on why classroom assistants are willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity. Here it considers occupational gender segregation and in particular on the structural constraints of class, through the writings of Marx, and Bourdieu, and gender, through Connell's work on patriarchy. This section then proceeds with an analysis of women's agency through Hakim's work on preference theory. Hakim's theories are appraised with reference to 'constraint' critiques. Next the chapter observes at how classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work. It is put forward that Skeggs (1997) notion of 'respectability' should be considered as a critical analytical tool here since it enables us to understand how classroom assistants negotiate their identity in relation to class and gender. The chapter also draws on Noddings' analysis of 'natural' care (1984, 1999) since this contributes to an another key aspect of classroom assistants' identity. Subsequently, the chapter contemplates the way in which classroom assistants, as an occupational group, negotiate and defend common sense knowledge and practices, against the encroachments of powerful others. It argues that this has two important functions. Lastly, the focus moves to why classroom assistants appear to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression. It is argued that through interactional strategies, grounded in Connell's work on emphasised femininity, White working class, not only police other women, but have a very circumscribed self-view.

Chapter 4 focuses on both methodology, the general theoretical and philosophical framework of the research, and method, the tools used to gather and analyse data. The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of the ontological and epistemological orientations of the research and focuses on 'critical realism' as an appropriate framework. An argument is then developed that this particular research topic lends itself to 'critical ethnography'. Such an approach is seen to have the capacity to make known and critique the taken-for granted agendas, power and oppression that potentially inhibit, repress and constrain classroom assistants. The chapter concludes by discussing method in terms of the field of study, access, sampling, role, data collection, data analysis, leaving the field and ethics.

Chapter 5 describes the findings on the day-to-day workplace experience of the classroom assistants. It discusses, in turn, several broad themes present in the working lives of classroom assistants, namely: qualifications and training, pay, conditions, planning and communication, and contracts. The chapter attempts to capture the apparent tensions in the lives of the classroom assistants. These tensions are visible in the talk they use to simultaneously distance themselves from both teachers and parents. The chapter concludes by arguing that it is through such talk that classroom assistants are able to negotiate and justify their role in the micropolitical world of the school.

Chapter 6 begins by examining talk that promotes the view that knowledge of mothering is an essential requirement for the role of a successful classroom assistant. It then argues that 'emotional labour' is important to understanding such talk. Next the chapter contends that as local women, the classroom assistants' talk displays a unique local knowledge of pupils and their families. However, these are often used negatively to differentiate to between 'good' and 'bad' parents, or carers. Next it is argued that the talk appears to position 'care' more highly than academic 'knowledge', which in turn can result in teachers and teaching being marginalised. The chapter concludes by conceding that not all classroom

assistants think and talk the same way and uses the idea of 'extremist talk' as an analytical device to explain dissenting talk.

Chapter 7 centres on atrocity stories, the dramatic talk through which a storyteller attempts to defend their particular occupational group against powerful others. The chapter considers the functions of atrocity stories, and argues that there are two important functions. Firstly, atrocity stories form part of the shared oral culture of any occupational group and, secondly, they have an important influence on the social production of occupational boundaries. Next the chapter focuses specifically on classroom assistants and how their atrocity stories, with a recurring theme of care, work to create occupational boundaries between themselves, teachers and parents. The chapter concludes by examining some extended talk from the data in an attempt to discover their shared formats and conventions.

Chapter 8 begins with a synopsis of the study so far. It reviews the research questions, methodology and methods, theoretical framework, and then presents the key findings, from the fieldwork. It commences by reviewing the Marxist concept of alienation as a possible explanation of classroom assistant identity. The chapter then uses the neo-Marxist theory of Bourdieu, particularly field, habitus and cultural capital, to extend traditional Marxist arguments. Next the chapter considers gender as a device for explaining the work choices, attitudes and lived experiences of classroom assistants. Specifically, it questions whether the role of the classroom assistant can be understood as a performance of Connell's (1987, 1995) notion of 'emphasised femininity'. Finally, in this section, anti-feminist arguments based on Hakim's (2000) idea of preference theory, and adaptive lifestyle, are rejected in favour of a more balanced explanation that combines agency and structure. The chapter then addresses the contradictory and conflictual relations of gender and class, through Skeggs' (1997) analytical tool of 'respectability'. Two ways in which respectability sustains class inequality and injustice are discussed. Firstly, respectability is discussed as an ideological form of self-persecution, and secondly, respectability is discussed as a means of monitoring and policing others. This chapter concludes with a consideration of

how classroom assistants try to exist under such ideologically dominating pressures.

Chapter 9 provides some recommendations, reservations and reflections on the study. It begins by suggesting recommendations in the areas of practice, policy and research. The chapter then warns against viewing the issues raised as supposed deficiencies of classroom assistants themselves to situate discussion in the context of broader societal and political contexts that have shaped, and continue to shape, the work of classroom assistants. The chapter moves on to question the role of the 'self' in the process of critical ethnography, in particular in generating rapport with the women in the sample. It goes on to critique some of the difficulties here and discusses my continuing doubts and insecurities. The chapter then focuses on the research questions and acknowledges the central analytical role of Skeggs (1997) notion of 'respectability'. The chapter then widens its focus to discuss the influences of late capitalism and neoliberalism on the labour market for classroom assistants. This section ends with a comparison of the market conditions of classroom assistants in relation to care workers in general. The chapter concludes with a note of cautious optimism regarding changes in cognition of classroom assistants.

The study can now properly begin by setting out in detail its background to classroom assistants' working conditions as a prelude to addressing the first of the research questions.

Chapter 2

Classroom Assistants: The Scottish Context

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to set the economic, historical and social contexts of classroom assistants in Scottish primary schools, as a means of then addressing the reasons why classroom assistants willingly undertake the work they do. It begins by discussing the multiple titles and terminology applied to the role, before discussing the origins of classroom assistants in Scotland. The chapter pinpoints the legislation and initiatives that have led to the rapid increase in numbers since the late 1990s. The role of classroom assistants, or more precisely, confusion over roles, is then discussed before a brief discussion of their perceived effectiveness. The chapter then considers the social characteristics of classroom assistants before outlining their pay, status and conditions. The chapter concludes with information on the training and qualifications of classroom assistants.

Titles and Terminology

'Classroom Assistant' is both a generic and specific term[4] to describe a range of paid, additional, support staff employed in Scottish schools. In generic terms it covers posts such as Special Educational Needs assistant, Additional Support Needs auxiliary, behaviour support assistant, classroom auxiliary, pupil support assistant, and support for learning assistant. In specific terms it refers to staff with a remit to provide, "general class learning and teaching support" (Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), 2007: 13). Although Doherty (2004) attempted to provide a full definition of the range of job titles, roles, and responsibilities of support staff in schools, for Wilson *et al*. (2001) the literature in this area generally contains, "a considerable lack of clarity surrounding the use of the term

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[4] However, when referring to a specific role, and/or in direct quotations, the original nomenclature will be used.

and the functions assigned to the post" (2001: 3). Indeed, Barkham (2008) referred to support staff as those in school, "whose job title is other than teacher" (2008: 839). In England, Farrell *et al*. (1999) saw no clear distinction between the work of learning support assistants, who work with children with a statement of special educational need, and that of other more general assistants who work in the classroom. However, within Scottish schools, Stead *et al*. (2007) reflected that teachers tended to regard Special Educational Needs assistants and behaviour support assistants as fellow professionals, whilst classroom assistants were merely seen as 'an extra pair of hands'. This was still the case even where roles and responsibilities undertaken were very similar.

The meaning of the term classroom assistant appears to have varied over time, reflecting changing roles due to the gradual 'opening up' of the classroom (Morgan *et al*. 1998). For the Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER) (2005) this array of job titles may expose the 'ad hoc' nature in which support roles have arisen in practice. Indeed, the EOC (2007) provided evidence of some Scottish local authorities using a range of up to eight different job titles for support staff in their schools. Wilson *et al*. (2001) believed that the title classroom assistant is, "by no means universally accepted as a job title [but] is the most common title in use" (2001: 3). However, in the light of wide variation in role description, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (2006) has highlighted, "the need to find an alternative title for classroom assistants and other adults who support teachers and pupils to better reflect their various roles" (2006: online).

Historically, Scotland has been responsible for its own education system, and this devolution of responsibility for education has led to some differences in the practical implementation of government policy between Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. This has been particularly relevant since 1999 with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. One interesting difference that has emerged between Scotland and England is in the job title used to describe support staff. In England the generic job title used is 'teaching assistant', rather than

'classroom assistant', as in Scotland. This difference in nomenclature carries an almost subliminal message that illuminates both political policy and practical implementation differences between Scotland and England. In the context of a heavily unionised workforce, Scottish teaching unions aired concerns regarding the demarcation of duties and professional boundaries, and the word 'teaching' was not used in either the naming of classroom support staff or in describing their roles and responsibilities (Ozga, 2005). SCER (2005) also noted the resistance in Scotland to upgrading classroom assistants' status, and expressed the view that the retention of the title of 'classroom assistant', rather than teaching assistant, reflected, "fears that classroom assistants might become teachers on the cheap" (2005: 7). It appears that the increased role and number of classroom assistants has been construed as a threat to the professional identity and status of teachers, with teaching unions asking questions about their deployment (Dillow, 2010). To some extent, this could be why, in Scotland, the equivalent of the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) does not exist, as it does in England. The HLTA, based on standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), gives teaching assistants a degree of professional autonomy, enables them to be able to teach whole classes and makes moving in to the teaching profession much easier (Teacher Training Agency (TTA), 2004).

The Origins of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

Historically there have been two distinct groups of adults who have supported teachers and pupils in schools and classrooms; non-paid parent helpers and a range of paid non-teaching support staff, known as classroom assistants. Although they have been described as a relatively new occupation (EOC, 2007), Wilson *et al*. (2003) remind us that, "the use of staff to support teachers is not new" (2003: 189). Indeed, in Scotland, as far back as the late 1960s, Duthie (1970) had identified, what he referred to, in a rather gendered fashion, as 'housekeeping' tasks that did not necessarily require a teacher's professional skill or training. However, it was the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), in England, and the Primary Memorandum (SED, 1965) in

Scotland, and their focus on child-centred philosophies, which precipitated an increase in classroom assistant numbers. The adoption of these child-centred philosophies in many primary schools resulted in teachers moving away from whole-class, direct teaching, to group teaching and activity methods. This new 'integrated day' benefited from an 'extra pair of hands' and the Plowden Report itself recommended the recruitment of 'teacher aides' to facilitate the implementation of these changes in pedagogy. In Scotland in 1972 the then Secretary of State supported the concept of allocating additional resources in the form of ancillary staff with the statement, "The Government is satisfied that there is scope for a considerable increase in this form of assistance to teachers" (cited in, Kennedy & Duthie, 1975: 1). Due to this, the number of auxiliaries working in nursery and primary schools more than doubled from 555 in 1970 to 1160 by the end of 1972.

Kennedy and Duthie (1975) provided an early evaluation of the impact that additional adults can have in terms of classroom processes. Commissioned by the Scottish Education Department to undertake a feasibility study of auxiliaries in classrooms, they found that auxiliaries, "acted as another pair of hands" (1975: 3) in undertaking non-teaching duties and recommended their role should be, "[s]upervision duties within class as well as out of the class, as well as 'housekeeping duties' and 'general school duties'" (1975: 108). However, whilst Kennedy and Duthie highlighted that, overall, the use of classroom auxiliaries offered a variety of benefits to teachers and schools, they also aired fears that auxiliaries may become engaged in teaching, an issue that remains a legitimate concern today. For Clayton (1993), over the intervening years the role of classroom assistants has developed from, "care and 'housekeeping' to substantial involvement in the learning process" (1993: 42). Hence today, classroom assistants carry out a range of practical and administrative tasks, and work under the direction of the class teacher in the supervision and support of pupils' learning (Schlapp and Davidson, 2001a). Since mid-1970s the number of classroom assistants in Scottish classrooms has continued to increase, for reasons that will now be considered.

Growth in the Use of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

In 1998, as part of his statement on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that the government was allocating £320 million to Scottish education authorities over a three year period in order to support the government in plans to raise standards (Calder, 2003). Included in this funding was the Classroom Assistants Initiative, which was announced in July 1998 by the Scottish Office. This initiative, supported by the Excellence Fund (Schlapp and Davidson, 2001b; SEED, 2002), was triggered by the desire of the Scottish Office to improve school pupil attainment by providing practical and pedagogical assistance to teachers, and was, according to Classroom Assistants Working Group (CAWG) minutes, "a ministerial priority" (cited in Gilbert *et al*. 2011: 28). As such, this can be seen as an integral part of the United Kingdom Labour Government's policy to drive up standards in education (Moyles and Suschitzky 1997) and was reflected in Scotland by recommendations from the SOEID (1999b) in 'Time for Teaching'. In Scotland, the aim was to recruit an additional 5,000 classroom assistants, by March 2002, in order to lower the pupil-adult ratio in primary school classrooms to 15:1, with the intention of increasing performance standards by creating smaller classes, thus allowing teachers to be relieved of some non-teaching elements of their work and to focus more on teaching (SCER, 2005; Gilbert *et al*., 2011). However, it was clearly stated that these classroom assistants were to work, "under the direction and supervision of teachers" (SOEID, 1999a: 1). The initial pilot scheme was rolled out across Scottish primary schools and was eventually extended to secondary and special schools.

The Classroom Assistants Initiative was later complemented by the 'McCrone Agreement' (McCrone, 2000; SEED, 2001a). This agreement was reached by a tripartite implementation committee established between teacher representatives, employers (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)), and the Scottish Executive (Wilson *et al*., 2003). The McCrone Agreement centred on improving the work and employment of teachers through the agreement of an identified list

of administrative and other non-teaching tasks which were no longer to be undertaken by teachers (EOC, 2007). Although for Warhurst *et al*. (2009) this had an indirect effect on classroom assistants in that such administrative and other non-teaching tasks were not eliminated, but were merely displaced to other workers, creating an increase in classroom assistant posts. A list of such tasks was found in Annex E of the agreement and became central to the significant investment that would be made in additional support staff. The intention was that these tasks would generally be undertaken by support staff, thereby allowing the particular skills and expertise of the teacher to be deployed most effectively. Approximately, the equivalent of an additional 3500 support staff, including classroom assistants, were appointed and the deployment of these additional resources was determined locally on the basis of local need. The introduction of the additional support staff was to be phased in over a three-year period commencing on 1 April 2001 using £50 million made available annually through Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) from the Scottish Executive to Scottish local authorities (Wilson *et al*., 2005; Wilson and Davidson, 2007). Again, the growing use of non-teaching staff in Scottish schools should be set in the context of ministers' desire to raise standards (Wilson *et al*., 2003).

Support For Special Educational Needs/Additional Support Needs

Subsequent government policies for the provision of Scottish education have extended the deployment of classroom assistants into secondary and special schools, and broadened the work they do (EOC, 2007). Specifically, the range of tasks classroom assistants are expected to do has been extended to include social inclusion and pupil discipline. Important here, were the Warnock Report (1978) in the United Kingdom, and in Scotland, the HMI Report (1978) and the subsequent Education (Scotland) Act 1981 (HMSO, 1981), which advocated inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs[5] (SEN) into mainstream schools. Such a major shift in policy required additional staff, and for Thomas (1987), it was this increase in pupils with SEN in mainstream schools that was a crucial factor

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[5] Now referred to in Scotland as Additional Support Needs (ASN) since the introduction of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

influencing the change in the make-up of school staffing and the development of the provision of paid non-teaching staff. In Scotland this became even more vital with the widening definition of need resulting from the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning Act (SEED, 2004). O' Brien and Garner (2001a) stated that classroom assistants are now responsible for, "…some of the most challenging and complex needs" and are, "…pivotal to the development of successful inclusive practice" (2001a: 1). Stead *et al*. (2007) agreed, stating that classroom assistants play an important, sometimes, "critical role in maintaining some pupils in mainstream education" (2007: 186). Nevertheless, a concern remains that the least qualified staff members are responsible for the students with the most complex learning characteristics (Giangreco, *et al*. 2005), which is unacceptable and inequitable for both students and classroom assistants (Bourke & Carrington, 2007). As well as the move towards inclusive education, the devolving of budgets to schools by local education authorities (LEAs) has enabled head teachers to employ increasing numbers of classroom assistants as a cost-effective way of providing support to classroom teachers. Classroom assistants, it seems, are, 'almost exclusively *the way*, rather than *a way*, to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms' [Emphasis in original] (Giangreco, 2013: 94).

Current Numbers of Classroom Assistants in Scottish Primary Schools

The result of the introduction of such national initiatives and legislation has led to the situation where classroom assistants now represent a substantial proportion of the school workforce. The most up-to-date figures from the Scottish Government show that classroom assistants make up 58 per cent of all support staff and almost 25 per cent of the Scottish primary school workforce[6]. The pupil to adult ratio is presently 6 to 1 in Scotland compared to a 2.8 to 1 in England. Hancock and Eyres (2004) argued that this more favourable ratio in English classrooms can be understood by the United Kingdom Government's focus on national literacy and numeracy targets, and its funding of the recruitment of teaching assistants to

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[6] *Statistical Bulletin, Education Series: Teachers in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government (2014)

support the 1 in 4 children judged not to be progressing as required in these areas. However, it can be seen that classroom assistant numbers, the overall total of support staff, and pupil numbers all rose slightly over this period (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Staff in Scottish Primary Schools (2010-2014)[7]

Staff in Scottish Primary Schools	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant	3,240	3,091	3,458	3,826	3,396
Behaviour Support	48	45	38	27	33
Classroom Assistant	4,215	4,244	4,196	3,996	4,324
Other Childcare Worker (qualified)	93	80	58	67	70
Other Childcare Worker (unqualified)	222	218	122	119	120
Total Support Staff	7,818	7,678	7,872	8,035	7,913
Teachers	23,131	22,851	22,732	22,905	23,029
Pupils	365,376	366,429	370,680	377,382	385,212

The continued employment of classroom assistants relies upon the availability of funding. However, while essential for the employment of classroom assistants, such reliance on funding streams also brings uncertainty with regard to classroom assistants' future prospects. Indeed, there is recent evidence in Scotland of some local authorities trying to reduce the numbers of support staff to make savings following recent budget cuts (TES, 2012) after the end of the concordat relationship between the Scottish Government and local government, endorsed by both the Scottish Ministers and by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Presidential Team. Nevertheless, in spite of this decrease in numbers,

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[7] *Statistical Bulletin, Education Series: Teachers in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government (2014)

there still appears to be considerable confusion as to what the role of classroom assistants in schools actually is.

The Role of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

In 1998, at the outset of the Classroom Assistants Initiative, the Classroom Assistants Working Group (CAWG) was convened by the Scottish Office to establish the roles of classroom assistants. It did so by developing roles undertaken by those support staff already in Scottish schools. However, whilst CAWG had representation from the main teaching union in Scotland, the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), there was no participation from the unions that may have been expected to represent classroom assistants, for instance UNISON or the GMB, as the work, not the pay, of classroom assistants appeared to be the primary agenda of CAWG (Gilbert *et al*. 2011). The initial 1999 Scottish Office 'Classroom Assistants Implementation Guidance' (SOEID, 1999a) outlined the job of classroom assistants and provided general advice to local authorities about deployment and employment in primary schools. However, much of the policy prescription lacked clarity in its outline (SCER, 2005; Warhurst *et al*., 2009) as the Scottish Office neither created national terms and conditions for classroom assistants, nor provided detailed job descriptions (SCER, 2006). Instead, local authorities were expected to determine pay in relation to the skills perceived to be required for the jobs; with national guidelines only informing more detailed job descriptions at the level of local authorities and schools (SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007). Annex B of the implementation guidance stated that classroom assistants should carry out a range of tasks under the direction of teachers and within four general categories (Annex B, SOEID, 1999b):

- Contribute to the effective organisation and use of resources
- Contribute to the quality of care and welfare of pupils
- Support the needs of pupils in effectively accessing the curriculum
- Support the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom.

The Scottish Office stressed though that Annex B was, "not intended to be a complete list of all the tasks that a classroom assistant could perform; nor is it intended that a single classroom assistant would be able to take on all the tasks on the list" (SOEID, 1999b: 12). Despite this, any clear demarcation of roles between classroom assistants and teachers is virtually impossible to police. Even when human resources outline that classroom assistants should only "support the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom", "support literacy and numeracy development" and Support the needs of pupils in effectively accessing the curriculum" (see Appendix 7), the reality of this in schools means that boundaries around learning and teaching are always going to be blurred, and frequently lead to tensions.

For SCER (2005) and Warhurst *et al.*, (2009), the phraseology of the latter two categories of Annex B was unclear, and created ambiguity, as such roles could be seen as stretching beyond core and administrative duties and into supporting learning. SCER (2006), went on to comment, that while some of these tasks in Annex B were distinct from teaching *per se*, others involving the encouraging and supporting of learning are more open to interpretation. The EOC (2007) were in general agreement, seeing the first two categories as more basic duties; practical and administrative tasks requiring a short period of induction training, and undertaken with straightforward guidance from teachers and suitable on entry to job. However, in contrast, the second two categories formed more complex duties with a focus on 'supporting learning', although still under the direction of teachers, and were only to be part of the role if classroom assistants had the appropriate level of training, experience or qualifications (SOEID, 1999b; SCER, 2005; EOC, 2007). This lack of clarity was made worse with the publication of a revised set of Annex B guidance on the duties and responsibilities of classroom assistants issued by Scottish Executive in 2005 (SCER, 2006). This re-issue subdivided the duties of classroom assistants of the original implementation guidance from 1999, but did not succeed in making these roles any clearer (EOC, 2007).

As a result, whilst the EOC (2007) stated that, generally, the work of classroom assistants is primarily about supporting pupils and teachers in the learning process, the EOC and others, see a small, but significant, group of classroom assistants appearing to be working beyond the policy remit in areas such as teaching new concepts, assessing the learning and development of pupils, looking after a class and planning the curriculum; although these are commonly, and somewhat euphemistically, referred to as 'extension' or 'consolidation' tasks. These higher-level learning activities blur boundaries and lead to an 'upward role stretch' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009) of the work for some classroom assistants into the remit of professionally trained and qualified teachers (SCER, 2005; EOC, 2007). Classroom assistants, it can be argued, are becoming proto-educators, but on a 'sticky floor'[8] (Berheide, 1992) as this informal upskilling is not reflected in either increased pay or status (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009).

The range of roles and expectations for classroom/ teaching assistants is now reflected in the United Kingdom wide National Occupational Standards (Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO) 2001), which was drawn up for staff in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who work with teachers in classrooms supporting the learning process in primary, secondary and special schools. Stead *et al.* (2007) believed these standards place the emphasis on responsibilities rather than listing specific tasks or duties, and that they present, "particular challenges both for additional staff and teachers in the management of roles and responsibilities" (2007: 194). In Scotland, SEED (2001b) also provided useful guidance on the roles and responsibilities, specific curriculum support initiatives and tasks to produce effective partnerships; the target audience being newly qualified teachers. While SEED provided detailed guidance and training materials to help teachers work with, and manage, classroom assistants, Warhurst *et al.* (2009) stated that newly qualified teachers still felt they lacked training in how to work with classroom assistants. However, the intended impact was to send a very clear message to local authorities, head teachers and class teachers about

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[8] Refers to women who are trapped in low-wage, low mobility jobs.

the important role classroom assistants were expected to play in improving Scottish education.

The GTCS (2003, 2006) welcomed the Classroom Assistants Initiative in that it could free teachers from tasks that did not directly relate to the process of learning and teaching. However, they always believed that the role of the classroom assistant needed to be carefully defined to ensure that there was no confusion between tasks a teacher should undertake, and tasks a classroom assistant should undertake. They produced advice for their own members regarding classroom assistants: stating that they should support the teacher, support pupils' learning, support pupils involved in practical activities, support children with additional support needs, support teachers and pupils in activities outwith the classroom/school, and support the work of the school. It was clearly stated though, that classroom assistants should work under the direction of a fully registered teacher in activities to consolidate learning and should not be used to introduce and develop new learning, or to teach individuals, or groups of pupils, new topics. Despite this, the Times Educational Supplement (TES) (2012) reported that recent changes, which cut supply teachers', pay and resulted in recruitment difficulties, have been followed by reports that some Scottish schools are asking classroom assistants to take classes because they cannot find alternative cover.

For an example of current job descriptions for classroom assistant and additional support needs auxiliary within the local authority used in this study see Appendix 7 and 8.

The Effectiveness of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

Almost everyone having any connection with classroom assistants will tell you about dedicated individuals 'worth their weight in gold', and indeed their benefits have long been considered common sense (Giangreco, *et al*. 2005: 29). Yet, the research evidence on the effectiveness of classroom assistants is inconclusive and

there is still some doubt to the extent that the introduction, and the subsequent increase in numbers, of classroom assistants have impacted on the lived experiences of pupils and teachers (Bourke, 2009). Hancock *et al*., (2001) stated that, "although there was a widespread personal belief that assistants were a good thing…research evidence is supportive rather than conclusive" (Hancock *et al*., 2001: 6). In their overview of the ways in which teachers and teaching assistants can work together, Cremin *et al*. (2003) suggested that, while there has indeed been an increased additional support for teachers in classrooms, little attention has actually been paid to how this works beyond the common sense notion that when large classes of children have access to additional adult help and support there will be a positive impact on learning and development. But while it may have been the case that support staff were initially introduced into classrooms without the support of clear research evidence stating that they could make a difference to children's learning, such evidence is now beginning to amass, with a substantial amount of recently published literature replicating longstanding issues that have been available in the literature for 20 years or more (Giangreco, et al., 2014).

To try to assess the effect of classroom assistants in Scottish primary school classrooms, the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) (Wilson *et al*., 2001; Schlapp *et al*., 2001; Wilson *et al*., 2002), funded by the Scottish Executive, conducted evaluations of the Classroom Assistants Initiative implementation. The main aims were to explore the relationship between pupil attainment and the use of classroom assistants by comparing different modes of deployment, to look at the utilisation of teacher time, and document classroom interaction and the learning experiences of pupils. Although the measurement of such aims are difficult, at the end of their two-year evaluation of the initiative, Wilson *et al*. (2002) reported that, "[o]verall the impact made by the Classroom Assistants Initiative has been very positive" (2002: v) but warned that, "[i]t is important not to overstate any apparent links between success in meeting attainment targets and the use of classroom assistants" (2002: 37). In the United Kingdom as a whole, a review of literature by the EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information) Centre concluded that the notion of effectiveness was

complex, with, "no clear and consistent effect" (Howes *et al*., 2003: 35), a view supported by Mujis and Reynolds (2003). In these studies the main barrier to effectiveness was considered to be a lack of planning and liaison time between teachers and teaching assistants (Dillow, 2010). However, qualifications, training and status issues were also highlighted in previous research (Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997; Lee, 2002; Wilson *et al*, 2002).

Other research too has reflected similar concerns. Evans and Lunt (2002) suggested that the use of learning support assistants (LSAs) to support pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms could actually work against inclusion. They argued that the presence of learning support assistants could potentially remove the ultimate responsibility for pupils with special educational needs away from class teachers. More recently, in a canon of work ranging over the last decade, Blatchford and various colleagues questioned the effectiveness of teaching assistants in England and Wales (Blatchford *et al*., 2003; 2004; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2011; 2012). The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project; the largest, most in-depth study in the area of support staff, critically examined the effect of teaching assistants on the academic progress of 8,200 pupils, based on observations of 700 pupils and 100 teaching assistants, data from 17,800 questionnaires and 470 interviews (Blatchford *et al*., 2012). The results pointed to the fact that the pupils most in need were being let down by current classroom practice. Results showed that teaching assistants did have a positive effect on teachers' workloads, job satisfaction and stress levels. In addition, teachers also felt that teaching assistants had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning, and observations showed a positive effect on individual attention for pupils, and on levels of control. However, the study found little evidence of teaching assistant support improving positive approaches to learning by pupils; and, crucially, a consistent, negative relationship between amount of teaching assistant support and progress made in English, Mathematics, Science. Blatchford *et al*. summed this up with the rather, "unexpected and troubling" (2012: 8) conclusion that the, "…more teaching assistant support pupils received, the less progress they made" (2012: 46). Crucially though,

methodologically level of support is difficult to assess and one must also question just what progress these pupils would have made without teaching assistants. Indeed, these findings did not go unchallenged. UNISON, the largest union for teaching assistants, strongly rebutted the findings based on 210 replies to an online survey of school leaders from local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland (UNISON, 2013a). Although their study was in England and Wales, Blatchford *et al.* are clear that it has implications for other countries, and there is no reason to suppose that Scotland would not be one of them.

Nevertheless, whilst the quantitative evidence may be mixed; qualitative evidence, based on the views of head teachers, class teachers and pupils, appears to be supportive (Dillow, 2010). Here, effectiveness is used to include such notions as positive effects on families, relationships and the environment. For instance, in Scotland, while there was no direct link to attainment, Wilson *et al.* (2002) did feel that classroom assistants made positive contributions to children's development and learning experiences. More recently, the Classroom Assistant Project (CAP) stated that classroom assistants, "can make a strong contribution to improving the quality of learning in the classroom, by having a positive impact on the personal and social development of pupils, and by encouraging parental involvement in their children's learning" (Woolfson and Truswell, 2005: 74).

The Social Characteristics of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

Classroom assistants are almost exclusively women (Schlapp *et al.*, 2001; EOC, 2007), despite attempts to attract men (SCER, 2005), indeed, in a SCER (2006) survey, 99 percent of classroom assistants were women. These women were typically aged 31-50, but concentrated in the 41-50 age range, partnered (only 8 percent were lone parents), and 80 percent had children of school age (SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007). Schlapp *et al.* (2001), referring to Scotland, also commented on the under-representation of minority ethnic classroom assistants in the workforce as a whole.

Typically, classroom assistants did not have a second job, as being a classroom assistant is not regarded as an entry-level job but as a job in itself. However, for the majority the income from their work is an important contribution to the family budget (Barkham, 2008: 845). Also, typically, the job was not regarded as a route to becoming a teacher (SCER, 2006), possibly because since the 1980s and 1990s discourses of managerialism had become common in education (Patrick, *et al*., 2003); meaning teaching now appeared to run contrary to a strongly held 'child-centred' philosophy of education (Dunne, *et al*., 2008). However, in an earlier study Wilson *et al*. (2002) stated that around a quarter of classroom assistants wanted to move into teacher training in the next three to five years. A high average length of service suggests that classroom assistants enjoyed some job satisfaction and regarded their work as a long-term commitment (Woolf and Bassett, 1988: 62). Classroom assistants are often from the local area (EOC, 2007) and are likely to have had experience with children through previous school based activities, such as working as voluntary parent helpers or paid playground supervisors (SCER, 2005). Moving in to the classroom assistant role is seen as a 'natural progression' in their eyes (Warhurst *et al*., 2009). Probably due to this local knowledge and experience, SCER (2006) found a roughly even split between formal and informal methods of recruitment, nevertheless, all candidates still went through a formal selection process. The EOC (2007) reported that classroom assistant jobs are very popular, with no shortage of applicants. Anecdotal evidence from head teachers reported 300 applications for one particular post and 70 for each post advertised in another school (Warhurst *et al*., 2009). This may appear surprising as classroom assistants are, in fact, amongst the lowest paid Scottish local government workers.

The Pay, Status and Conditions of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

Classroom assistants are local government employees and as such levels of pay are determined by, and differ across, each of the 32 local employers. Under the Scottish Joint Council National Agreement, pay rates for white collar local government workers are based on 37 hours a week, 52 weeks a year for full-time

employees. Typically pay rates for classroom assistants reflect local government pay scales and are considered equivalent to the lowest clerical grade (GS1, GS2) (SCER, 2006), despite the absence of any job evaluation (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009). The EOC (2007), in a General Formal Investigation (GFI) into classroom assistants' pay and status in Scottish primary schools under section 57 (1) of the Sex Discrimination Act (EOC, 2007), reported that classroom assistants were typically paid between £5.68 and £7.58 per hour, giving an annual salary in the range of £6,810 - £10,089. The then United Kingdom National Minimum Wage was £5.52 per hour and the Low Pay Threshold, the commonly accepted benchmark for low pay, was £7.00 per hour (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009). More recently Argyll and Bute advertised a part time 12 hours per week, classroom assistant position at £14,307-£15,165 pro rata; whilst in Fife, a classroom assistant vacancy working 12.5 hours per week was advertised at £16,087 - £18,114 pro rata; and Midlothian, meanwhile, advertised a learning assistant post of 12.5 hours per week at £16,342 - £17,338 pro rata (TES, 2012). Notice however, that the actual pay classroom assistants receive is pro-rated to reflect the hours they work, which are less than the standard full-time hours. Most classroom assistants are in permanent employment of between 25 and 30 hours per week (SCER, 2006). So in practice classroom assistants are paid less than the salary range suggests, reflecting the number of hours and weeks worked, which is typically 8.45am-3.30/4.00pm, 39 weeks per year (SCER, 2005).

In the majority of local authorities, classroom assistant pay progresses along a pay spinal column and is related to years of continuous service. Pay ceilings are reached when employees reach a specific length of service. Therefore, for many classroom assistants, factors such as qualifications, training and actual job content or demand do not affect their level of pay (EOC, 2007). Salary is 'spread' evenly across 12 months to provide a regular monthly income that enables continuity of service and prevents the negative future impact breaks in National Insurance contributions (EOC, 2007). However, the spreading of pay across the year disqualifies classroom assistants from entitlement to state benefits outwith term time despite low pay (SCER, 2005). Classroom assistants were employed as

permanent members of school staff and viewed as a component of a schools core staffing. Yet despite this Stead *et al.* (2007) commented that classroom assistants were not always included on the staff list of some schools.

Classroom assistants are entitled to paid annual leave, but this has to be taken outside term time. The Scottish Joint Council National Agreement on pay and conditions of service sets out a minimum provision of paid general annual leave of 20 days. For employees with at least five years continuous service, the provision is increased to 25 days. However, the practice of calculating annual leave entitlement in hours, rather than days, has a particularly negative effect on the salary of the lowest paid public sector workers such as classroom assistants (EOC, 2007). But for Warhurst *et al*, (2009), many classroom assistants saw this as a trade off, with 72 percent of respondents in their research stating that their working hours suited both family life and childcare costs.

In terms of unionisation, Gilbert *et al.* (2011) reported that classroom assistant trade union membership was relatively low at the outset of the Classroom Assistants Initiative, and remained low for a number of years after implementation. Lindsay *et al.* (2007) give a figure of 65 percent for Scottish public sector trade union membership, with women's membership particularly high and growing. Nevertheless, it must be noted that trade union membership for women working part-time is lower, and that women working part-time are generally more critical of 'old style' trade unions (Tomlinson, 2008). Current figures from UNISON point to 55 percent of classroom assistants being members of a trade union and 95 percent of these being members of UNISON itself. These relatively low figures are often explained by the nature of the work, which is perceived as having family-friendly working conditions, and the general lack of militancy in the caring professions. It would appear the 'putting children first' attitude, both their family and the pupils, has not helped create a strong trade union membership (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009; Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). However, this needs to be contrasted with Scottish nursery nurses, a similar caring profession, where membership and militancy are both noticeably higher, and who undertook a

very high profile, and long, strike over underpayment in 2003/2004 (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009).

The Qualifications and Training of Classroom Assistants in Scotland

Neither formal qualifications nor continued professional development are 'essential' requirements for entry (EOC, 2007). However, candidates usually have to show evidence of previous experience of working in their chosen field. SCER (2005) report noted that the most important reported attributes of classroom assistants are experience and social skills, along with physical skills necessary to deal with some pupils with Additional Support Needs (Warhurst *et al*., 2009). As such, being a classroom assistant is certainly not an unskilled job. Despite the fact that whilst no Scottish local authority requires classroom assistants to have any relevant classroom assistant qualifications (Warhurst *et al*., 2009), doing a respected course and having previous experience is seen as an advantage (TES, 2012). Applicants are also, generally, asked to provide evidence of basic literacy and numeracy at Standard Grade, or equivalent, or a relevant qualification, such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

A range of standard courses, which are designed to be suitable for support staff in both England and Scotland, are available. SVQs assess skills in the workplace but may also include attendance at a Further Education (FE) college, or other training provider, to learn the theory underpinning the choice of qualification. SVQs involve regular assessment in the workplace, but entail no formal exams. Rather, they normally involve someone in the workplace to help support the classroom assistant. Although there are no time restrictions, obtaining an SVQ generally takes between 18 months and two years for an SVQ Level 3, or one year for an SVQ Level 2. The Professional Development Award (PDA) Certificate for Classroom Assistants (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5) was developed and introduced to support the 1998 Classroom Assistant Initiative providing classroom assistants with the training required to undertake support for learning tasks. The EOC (2007) found that the majority of Scotland's

classroom assistants had achieved or were working towards achieving the PDA or the relevant SVQ.

Once in the job, and to provide themselves with the knowledge and understanding to support learning, many classroom assistants obtain further qualifications in areas such as first aid and calming techniques (TES, 2012). However, Stead *et al.* (2007) reported that some classroom assistants had qualifications well beyond those required for the post, and which could have been associated with more highly paid work. Survey figures from both the SCER (2006) and the EOC (2007) showed that almost 70 percent classroom assistants have at least Standard Grades; 44 percent have Highers or A Levels; 16 percent have Higher National Certificates (HNCs) or Higher National Diplomas (HNDs); over 20 percent have SVQs, almost 50 percent have the PDA; around 10 percent have a degree, and around 3 percent a higher degree. Despite this though, there is no occupational or professional body regulating the work of classroom assistants, working to raise standards of practice or promote their education and training. While there are United Kingdom wide occupational standards for classroom and teaching assistants, in Scotland these standards are only used for developing SVQs (EOC, 2007).

Stead *et al*. (2007) warned that although training and qualifications for classroom assistants are being developed locally and nationally, it would be unfortunate if these resulted in a diminishing of the informal nature of relationships in schools. It is, in some part, the informality of the relationship, or 'emotional geography' (Graves, 2011), between classroom assistants, parents and pupils that has been recognised in research as extremely positive; with classroom assistants demonstrating, "insights and knowledge of the children" (Cremin *et al*, 2003: 424), "tolerance, fairness and patience" (Groom & Rose, 2005: 23) and, "listening to both sides of the story" (Groom & Rose, 2005: 27).

Summary

Classroom assistants remain on the margins of school hierarchies, as witnessed by short-term contracts, low pay, limited access to formal training and 'low status'. Etzioni (1969) referred to teachers as 'semi-professionals', which makes one wonder about the status afforded to classroom assistants. The years since 1998 have seen a dramatic increase in the number of classroom assistants working in Scottish primary schools as successive Scottish governments have attempted to raise standards by freeing teachers from administrative and 'housekeeping' duties, thus allowing them to teach. The vast majority of these classroom assistants are mature, White, working class, local women who are partnered and have school aged children. The job of classroom assistant is popular despite low pay and poor status. The job itself has a general confusion over its title and role, although it is usually thought to entail general class learning and teaching support under the direction of a fully registered teacher. Recently, a small, but significant group of classroom assistants appear to be working beyond their policy remit and in to areas of the remit of professionally trained and qualified teachers. However, this new proto-educator role for classroom assistants is not reflected in enhanced pay or status. Despite this, levels of trade union membership and militancy remain low. Generally, regardless of general feelings of school staff that classroom assistants have had a positive effect on the lived experiences of pupils and teachers, there is little research evidence to support these assumptions, and indeed the most recent research actually contradicts this. The next chapter goes on to examine why, given such conditions, classroom assistants are willing to undertake such work; how they maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work; how they create and sustain positive social and professional identities, and how, to some extent, they are complicit in their own oppression.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature key to the study's research questions. It begins by focusing on why classroom assistants are willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity. Here I look at occupational gender segregation and, in particular, on the structural constraints of class through the writings of Marx, and Bourdieu, and gender through Connell's work on patriarchy. This section continues with an analysis of women's agency through Hakim's (2000) work on preference theory. Hakim's theories are then evaluated with reference to 'constraint' critiques (Ginn *et al*. 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2010). Next, the chapter looks at how classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work. It is proposed that Skeggs' (1997) notion of 'respectability' should be considered as a crucial analytical tool here since it enables us to understand how classroom assistants negotiate their identity in relation to class and gender. The chapter also draws on Noddings' analysis of 'natural' care (1984, 1999), and Hochschild's (1979, 1983) work on 'emotional labour', since these both contribute to an understanding of classroom assistants' identity. Subsequently, the chapter considers the way in which classroom assistants, as an occupational group, negotiate and defend common sense knowledge and practices against the encroachments of powerful others. It argues that this has two important functions. Finally, the focus moves to why classroom assistants appear to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression. It is argued that through interactional strategies grounded in emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987), White working class women not only police other women (Cohen, 1980), but have a very restricted self-view.

Why are classroom assistants willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity?

Jobs and workplaces are not neutral spaces. Occupations, including the work of classroom assistants, are divided along the lines of class, gender, and race (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). For Bach *et al*. (2006), the development and deployment of classroom assistants is likely to be sensitive to the characteristics of the local labour market, and influenced by the demographic features of the school population in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. The fact that classroom assistants are almost exclusively women is an example of occupational gender segregation; the tendency for men and women clustered in certain occupations such as clerical and sales, unskilled factory work, and domestic or caring roles (Crompton and Scott, 2000; Blackburn, *et al*., 2002). Such segregation is not only demonstrated within the United Kingdom labour market, but is also a clear and universal phenomenon (Blackburn, *et al*., 2000). This type of segregation, where men and women undertake different occupations, is sometimes referred to as horizontal occupational segregation. In addition to this, is the idea of vertical occupational segregation (Hakim, 1979), where men tend to dominate the higher grade, higher paid occupations; and women the lower grade, lower paid occupations in the same area of activity.

Historically, there are a number of broad theoretical approaches to understanding occupational gender segregation within the labour market. Of these, three are important to this study's research questions, and will therefore be discussed more fully. Firstly, the traditional, structuralist, Marxist perspective argues that the basic organisation of society is founded on labour, class organisation and economic capital. Secondly, the work of Bourdieu extends Marx's idea of economic capital into wider realms such as social, cultural and symbolic capital. And finally, patriarchy maintains that inequality in power relations between women and men results in the systematic disadvantage of the former.

- ***Marxist and neo-Marxist Perspectives***

Marx defined a class as a group of individuals within a society that share common economic interests. Hence, class is embedded in productive relations rather than income or social status (Marx, 1933). Marx defined modern society as having two main classes; capitalists (bourgeoisie), who own the means of production and purchase the labour power of others; and workers (proletariat), who do not own any means of production or the ability to purchase the labour of others. Rather, they sell their own labour. So for Marx, a class is a group with intrinsic tendencies and interests that differ from those of other groups within society, which results in a fundamental antagonism between such groups. However, although an aggregate of people may occupy similar positions in the process of production, and their lives may have objectively similar determinants, they will only become a cohesive class, that consciously articulates their common interests, if they become aware of the similarity of their interests through common struggles and conflicts with opposing classes (Marx, 1867).

Whilst class is central to Marxist thought, since the advent of second wave feminism in the 1970s, gender has come to be recognised as an increasingly important factor shaping social experiences and life chances. Intersectional analysis has underlined the importance of understanding the way in which gender articulates with social class and other variables such as race and age. Whilst traditional Marxist analysis was criticised for being gender blind, contemporary Marxist accounts take account of social class alongside a range of other social variables such as culture and ideology. For example, Bourdieu (1987) argued that classes on paper are merely categorisation devices with no independent ontological existence. Instead, Bourdieu attempted to understand how classes become *constituted as classes;* how complex status hierarchies are articulated and internalised by individuals; and how systems of status subordination are integrated within a class system of domination.

Bourdieu argues that modern Western reality exists as semi-autonomous and increasingly varied spheres of action or 'fields' (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1991). It is

within fields, for example art, education, religion, science, politics, medicine or law, that the visible world, of 'practice', or what people do, takes place (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1991). Individuals, or 'agents', all occupy a position within fields and are involved in struggles for place, mobilising their power to stake claims within the particular social domain. Each position carries different dispositions that exist as likely, or potential, courses of action. Such courses of action can be attempts conserve or transform the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field. However, agents can face tensions and contradictions as they experience power differently, depending which field they are in at a given moment. This can explain how agents can resist power and domination in one field, but express complicity in another; for instance, how certain women can display public authority but be submissive in their home (Bourdieu, 1990b). Positions in a field are determined by a number of influences, with one of the most important being 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984,1990b).

Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly relegitimised through the interplay between agency and structure. The main way this happens is through habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as a "structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (1984: 166). Habitus, then, is the cognitive system of structures that are embedded within an individual, and/or a collective consciousness; the internal representations of external structures, or, "the way society becomes deposited in persons" (Wacquant, 2004: 316). Habitus consists of our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, interests, and our understanding of the world around us, and is created through primary socialisation into the world through family, culture and the milieu of education. It is the physical embodiment of the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences; "the hold of the past on the present" (Hey, 2013: 113) Our habitus generates what Bourdieu describes as, "all the 'reasonable', 'common-sense' behaviours…which are possible within the limits of these regularities," (1980: 55); it is the 'common sense' way we interpret the world, the '*le sens pratique*' (Bourdieu, 1990: 52), the feel for the game. Habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, and has an infinite capacity for

generating thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions, but within the limits set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production.

For most individuals habitus is not questioned, largely as a result of what Bourdieu calls 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Misrecognition works largely through the tool of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1991, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977**)**, that is, "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity…[that] one does not perceive…as such" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167-168). This symbolic violence is imposed through systems of cultural symbolism and meaning upon groups, or classes, in such a way that these are experienced as legitimate. As a result, agents do not think about their situations, rather they just accept their social path as valid and make best of their circumstances. However, Bourdieu emphasises that habitus constrains but does not determine thought and action. Habitus includes the Marxian concept of 'dialectic' or contradiction in the form of paradoxes between the dominant 'common sense' perspective and agent's own actual experiences. It is this that gives agents some freedom of thought, however much they might be unknowingly controlled by their dependence on taken-for-granted assumptions of how the world is. So if an individual is both reflective and aware of their own habitus, they have the potential to observe social fields with relative objectivity.

A second important influence determining position in a field is that of 'capital', understood by Bourdieu as part of the structuring process of habitus used by agents and groups within fields as a tool for gaining dominance and power. Like Marx, Bourdieu argued that capital formed the foundation of social life and dictated one's position within the social order. For both Marx and Bourdieu, the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. However, Bourdieu extended Marx's idea of capital beyond the notion of economic capital, focusing on wider notions of social and cultural capital. Social capital referred to the circles of friends, groups, memberships and social networks; whilst cultural capital denoted an individual's knowledge, experience and connections (Bourdieu, 1986).

The final influence determining position in a field is the set of rules found within each field; the 'doxa'. Bourdieu describes doxa as the "universe of tacit presuppositions that organise action within the field" (2005: 37). Doxa is the combination of both orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs, the unstated, taken-for-granted assumptions or 'common sense' behind the choices we make; essentially, the 'rules of the game'. According to these rules, the group, at an aggregated level, will evaluate an agent and ascribe them their legitimate position within the field. Like habitus, doxa exercises limiting influences on the potential courses of actions for agents in the field, and to some extent, determines agent's courses of actions. Agents who occupy similar positions in a field share, to greater or lesser extent, the same doxa, but do not always agree. As a result, agents may become involved in a process of struggle, making use of their capital, to change the doxa for their own benefit. This involves conserving or transforming the field to impose the doxa that favours them the most.

- *Feminist Perspectives*

Feminist writers such as Skeggs (1997), argued that whilst Bourdieu's work was useful in moving away from economic determinism, it did not go far enough in exploring the feelings and passions of the actual lived experience of class; and like Marx, did little to explain the experiences of women. For this we need to focus on patriarchy. Patriarchy describes both the historic and current inequality in power relations between women and men, whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. From this stance gender is regarded as being socially constructed and rooted in the social expectations and representations of appropriate male and female behaviour. 'Difference' here was seen as a social, rather than 'natural', division between men and women; one that positions men and women in hierarchical opposition to one another; that is, what is regarded as 'male' or masculine behaviour is defined not only as different, but also opposite to 'female' or feminine behaviour. Furthermore, 'male' qualities are positioned as superior to 'female' ones. So as Delphy (1993) argued, whilst gender division itself may be fixed, modes of being 'male' or 'female' vary. Actors in different

situations can adopt behaviours, qualities and characteristics varyingly. Such differences are also reinforced through social structures, cultural representations, discourses, and individuals' own practices (Jackson, 2005).

In Western capitalist societies gender relations are still defined by patriarchal power, and all forms of feminism consider this as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Walby (1990) described patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990: 20). Although some Marxist feminists have argued that this dominance of women by men is intimately connected with capitalism, in that they are mutually supportive, Walby argued that patriarchy and capitalism are two distinct, but interacting, systems. She did agree, though, that capitalism has generally benefitted from patriarchy through the sexual division of labour. Walby explained patriarchy as being composed of separate independent structures that interact with one another. The most important structures for this particular study being 'production relations in the home', in which women exchange their unpaid domestic services for their upkeep; 'paid work', in which women in the labour market are excluded from certain types of work, receive lower pay, and are segregated in less skilled jobs; and 'patriarchal cultural institutions', such as education and the media, who produce particular representations of women through a "patriarchal gaze" (1990: 21). Walby defined two distinct forms of patriarchy, the private and the public. Private patriarchy is the domination of women that occurs within the household by her partner. In contrast, public patriarchy occurs when women are involved in public arenas, such as the labour market, but are still separated from wealth, power and status. For Walby, whilst patriarchy in the United Kingdom has evolved since the Victorian era, in its shift from the private to public sphere, this does not mean that it is in decline.

Connell (1987, 1995) argued that to understand patriarchy completely we must understand masculinity, or more precisely masculinities. Connell believed that as groups of men and women live within particular times and socio-cultural contexts, gender patterns emerge. Within these patterns there are many different versions of

masculinity and femininity that are ordered into a hierarchy at societal level. This interrelation of masculinities and femininities has one defining premise, "the global domination of men over women" (Connell, 1987: 183). Connell described stylised, 'ideal types' of masculinities and femininities in this societal hierarchy; but at the top is one particular version of masculinity, that of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987: 183). Hegemonic masculinity, he argued, is the most structurally powerful form of masculinity, dominant over all other masculinities, and can be understood as the pattern of practice that allows patriarchy to continue.

Connell's use of hegemony draws its theoretical roots from the Italian Marxist Gramsci (1891-1937). Gramsci (1971) argued that hegemony described the system whereby one class achieved domination over others through a combination of political and ideological means. Essential to hegemony is the ability of one class to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality. Hegemony involves the persuasion of the majority of the population, primarily through the media, other social institutions, such as religion and politics, and culture so that the ways of the ruling minority are seen as 'natural', 'ordinary' and 'normal'. Hegemony does not mean violence, although it can be supported by force if necessary. Connell transferred these ideas from the realm of class to those of gender relations. He argued that Western capitalist societies are dominated by hegemonic heterosexuality. This is as an oppressive status quo in which even our most personal acts are, in reality, scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies. These social conventions and ideologies function at social, familial and legal levels to regulate behaviours by means of punitive rules that force us to conform to heterosexual standards of identity. However, for the majority of actors, such performances are not spontaneous or individual, but rehearsed and scripted by the prevalent and dominant ideals of masculinity and femininity idealised by hegemonic heterosexuality. For Connell (1987) the most important script was that of hegemonic masculinity.

The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual and closely connected to the institution of marriage (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity also includes other stereotypes of male behaviour, specifically, being in paid work, authority, strength, aggression, assertiveness, dominance and power. However, hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to other 'subordinated' masculinities as well as in relation to women, and it is this interplay between different forms of masculinity that is crucial to the functioning of the patriarchal social order. Nevertheless, although hegemonic masculinity is the most important version of masculinity it should not be assumed to be 'normal' in the statistical sense. In reality only a minority of men might actually enact it. However, Connell argued that it is certainly normative in that it is the current most honoured way of being a man and as such requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it. Hegemonic masculinity is open to challenge though and hence needs to be constantly negotiated in everyday life and requires considerable effort to maintain, by means of the policing of men, and the exclusion, or discrediting, of women.

It would appear then that class and gender should be considered in tandem, rather than singular realms of analysis. These two crucial social divisions need to be addressed in accordance with their, "contradictory and conflictual relations with each other" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004: 80). This intersection of class and gender is important as it can be seen to have a visible impact on the labour market experiences of classroom assistants, for research shows that those from the lower rungs of the social hierarchy, in terms of class or gender, are more likely to receive lower wages, to be subjected to stereotypes and discriminated against, or be hired for exploitive domestic and caring positions (Weigt & Solomon, 2008; Hofman, 2010).

- *Anti-feminist Perspectives*

However, before leaving these structural explanations of class and gender the role of women's agency will be addressed. Hakim (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) argues,

contentiously, that in late modern society it is women's agency, rather than structural constraints, that explains occupational gender segregation. This she calls 'preference theory'. Hakim (2000) argues that social changes, from the 1960s onwards, have produced a qualitatively new scenario for women in affluent modern societies. As a result, women have greatly increased aspirations, motivations and genuine personal choice. Hakim (2003, 2006) is quite clear that these choices apply to the vast majority of women, whatever their levels of education and/or social class. According to Hakim modern women have a genuine choice between three different lifestyles: 'home-centred', 'work-centred' and 'adaptive' (Hakim, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006). According to Hakim, the majority of women, two thirds, choose the adaptive lifestyle; they, "want to work, but [are] *not* totally committed to [a] work career" [Emphasis in original] (2006: 288). Hakim (2005) argues that these women seek work-life balance; the balance between family values of caring, sharing, non-competition, communality and cohesiveness, with market place values of competition, rivalry, achievement, individualism and excellence, much more than men do (Hakim, 2000). Because of this, women with adaptive lifestyles either voluntarily take breaks in employment or shift to part-time work when their children are young. Hence, such women are likely to marry, and stay married, as their preferred lifestyle is that of secondary earner and dependent on a partner who was in regular employment (Hakim, 2002: 443). These women are not ambitious for career success and are 'content' to settle for less demanding 'female' occupations, where part-time jobs are plentiful and high labour turnover is usual (Hakim, 2002). It is this kind of behaviour that explains women's relative lack of success in the world of employment.

Understandably, preference theory has "generated acrimonious debate" (Crompton, 2006a: 668). In general, critics of Hakim do not deny that women make choices, and that these choices are reflected in aggregate patterns of employment amongst women; their tendency to do part-time or flexible working and their over representation in lower level occupations. However, critics disagree with her over the reasons for the persistence of gender inequalities. Most of these critiques centre on a similar argument; that Hakim focused on preferences but

ignored very real constraints on women's agency. Ginn *et al*. (1996) began their critique of Hakim by questioning her view that women who choose part-time work are "uncommitted workers" (Hakim, 1991, 1995, 1996). They argue that just because part-time women workers show greater commitment to their families than full-time workers, this does not necessarily mean that they are not also committed to their employment. Ginn *et al*. argued that women's preference for part-time work needed to be understood in the context of their cultural norms, both within the family and workplace, the demands of caring and domestic work, and the practical and financial difficulties posed by childcare. They argued that these influences, especially domestic responsibilities, meant that women part-time workers faced a lack of alternatives and a weak bargaining position in the labour market that generally limited their employment options compared to men's. Like Crompton and Harris (1998), Ginn *et al*. see women's employment behaviour as a reflection of the way women constructed their work-life biographies based on both preference and constraint. The point is not that these women preferred part-time work, and all the disadvantages such employment entails, but that they preferred shorter hours to accommodate domestic responsibilities.

McRae (2003) found that the main influences on women's preferences were "based almost entirely on observable *external* characteristics" [Emphasis in original] (2003: 325). She argued that whilst all women faced constraints on their decision-making some have substantially better chances of overcoming constraints, and a few women, who could afford it, may have chosen to be at home. For others there were few such alternatives available and practical and financial constraints were usually decisive. Such constraints McRae identified as 'normative'; women's own identities, the gender relations and culture within families, and/or particular preferences and attitudes, and 'structural'; job availability, cost and availability of childcare, social origins (educational qualification, health, early pregnancy, culture, etc.). However, these normative and structural constraints were interconnected rather than working independently. Both normative and structural constraints shaped women's decisions relating to

the 'balance' achieved by individual women in respect of market and family work.

In addition, Crompton and Lyonette (2005) argued, it was women with adaptive lifestyles who were the most likely to face constraints; with having children in the household and the level of education being the most significant determinants of couples' working arrangements. Evidence suggested that the capacity to pay for childcare remained crucial in facilitating mothers' employment, and was a major class factor differentiating childcare use (Vincent and Ball, 2006). This was because these women had chosen to adapt their working lives to fit their family lives, not because that is what they preferred, but because they had to adapt to the realities of childcare (Cartwright, 2005). Hence, the constraints of the cost, and availability, of childcare were much more crucial factors than women's preference for more family work and less market work. These arguments underline the importance of structural factors, and the limited influence of agency, in shaping the working arrangements of couples. Yet, despite this, the previously discussed research evidence of Chapter 2 suggested that classroom assistants were strongly committed to their work. This irony will now be considered.

How do classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work?

To best understand classroom assistants' commitment to their work we need to reflect on Skeggs' research in to the intersection of class and gender, and especially her notion of 'respectability'. Skeggs (1997) believes that there has been a decline in the traditional use of class categorisation. Instead class is now "insinuated in the intimate making of self and culture", making it much more difficult to identify (Skeggs 2005: 969). Skeggs focuses on subjectivity as central to understanding contemporary class relations by arguing that we must move beyond the economic, and instead understand how class is derived through cultural values. Although Skeggs (2008) believes that capital structures everything, and that nothing can be analysed without first analysing capital, she moves from this traditional, structuralist, Marxist stance to a more post-

structuralist one. Skeggs (2005) moves beyond, but still with, the economic into areas of value more generally. She attempts to explain how capital now extends into new spaces, creating new markets by mobilising affect and moving into intimate emotional and domestic relationships (Skeggs, 2010). As a result she views class as now formed through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realised, or not, as a type of property with value in symbolic exchange systems (Skeggs, 2004). Here Skeggs (2005) sees a significant shift in what constitutes property. Property is no longer a thing, but a 'set of entitlements' which are exclusive to the owner. For her, culture has itself become a property invested in by the middle classes.

Influenced by Bourdieu (1986) she argues that people can (or not) acquire different forms of capital in different combinations and values, which enable them to move (or not) through social spaces, depending on their acquired capitals potential 'exchange value'. Capital here, in Marxist terms, becomes an 'alienable' good, one capable of being bought and sold, under capitalism (Marx and Engels, 1932). But only some people can acquire and utilise culture as a form of property. The middle classes can keep amassing property for themselves, by accumulating cultural capital. This process, known as 'propertising', describes how the middle classes use cultural capital to accrue value in their selves over time (Skeggs, 2005). For Skeggs (2008), this is always a future project. The middle classes are projecting themselves into the future and amassing value through the accumulation of cultural capital. Culture then is central to increasing the exchange value of one's overall volume and composition of capitals.

Fundamental to this is the idea that in order to have value you have to invest in yourself, work on yourself. Such investment is about accruing cultural capital: the proper culture, proper value and proper learning. This cultural capital is 'self-making' in that it has 'exchange value' in the future, and presents you as a proper and responsible person (Skeggs, 2011). Access to cultural capital is central to both the formation of middle class subjectivity of proper personhood, and, simultaneously, the exclusion of others from it. Skeggs (2005) argued that we are

in a period of 'extraordinary subjectivity', which had moved away from grand narratives as the basis of truth claims. What this means is that there is no longer a singular version of personhood, rather a plurality of forms of selfhood. Hence an individual can 'choose' their repertoire of the self. The imperative to produce oneself through capitals relies not just on access to, and control of, symbolic resources, but also on knowing how to display ones' subjectivity properly. If one does not have access to the range of capitals for the production of the proper person, they may be held responsible for choosing badly, and creating irresponsible production of themselves. Building on the work of Illouz (1997) Skeggs argues that our feelings and emotions become value statements about ones' capacity and are crucial to the display of the morality of a person. The projection of negative value onto others is established as a central way in which class and gender divisions are drawn. Attributing negative value to the working class is a mechanism for attributing value to the middle class self.

Despite this use of Bourdieu's concept of capital, Skeggs argued that his analysis is unable to explain everything. Firstly, Bourdieu's work relies on an understanding of quantification, as it is premised on a person accumulating capitals (Skeggs, 2010). As Strathern (1992) argues' propertising is still underpinned by a Marxist view of economic exchange, by 'commodity logic', namely that everything is open to commodification. Also, crucially for Skeggs, is that when Bourdieu talks about cultural capital he always means 'high' cultural capital, that which can be exchanged and converted. Skeggs (2011) reasoned that this meant that although Bourdieu can be used to explain how those with power, live power, his work was less useful on how those without power live powerlessness. Skeggs concluded that White, working class practices, or working 'classness', appear beyond Bourdieu's analysis. Finally, Skeggs (1997) also believed that Bourdieu's empirical work on class was aloof and emotionless and did not demonstrate the feelings and passions of the actual lived experience of gender and class.

Skeggs (1997) is specifically interested in White, working class women and argues that such women appear not to be interested in accumulating exchange value, but are more interested in 'use value'. Use value being when one is not really interested in accruing value for exchange, but instead, is simply interested in something for its own use. Use value then is not exchangeable and cannot be put to use to enhance the middle class self and produce proper personhood. Use value has an entirely different goal, and rather than being oriented towards the future is much more embedded in the here and now. Through relationality, in the form of giving away of time and energy, by means of the non-utilitarian effects of care, loyalty and affection, White working class women find other routes to alluring themselves and others outside the circuits of exchange value. This is not commodity logic of exchange value. Instead, Strathern (1992) argued that use value is based on a relational way of generating value for themselves and others through an understanding of the social relations that brought value into being, demanding reciprocity through the gift, rather than money. In Marxist terms, such gift exchanges are transactions that exist in a state of reciprocal dependence, where both parties treat each other as the possessors of 'inalienable' objects or attributes (Marx and Engels, 1932).

For Skeggs (2010), it is the analysis of use value that enables us to see how White, working class women shape their subjectivity through means of an entirely different value system. This takes the form of them trying to invest, and establish value, through 'respectability'. Skeggs (1997) believed that respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class, and explains White, working class women in Britain, at particular moment, live their lives. Respectability involves a constant performance of trying to get these things 'right', of trying to be a 'proper' person, of constantly trying to prove oneself to be 'respectable' (Skeggs, 2011). She defined it as a gendered practice based around femininity that involves such areas as caring, marriage, hygiene, cleaning, clothing, and looks. It is the body and the home where class is lived out. Respectability relies on an understanding and uptake of the dominant symbolic structure that enables some dispositions, cultures and practices to be inscribed with much more value than

others, hence leading to the reproduction of the class structure through the development of the 'self'. It is a model of how class difference comes into effect through the divisions that can be drawn between those who can add value to their selves and those who cannot. However, respectability is usually only a concern of those seen not to have it. So these women's performances of respectability always take place under the gaze of a dialogic other, someone who is constantly judging you as lacking. As such, it becomes then a key mechanism in othering, as it positions those without it, and those without it position themselves against it. It is now, as it was in the past, "a false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers" (Marx & Engels, 1962: 523), or symbolic violence.

But whilst fully aware of this symbolic violence, White, working class women do not accept its legitimacy and are constantly trying to overcome it through respectability. For White, working class women it is something to desire, to prove, to achieve, because it is seen as the property of others, and as such is valued and legitimated. However, this does not mean that White working class women want to become middle class. Skeggs (2008) argues that such a view misses the point entirely. Rather they want to have value. For those who cannot gain the required capitals to continually convert into exchange value, Skeggs (1997) argues, that they do not give up on attempting to attach value to their selves. Rather, they attempt to attach value to themselves through this performance of respectability. And for Skeggs (1997), White, working class women are predisposed to respectability from a very early age, usually through the influence of their mothers. Indeed, mothering and care, become a moral high ground - *the* source of value, and *the* way in which White, working class women can acquire value. Investing in mothering and care is one of the key ways respectability can be put into effect.

Such maternal care is also central to the work of Noddings (1984) and her ethics of care, which is useful to understanding the views and actions of classroom assistants. Noddings starts from the position that care is basic to human life, a human right, we all want to be cared for. However, Noddings explores the

difference between 'natural' care and 'ethical' care. Noddings argues that neither a utilitarian explanation, consideration of anticipated consequences, nor deontological explanation, based on principled reasoning; provide an adequate foundation for understanding the moral dilemmas or ethical concerns of women (Noddings, 1984). She proposes an alternative perspective grounded in natural caring, the care of a mother for a child. Natural caring, then, is a moral attitude, a longing for goodness that arises, almost naturally, out of women's experiences. Here she rejects this view as essentialist by insisting that this does not mean that men are excluded from natural care anymore than women are excluded from Kantian liberalism, virtue ethics or traditional ethics. It just means that the idea of caring arises more naturally out of women's experience, believing, 'it is feminine in the deep classical sense – rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness' (Noddings, 1984: 2). At the same time she differentiates between men and women, both in terms of women's physical and emotional experience around carrying and bringing children into the world, and the sociological and anthropological evidence concerning their role in bringing up, and caring for them. Natural caring, although requiring considerable physical and mental effort, does not require an ethical effort to motivate it. Rather, it is a moral attitude of wanting to care, arising out of the experience or memory of being cared for. It does not involve elaborate rationales to explain we ought to treat one another as positively as our situation permits.

In contrast, Noddings (1984) develops the notion of ethical care. Whilst ethical care arises out of natural caring, it is different to the former in that it has to be summoned. Ethical care is about what one 'ought' to be rather than what one 'wants' to do. As such, it can be un-natural in that it can involve an inner conflict of 'I ought but I don't want to'. On these occasions, Noddings (1999) argues that rather than turn to a principle; we must instead focus on our memories of caring and being cared for, and an ideal of ourselves as carers. Ethical care then cannot be analysed simply from the perspective of an individual agent acting out of duty. Rather the relationship always includes a 'cared for', together with their interests, motives and affective responses. So whilst many educators care in that they

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conscientiously pursue certain goals for students and work hard to help them achieve these goals, Noddings argues that this is caring as a 'virtue'. Such care does not necessarily adopt a 'relational' sense of caring. It is this relational sense of caring that force us to look at the centrality of relationships. Hence it is not enough that the teachers claim to care, the pupil must recognise that he or she is cared for. Care has to be recognised by the other. For Noddings (1999), natural care comes before ethical caring, and is preferable to it. Ethical caring's contribution is to guide action long enough for natural caring to be restored and for people once again to interact with mutual and spontaneous regard. In this sense Noddings' care theory can be viewed as reversing Kantian priorities. By putting natural care above ethical care, Noddings (1984) is taking the view that latter is instrumental in establishing or restoring the former. Given the centrality of maternal care, it is not unlikely that women working in caring occupations might develop particular types of personal and social identities.

Finally, consideration is required of the work of Hochschild (1979, 1983) and 'emotional labour'. Emotional labour is defined as the publically visible language, facial and bodily displays of emotion at work. Hochschild argued that it is through emotional labour that social actors, such as the women in the sample, attribute feelings and meanings to their shared, lived experiences as classroom assistants. This emphasis on emotions at work presents a socially desirable performance as classroom assistants act out the roles expected of them within their particular occupational context. As such, emotional labour is a performance that is shared with others; enabling the classroom assistants to display their caring qualities, professional demeanour and character as aware, competent, patient, rational, sensitive and understanding. Consequently, emotional labour can be argued as central to the construction of a moral identity, a sense of self and group identity constructed around moral concerns.

How do classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities in this context?

Classroom assistants' views about maternal care are displayed through a range of thoughts, but within very definite and unquestioned limits (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009). The position of mother is founded on the biological functions of conception and childbirth, meaning that mothers are constructed as the 'natural' teacher of their children (Forde, 2013). Using the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), it could be argued that these dominant versions of 'reality' regarding mothering and care become deeply embedded into the consciousness of classroom assistants and delineated the boundaries of their common sense, but for the most part remained beyond analysis and question. All the same, Hargreaves (1984) argued that such boundaries of normal and acceptable practice are maintained, in part, by certain interactional strategies.

One important interactional strategy he called 'contrastive rhetoric' (Hargreaves, 1984). Contrastive rhetoric works through members of an occupational group introducing outrageous and stereotypical examples of alternative practice into conversation. This stylised, trivialised and pejorative manner in which alternative practice is discussed works to highlight and cement its unacceptability. Hargreaves argued that contrastive rhetoric works most successfully when it is utilised by dominant personalities. The success of contrastive rhetoric hinges on the kind of knowledge, assumptions and interpretations classroom assistants bring to interactions, and on the skills of the dominant personalities on stressing these particular elements of classroom assistant culture. Hence, experience is central to such interactions, and in this way, the dominant personalities justify the accounts presented. As classroom assistants tend to come from certain backgrounds, it could be argued that their experiences of childcare practices are homogenous, and their contact with alternatives limited. Out of this can develop one particularly powerful form of contrastive rhetoric, the 'atrocity story'.

Atrocity story was a term first used by Stimson & Webb (1975) to describe the ways in which patients talk about doctors. However, Dingwell (1977) and Baruch

(1981) argued that such accounts were common in previous ethnographic research in the area of work, for instance Becker (1963) and Gold (1964), and other social contexts such as religion (Bromley *et al.*, 1979). In his seminal work on atrocity stories and professional relationships, Dingwell described atrocity stories as, "dramatic events staged between groups of friends and acquaintances that draw on shared understandings about the way of the world" (Dingwell, 1977: 375). It is precisely their dramatic nature that captures the audience's attention (Silverman, 2005, 2006). Bromley *et al.* (1979), in their work on religious sects, defined an atrocity as an event with an, "outrageous, larger-than-life quality" (1979: 52) that is regarded as a blatant breach of a core cultural value of the storytellers group. For Allen (2001), drawing from Gieryn's (1983) work in the field of science, such stories possess "dramatic or shocking events that may take on legendary or apocryphal status in the oral culture of an occupational group" (2001: 76). As such, they can be seen as similar to folklore, urban myths, or even 'barbed comments made to the researcher' (Delamont, 2002: 136). Baruch (1981) argued though, that what characterises atrocity stories are themes of conflict and disagreement.

Bromley *et al.* (1979) believed that, in essence, atrocity stories[9] describe, "a struggle for the construction of social reality" (1979: 43), with each side trying to construct their own definitions of reality to justify their own activities and bring into disrepute those of others. Dingwell maintained that the storyteller adopts the role of 'hero', someone who is rational, understandable and in the right. Through the telling, the active hero settles a problematic situation and prevails despite the obstinacy, ineptitude and imprudence of others. The stories defend the storyteller, their colleagues and social structures against the violation of powerful others, and in mocking this power, the storyteller can shield their own reasonable character, whether in the narrow occupational sense, or more generally, against the breaches of others, and set right a real or supposed inequality (Silverman, 2005, 2006). Despite this, atrocity stories are not restricted to the powerless, although Dingwell argued, that they tend to be more common within this group.

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[9] Bromley *et al.* (1979) actually use the phrase 'atrocity tales'.

Importantly, however, what differentiates atrocity stories from mere complaints or objections is the specific vocabulary used and, in particular, the appeal to the notion of 'right and wrong'. Much like Bruner's (1990) views on narratives, it is the plot rather than the 'truth' of atrocity stories that determines their power. In essence, there is no structural difference between the factual and fictional, and it is not important whether atrocity stories are actually true or false. Their purpose is not to present the complexity of events dispassionately, but rather to make the event stand out from the ordinary (Garfinkel, 1956). Hence, whether such stories contain some element of truth is not only difficult to confirm but largely irrelevant. Silverman (2006) argued that there are powerful cultural forms at work in atrocity stories and, subsequently, they cannot be treated as straightforward account of actions to be triangulated with other people's versions or observations. Nevertheless, Dingwell pointed to the fact that such stories can have the tendency to become self-fulfilling. For Silverman (2006) an atrocity story was no less powerful because there is no corroborating evidence. In fact, stories may actually gain their persuasiveness from their embellished, inflated and overstated qualities (Bromley *et al.*, 1979). Hence, it would be mistaken to view these stories as 'factual' accounts. Rather they should be viewed rather like moral parables that focus on the inconsistencies between the 'real' and the 'ideal'.

After a review of the literature, Allen (2001) concluded that atrocity stories have been analysed as serving diverse social purposes; communicators of guilt, relievers of anxiety and tension, mechanisms for communicating shared difficulties, facilitators of occupational rites of passage, vehicles for the transmission of an occupational culture, and resolvers of ambiguities over occupational boundaries (Allen, 2001: 77). Dingwell suggested that atrocity stories are one element of the oral culture of a group, which typifies aspects of that group's shared culture. It is through the production of atrocity stories that occupational groups have the opportunity to demonstrate the nature of their own expertise, and to construct implicit ideals about correct conduct and performance that they hold in their particular social setting (Li and Arber, 2006). Dingwell (1977) originally outlined two ways that atrocity stories may be used. Firstly, as

argued previously, atrocity stories are used at an individual level to assert the reasonable character of the individual. Here the stories appeal to the reasonable conduct of the storyteller, and their rationality in contrast with the implied or stated positions of others. Secondly, Dingwell (1977) argued that atrocity stories are important in the social production of occupational boundaries that unite occupational groups through the sharing of common problems and the mutual acceptance of their challenging make-up. However, this positioning of in-groups and out-groups can lead to disagreements, or 'turf battles' (Allen, 2001: 94) in the case of classroom assistants, between themselves and rival groups, such as teachers, and parents.

What we see here, unsurprisingly given Allen's work originated mainly from the medical profession, is the similarity between classroom assistants and nurses. In her study of gender and professionalism in the nursing profession, Davies (1995) concluded that the dedication and commitment of nurses was widely recognised. Nurses exhibit maternal calmness, care, nurturing, comfort and concern. But once again as these are the 'understood' intrinsic qualities of women, the job of nursing, like that of classroom assistant, appears unremarkable (Davies, 1995: 2). Yet Davies argues that just below the surface of nursing lies confusion, resentment and exhaustion, not as an alternative to dedication, but, intriguingly, inherent to it. Nurses show 'dedication and devotion to their work…but they combine this with an uneasy sense of their own oppression' (Davies, 1995: 12-13). Hence, ironically, given the centrality of mothering and care to both groups' occupational identity, atrocity stories could be complicit in their self-oppression.

Why do classroom assistants appear to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression?

To understand this complicity we need to return to Connell and hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that as gender is relational, hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to women. Hence, Connell (1987) argues that patterns of femininity are socially defined in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. Yet, it is also true that women are fundamental in constructing

masculinities through their roles as mothers, sexual partners, wives, and co-workers. This notwithstanding, Connell states that all forms of femininity are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men, and whilst it is likely that actual femininities in society are more diverse than masculinities, there is no version of femininity that is hegemonic.

However, there is one version of femininity that is defined around compliance with hegemonic masculinity and is grounded in heterosexual women's cooperation with the interests and desires of men. Connell (1987) referred to this as 'emphasised femininity' (1987: 183) and saw compatibility between hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, even though they occupy asymmetrical positions of power in the patriarchal gender order. Emphasised femininity was seen as an exaggerated form of femininity and is organised as an adaptation to men's power and dominance. As such it emphasises compliance, nurturance and empathy as female qualities. Emphasised femininity also displays "sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour market discrimination against women" (Connell, 1987: 187). Hence, emphasised femininity becomes part of the dominant patriarchal gender order and is compliant with gender inequality.

At societal level this usually plays out as sexual accessibility in younger women and mothering in older women. Connell stated that emphasised femininity is a very public cultural construction, although its content is particularly linked with the "private realm of the home and the bedroom" (1987: 187). Emphasised femininity is given great cultural and ideological support and is endorsed through the mass media and marketing, to a degree, over and above that of hegemonic masculinity; through articles and adverts in 'women's' magazines, 'women's pages' in newspapers, daytime television scheduling and soap operas, to name but a few. Such representations influence women's identities and prescribe acceptable standards of behaviour and action. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of patriarchal

society, the majority of these endorsements are supervised, organised and financed by men. According to Connell, emphasised femininity, although the current most honoured way of being a woman, is not fully enacted by most women. However, in its ideal form, emphasised femininity is the version of femininity that all women are required to position themselves to, and, by which women are positioned by others, just as hegemonic masculinity is for men (Giddens, 2009). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) viewed both hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity as related to particular ways of representing and using our bodies, or patterns of 'social embodiment' (2005: 851). Connell (1987) stated that emphasised femininity was performed, and performed especially for men.

This notion of performance is important for Butler (1990a, 1990b, 1992), for this is how gender is constructed; through our own repetitive performances, "a stylized repetition of acts…[so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performance accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (1990a: 179). Put simply, gender reality is exhibited in what people do rather than what they are, and "is real only to the extent that it is performed" (1990b: 278). However, for the majority of actors, such performances are not spontaneous or individual, but rehearsed and scripted by the prevalent and dominant ideals of masculinity and femininity idealised by hegemonic heterosexuality (Butler, 1990b). Emphasised femininity is itself a performance, and one that needs constant and continual repetition of gender acts in the most mundane of daily actions to maintain it. Given the dominance of masculinity within this hegemonic heterosexual status quo, Butler (1992) argued that for a woman to identify as a woman was a "culturally enforced act", very often involving the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms that have to be "cultivated, policed and enforced" (1992, online). Any violations that mark a woman's performances as antithetical to the 'proper' performance of femininity are punished; "usually through shame" (1992: online), and here once again patriarchal cultural institutions have a pivotal role. This may be particularly

important for White, working class women, as Cohen (1980) argued that it is those groups most proximate to the working class that actually end up being monitored and policed by the working class, and that often receive the most punitive sanctions towards them. Ironically, respectability therefore becomes not simply about self-persecution, but the persecution of other similar women for not living up to the standards that they themselves cannot live up to (Skeggs, 1997).

Summary

This chapter set out a theoretical overview of the significant literature to the studies research questions. It argued that the structural constraints of class and gender, through patriarchy, are more crucial in explaining why classroom assistants are willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity, than those of agency, and in particular preference theory. The chapter went on to consider the twin constraints of class and gender, through the conduits of 'respectability', and maternal care, arguing that these were crucial in any analysis of how classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work. Next, the chapter reasoned that certain shared interactional strategies both stress what it is to be a competent member of such a group, and simultaneously, influence the social production of occupational boundaries. It was maintained that this explained how classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities. The chapter concluded that as a result of the repressive nature of class and gender for White, working class women, their talk, grounded in emphasised femininity, policed not only other similar women but also restricted their own growth. As such, it was hypothesised that classroom assistants could be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression. The next chapter discusses in detail an appropriate philosophical and methodological framework for the study of the research questions.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Method

Introduction

This chapter considers appropriate instruments for examining the research questions. As such it focuses on both methodology; the general theoretical and philosophical framework of the research, and method; the tools used to gather and analyse data (Brewer, 2000). The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of the ontological and epistemological orientations of the research and focuses on Bhaskar's (1989) notion 'critical realism' as an appropriate framework. Critical realism is understood as an attempt to explain the relationship between social structures (traditions, institutions, moral codes, established ways of doing things) and human action. An argument is then developed that ethnography is a suitable research methodology for critical realism. Further, it is argued, that this particular research topic lends itself to 'critical ethnography'; an approach to ethnography that attempts to make known and critique the taken-for-granted agendas, power and oppression operating at all levels of society (Thomas, 1993). This would appear an appropriate methodology to describe, analyse and open to scrutiny the forces that potentially inhibit, repress and constrain classroom assistants. The chapter concludes by discussing method in terms of the field of study, access, sampling, role, data collection, data analysis, leaving the field and ethics. However, despite this linear description, it is made clear that in reality the research process is more integrated and complex than this.

Educational Research and Research Paradigms

Given the complexity of educational practice, Pring (2004) believed we should not be surprised by the myriad approaches to educational research. However, while he stated that researchers should be, "eclectic in the search for truth" (Pring, 2004: 33), he also highlighted that the intrinsic reason behind this variety of

approaches is a fundamental disagreement of a philosophical nature. Such disagreements are, in essence, of a paradigmatic nature (Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lyham and Guba, 2011).

Paradigms are frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence. Paradigms are shared by a scientific community and guide how those communities of researchers act with regard to inquiry. They guide researchers to make decisions and do things in certain ways. More formally, they establish a set of practices that can range from patterns of thought to actions (Guba, 1990). Hence, across disciplines, and indeed within them, there are varying views of what research is and how this relates to the kind of knowledge being developed.

For Guba and Lincoln (1994), these philosophical disagreements between paradigms are based upon two key differences, the ontological and epistemological orientations of researchers. By this they mean that different choices in researchers' approaches reflect their ontology; the philosophy of existence and the assumptions and beliefs held about the nature of being and existence, and their epistemology; the theory of knowledge and the assumptions and beliefs held about the nature of knowledge, as well as concerns with the relationship between the participant and the researcher. What this means, as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) stated succinctly, is that a researcher's, "ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological considerations, and these, in turn give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 21).

Traditionally, two dominant paradigms exist within social science research, those of positivism and naturalism, each rooted within different epistemological and ontological orientations. Historically, a researcher's approach falls within one of these paradigms. However, it should be noted that there is a risk of drawing too distinct an opposition between these two paradigms, with the potential to create a false dualism (Dewey, 1916), when, in reality, for Pring (2004), "educational

research is both and neither" (2004: 33). Indeed, Morgan (2007) argued for a more pragmatic approach, one that steers clear of this paradigm division, one that recognises the similarities that connect positivist and naturalist research, and one that sees the benefits of blending the two paradigms. In reality this has always been the case, for instance, Hammersley and Atkinson noted that the seminal anthropological work of Malinowski (1922) was clearly influenced by positivist canons and that even the pioneering work of the Chicago School employed quantitative methods in their use of statistical data. Nevertheless, Crotty (1998) believed that what is crucial is that the researcher should explicitly state the philosophical considerations that underpin their research and justify their approaches. With this in mind, the philosophical background against which my own research was conducted will now be discussed.

Philosophical Background

My own work is broadly situated within naturalism (Lofland, 1967, Blumer, 1969, Matza, 1969, Denzin, 1971, Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, Guba, 1978). Methodologically, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stated that naturalism proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural', real-life state, undisturbed by the researcher in a way that expresses the subjective reality of the interior world of the participants. Naturalism then is, "…the philosophical view that remains true to the nature of the phenomena under study" (Matza, 1969: 5). Hence 'natural', not 'artificial', settings are the primary source of data. Furthermore, the research must be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of the setting and that of the phenomena being investigated. The primary intention should be to describe what happens, how people involved see and talk about their own actions and those of others, the contexts in which the action takes place, and what follows from it. Traditional methods include forms of observation, participant observation, conversation and listening techniques.

Nevertheless, I, like others, have concerns with naturalism. Firstly, naturalism holds what van Maanen (1988) referred to as a 'realist' position, in that it

conceives the existence of a real world that is independent of our ideas about it. The representation of social reality is seen as unproblematic as long as the researcher follows the procedural rules and gets sufficiently close to what it is like on the inside. Within realism the researcher has a privileged gaze by means of their access to insider accounts of people's world-views. However, researchers must absent themselves from the text, and simply try to represent the insider's account. Van Maanen stated that "the narrator of realist tales poses as an impersonal conduit who passes on more-or-less objective data in a measured intellectual style that is uncontaminated by personal bias, political goals or moral judgements" (1988: 47).

The idea that realism can represent social reality in a relatively straightforward way, by getting close to it, has now been widely rejected. Rather than realism, Hammersley (1990, 1992) referred to this position as 'naïve realism'. Naïve in that researchers' representations are just as partial as insiders, there is no "doctrine of immaculate perception" (van Maanen, 1988: 23). Hammersley (1992) believed that this fundamental flaw in naïve realism stemmed from a tension between constructionism and cultural relativism. Hammersley argued that if we accept that people construct their social worlds, and that different people create different social worlds (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Blumer, 1969), then we must also accept that researchers do this too. Researchers are not theoretically neutral; building up theories in a grounded fashion from data, rather, they hold theoretical assumptions and wider values, which they bring to their work (Hammersley, 1990, 1992). These often condition their interpretation of the data and the theoretical inferences made, rendering them incommensurable.

A second, and related, concern focuses on the political commitment of the researcher. Naturalism holds a commitment to producing accounts of factual matters that reflect the nature of the phenomena studied rather than the values or political commitments of the researcher. While, in practice, it is recognised that research is affected by the researcher's values, the aim is to limit the influence of these values as far as possible, so as to produce findings that are independent of

any particular value stance (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, from the mid-1980s, striving for value neutrality and objectivity has been questioned, and instead there has been a call for research that is explicitly carried out from the standpoint of particular parties, for instance, women (Stanley and Wise, 1983), or peoples with disabilities (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2003). Research, it is argued, is always affected by values, and always has political consequences. Researchers must take responsibility for their value commitments and for the effects of their work. In addition, naturalism has also been criticised for having too little impact. Gerwitz and Cribb (2006) argued that to be of value researchers must apply their findings to bring about change at national policy level, in professional practice, or in terms emancipation. Research should challenge the status quo.

An Alternative to Naïve Realism

If we are to abandon the naïve realism of naturalism then we require something more suitable to put in its place. Bhaskar's (1998) work in the realm of 'critical realism' may provide the answer. Critical realism is an attempt to explain the relationship between social structure (traditions, institutions, moral codes, established ways of doing things) and human agency.

Bhaskar (1998) proposed an alternative, subtle and complex view of society in which human actors were neither the passive products of social structure, nor simply its creators. Rather, there is an iterative and naturally reflexive relationship between them. Social structure has the ability to exert deterministic force on actors, to constrain agency, but simultaneously enable agency, by providing the framework within which human agency reproduces, and occasionally transforms, the structure itself.

In this sense critical realism can be seen as similar to Giddens' (1986) theory of structuration. In Giddens' view social life is more than random individual acts of human agency, but neither is it merely determined by social structure. For Giddens too, human agency and social structure are in a relationship with one

another, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents that reproduce social structure. But again, whilst people's everyday actions reinforce and reproduce social structure, these can also be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently.

The important difference between critical realism and structuration lies in their different interpretations of the significance of social structure. Structuration places emphasis on the autonomy of human actors, whilst critical realism underlines the pre-existence of social structure. Hence, critical realism gives a stronger ontological grounding to social structure. Critical realism stresses the objectivity and reality of social structure that exists independently of our conceptions of it in its causal properties. The existence and properties of social structure are independent of the process of investigation and as such can be genuine, practical objects of research. Nevertheless, critical realism does also accept that the production of knowledge about social structure is, in itself part, of the process of social reproduction.

Bhaskar argued that the debate between naturalism and positivism is flawed as it focuses on epistemology, ways of knowing. Naturalism is flawed in its belief that social reality is merely created by human agency, whilst positivism is equally flawed in its belief that social structure pre-exists, and occurs independently of human agency (Bhaskar, 1998). Rather, by means of reflexivity, critical realism focuses upon social structure, through the close examination of human agency, in an attempt to explain the relationship between the two.

Bhaskar argued that what we should be focusing on is ontology, on the properties that social structure possesses. In his view both naturalism and positivism over simplify the nature of social structure, with naturalists taking a 'transcendental' view that social structure only exists in the ideas human actors have of it; and positivists taking an 'empirically real' view in that structure is only observable through the behaviours of human actors. For Bhaskar, the relationship is both transcendental and real (Bhaskar, 1998).

In critical realism, social structure and human agency represent different, but complexly linked ontological levels, each dependent on the other for their existence and yet each capable of exerting deterministic force on the other. Neither is fully determined by or produced by the other. This ontological status is why we can neither take behavioural observations as simply representative of some given social world, nor fully reveal or reconstruct the social through our understanding of human actors' meanings and beliefs. Rather, researchers are encouraged to explore the reality of human actors' understanding and interpretations and their effects on social structure, but not to take these interpretations as fully constitutive of social structure. Social structure can only be studied by observing their effects on human actors; however, this does not refute their reality or suggest that they cannot be a genuine object of study and theoretical consideration. Critical realism then can produce general, law-like, explanatory observations, whilst both acknowledging and explaining the roots of such in human agency (Bhaskar, 1998).

Such research requires a suitable methodology capable of the appropriate study of both human agency and social structure. Brewer (2000) suggested that ethnography is such a methodology. However, Porter (1993, 1995) argued that critical realist ethnography must not just be about describing small-scale social events, but also examining human agency in order to understand the relationship between human agency and social structure. Critical realist ethnography endeavours to raise awareness in participants of the underlying mechanisms affecting their lives, which, for Porter (1995), may result in descriptions of social structure that differ from, possibly even contradict, those described by participants themselves. An example of this would be Willis (1977) and his work on class reproduction, which addresses ethnographically the objectivity of the class system and how it imposes itself on school pupils. Merely studying what human actors think they believe is unlikely to provide us with all the answers.

Ethnography as a Methodology for Critical Realism

O'Connell-Davidson & Layder (1994) saw ethnography as commonly located within naturalism, with Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stating it is the central, but not the only legitimate social research methodology, within this paradigm. The central methodological tenet of ethnography is that researchers learn about people and/or groups through first-hand experience in their daily lives. Pole and Morrison (2003) suggested that ethnography could be summed up as,

> *"An approach to social research based on the first hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location."*
>
> (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 16)

However, Pole and Morrison (2003) were clear that such descriptions should not limit or hamper researchers, but rather, act to set out what constitutes ethnography, and what sets it apart from other forms of research. In fact, there is a huge and bad-tempered literature on the boundaries of ethnography; which revolves around what it is and what is it not, and whether there is, in fact, an ethnographic method (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 9). This debate can be answered, to some extent with reference to Brewer's (2000) contrast between 'big' ethnography and 'little' ethnography. For Brewer, big ethnography parallels qualitative research as a whole, ethnography is really a perspective on research rather than a way of doing it (Wolcott, 1973). In contrast, Brewer defines 'little' ethnography as 'field research, or 'ethnography as fieldwork' (Burgess, 1984). But 'little' ethnography does not mean 'small'; it must involve judgements about, for instance, the object of the research, the researcher's role, and the data to be collected. Such issues arise from a set of theoretical and philosophical premises; a methodology, meaning that ethnography as fieldwork still describes more than just a set of procedural rules for collecting data. Brewer defines 'little' ethnography as,

> *"...the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally"*
>
> (Brewer, 2000: 10).

What is crucial here is that qualitative methods only have the capacity to be ethnographic if they are implemented within the scaffold of ethnographic methodology. Ethnography is not an approach based on the philosophy of 'anything goes'; there can be no meaningful method without methodology (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 11). Given this, Hammersley (1990) defines ethnography as research with the following features:

- People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts

- Data is collected primarily by means of observation

- Data collection is flexible and unstructured

- Focus is on a single setting or group and is small-scale, and

- Analysis of data involves attribution of the meanings of the human actions described and explained

As this study involves all these features, this is the definition of ethnography that will be used in the study from now rather than 'little' ethnography or 'ethnography as fieldwork'.

Ethnography is a relatively open-ended method of enquiry (Maxwell, 2012), which often begins with, "foreshadowed problems" (Malinowski, 1922: 9). Therefore a researcher's interests and questions are refined and transformed over the course of the research and turned into a set of research questions to which answers can potentially be found. Hence, ethnography is iterative-inductive research; it evolves in design through the study (O' Reilly, 2009). Ethnography usually begins with an interest is some particular area of social life. The task then is to investigate aspects of the lives of the people being studied; and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves. However, the initial interests and questions that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even

transformed, over the course of the research. Eventually, through this process, the inquiry will become progressively more clearly focused on a specific set of research questions, and this will then allow the strategic collection of data to pursue answers to those questions more effectively and to test these against the evidence. Importantly though, Pole and Morrison (2003) also acknowledged the importance of structure. For them structures have the ability to shape, limit and/or define social action and, as such, can be central to the explanation and understanding of action.

There exists, though, more than one approach to ethnographic research and if one starts from a critical realist stance, as a way of examining human agency in order to understand the relationship between social action and social structure, then 'critical' ethnography appears entirely appropriate as this approach to ethnography attempts to expose hidden agendas, challenge oppressive assumptions, describe power relations, and generally critique the taken-for-granted (Thomas, 1993).

Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnographers rely on the same sets of methods and, to some extent, the methodology of conventional ethnography. In Thomas's (1993) view it differs from conventional ethnography in that it offers a more direct style of thinking about the relationship between knowledge, society and political action. Although not inherently better than conventional research, he argued that it could provide insights about the fundamental questions of social existence often ignored by other approaches. As such, critical ethnography aims to fight familiarity.

Critical ethnography begins with an ontological argument that contemporary society is, "unfair, unequal, and both subtly and overtly oppressive for many people" (Carspecken, 1996: 7) and that some social groups are more disadvantaged than others. Given this, Thomas believed that critical ethnography should aim to describe, analyse and open to scrutiny the hidden agendas, power

centres and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain the disadvantaged. Hence, central to critical ethnography is, "a compassion for the suffering of living beings" (Madison, 2012: 5).

Thomas, nodding to Marx, argued that it is not sufficient to study the world without also attempting to change it. What critical ethnography does is enable the ethnographer to actually choose between competing ways of seeing the world and judge some of these views 'better' or 'fairer' than others. Critical ethnography attempts to use the knowledge it produces for social change, to expose and deal with systematic social disadvantage. Thomas summarised, "…critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose" (1993: 4). So while conventional ethnography seeks 'what is', critical ethnography seeks 'what could be'.

Hence, while conventional ethnography assumes the status quo, critical ethnographers attempt to address the repressive influences that lead to the social domination of some groups. Critical ethnography takes seemingly mundane events and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, power imbalance and the symbolic mechanisms that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviours over others, "ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" (Madison, 2012: 5). For Thomas conventional ethnographic research, free of normative and other biases, was impossible, perhaps even undesirable. In contrast, critical ethnography celebrates the researcher's normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change. Despite striving for social change, Thomas stated that critical ethnographers vary in the extent to which they seek reform. Most at least demand 'changes in cognition', or effecting a new way of seeing the world as a first step to important step towards recognising alternatives. Thomas thought that even the most modest of these approaches contains a subversive element, because they advocate changes that are not merely cosmetic.

Critical ethnographers begin from a set of value-laden premises. However, this gives rise to the question of whether holding such a set of values distorts the research process. Thomas countered by arguing that all knowledge ultimately reflects a set of norms and values about what is worth examining and how. Such values are implicit in the questions we ask, in the operational definitions we use, and in how we conceptualise an act. Values in research are unavoidable, but rather than purge them from research, Thomas stated we should identify them and assess their impact. This stance is much like Becker (1967) who argued that it was impossible to do research, "uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies" (1967: 123). Researchers inevitably take sides, but for Becker, the real question was whether their work was so distorted that it became useless. Researchers must ensure that, "avoidable sympathies do not render…work invalid" (1967:132). To do this Delamont (2002) agreed that values must make them explicit and tested systematically. Crucial here then is the notion of reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the notion that social researchers are part of the world they study and the instruments of their research (Eisner, 1991). From this stance, findings cannot help but be affected by social processes and personal characteristics, an issue noted by Weber (1946) many years ago. Reflexivity acknowledges that the orientation of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. Researchers can no longer be seen as objective (Fontana and Frey, 2000). We act in the social world but need to be able to reflect upon ourselves and our actions as objects in that world; hold ourselves up to the light in Cooley's (1902) notion of the 'looking glass self'. Dey (1993) argued that all data, regardless of methodology, are 'produced' by researchers who are not distant or detached since they make various choices about research design, location and approach which help to 'create' the data they end up collecting. In this sense, all research is subjective in that it is personal and cultural, including science (Hammersley, 1990). All methods are culturally and personally constructed and all knowledge is

selective. Once this is accepted, then it is difficult to see the possibility of isolating a set of 'pure' data. My own research then was conducted in partial awareness of the myriad limitations associated with humans studying other human lives. Nevertheless, what was important for Van Maanen (1988) is that researchers should produce 'tales of the field' rather than attempt spurious realist accounts of some setting. After a brief summary, it is my own production of such tales that the rest of the chapter will focus on next.

Summary of Methodology

The focus of this study was to understand why classroom assistants are willing to undertake work they do; how they create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work; how they create and sustain positive social and professional identities; and how they appear to be complicit in their own oppression.

The study intended to convey both the subjective reality of the lived experiences of the participants, and the influence of social structures to potentially inhibit, oppress and constrain the agency of classroom assistants. Given this duality the study was theoretically positioned within critical realism in an attempt to best explain the relationships between social structures, in society generally and schools particularly, and human agency. The most appropriate social research methodology was deemed to be critical ethnography as this is the best-suited to provide the, "tools for digging below mundane surface appearances of social existence to display a multiplicity of alternate meanings" (Thomas 1993: 6), making known and critiquing the taken-for-granted agendas, powers and oppressions in operation. Through reflexivity the reality of classroom assistants' understandings and interpretations of social structures were explored, whilst simultaneously trying to understand the causal connections of such structures through observing their effects on classroom assistants. The intention was to produce general explanations, but always with the acknowledgement that these are rooted in the classroom assistants' own experiences.

Method

To do ethnography in practice requires, what Brewer (2000) referred to, as method, or a set of tools. However, such a method must relate to the methodology and be appropriate to it. For Brewer, the method chosen must have the capacity to generate data that will facilitate analysis within the particular methodology. Methods cannot be described as ethnographic independent of the methodology that provides the context for them. There can be no meaningful method without methodology. This study of the 'fit' between methodology and methods Hughes (1990) defined as 'the philosophy of social research'.

Once a method has been decided on, then the research can actually begin, although Burgess (1984) questioned this notion. Burgess saw fieldwork as preceded by reading, thought, planning, etc. which should not be seen as distinct from the research process. Research design should precede all social research. He also commented that the model of research design presented in textbooks, conveys neat and tidy descriptions of a linear model with a beginning, middle and end. However, for Burgess, "reality is very different and infinitely more complex" (1984: 31). This issue is especially pertinent to ethnography. These points should be borne in mind as I attempt a model of the research process to describe my own experiences.

Locating a Field of Study

Before ethnographic fieldwork can proceed a field of study, a, "circumscribed area of study…[for]…the subject of social research" (Burgess, 1984: 1), needs to be selected. Fetterman (2010) argued that such selection is shaped by the ethnographer's research questions, and foreshadowed problems (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The obvious selection of setting for my research was a school. This may appear obvious but as O' Brien and Garner (2001a) made clear,

> "*Past accounts of the work of LSAs* [Learning Support Assistants[10]]...*have largely been provided by those who are very far removed from the day-to-day experiences of LSAs in the classroom.*"
>
> (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a: 5).

Schools though are not homogenous settings and the key was to identify a particular setting that would be most appropriate to the investigation of my fledgling research questions.

Burgess (1984) argued that given the nature of ethnographic methodology the researcher should not be concerned with whether such a setting is 'typical' or 'representative'; indeed choices of setting are sometimes made with much more pragmatism. Citing Spradley (1980), Burgess listed five criteria for selection; simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, permissibleness and participation. Burgess is realistic in stating that it is rare for a setting to meet all of these criteria, and hence, some compromise is often needed based on the substantive and theoretical interests of the researcher and/or practical and pragmatic restraints, such as travel costs, time etc. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Indeed, these were real issues for my own research. As my data collection processes were very intensive, with implications for what schools were viable as fields of study. In trying to complete a doctorate on a part-time basis, around a busy workload, it made sense to only consider schools within a reasonable travel time of both my home and work. As the vast majority of my own teaching experience was in the primary sector it also seemed sensible to choose a school within this sector. I eventually chose to try to gain access to three primary schools, this choice being guided by personal knowledge, experience, reputation and recent school inspection reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMIe).

Access

Access, at its most basic, is about gaining permission to do a piece of research in a

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[10] Learning Support Assistants, one type of English terminology for Classroom Assistants.

particular social setting or institution (Burgess, 1984). In overt ethnographic research, access must be negotiated and permission obtained (Brewer, 2000). In educational settings such permission usually comes from the head teacher and, in some cases, the local authority (Burgess, 1984). Individuals, with the power to grant access to the field, are known as gatekeepers (Burgess, 1984; Brewer, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

I decided to try to secure access by means of existing social networks, based on acquaintanceships, and occupational membership (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). After careful reflection I decided to approach a local authority that had previously employed me as a teacher. This provided an advantage in that I was familiar to the 'gatekeepers' that I had to deal with. Hence the schools were chosen partly on the basis that I had connections with their head teachers. Here I was therefore making use of the, "mobilization of existing social networks" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 47).

The first gatekeeper I needed to approach was the local authority. Here I contacted the Director of Education and outlined, in general terms, my intended research. As soon as this was successful (See Appendix 1) I then contacted the Head Teachers of three schools that I had selected as possible fields of study. My aim was to find one school to be used as a pilot study and one other to use for the main study. By contacting three schools I hoped to have a 'safety net'. This proved to be prudent as only two of three head teachers replied positively to my request to conduct research within their schools. With this level of access in place the next step was to meet with the line managers of the classroom assistants, the head teacher in one school and a Principal Teacher (Support for Learning) in the other. This ensured that my tentative research plans were acceptable on a practical level. Finally, but crucially, I then had to get consent from the classroom assistants themselves. To do this, I met with them as a group in their respective schools and talked to them generally about the nature of my proposed research. After my input, there was an opportunity for questions and one-to-one contact if needed. I also provided a written outline for potential participants to take away and consider at their own

leisure. This also included the informed consent statement and reply (See Appendix 3).

All thirteen classroom assistants at the two schools gave me their written, informed consent and became my sample. This group was made up of four classroom assistants at Coalside Primary[11] (two 'SEN' Auxiliaries and two 'Classroom Assistants') and eleven classroom assistants at Sunview Primary (seven 'ASN' Auxiliaries and two 'Classroom Assistants'). Based on these numbers, Coalside Primary became my pilot school and Sunview Primary my main focus of study.

Sampling

Sampling involves selecting participants, times and/or contexts, from a broader set of choices in such a way that this chosen subset, or sample, is in some ways representative of the broader set (O' Reilly, 2009). Often though, this sampling is not the result of conscious deliberation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), but will be quite clear, and the result of, "…clear accident and good fortune" (Brewer, 2000: 80). This was the case with my sample of participants.

Sampling, however, also involves time and context, for once fieldwork begins it is impossible to conduct around the clock (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; O' Reilly, 2009). Again, such choices should be theoretically informed where possible, but in reality may have to be made on the basis of practical limitations (O' Reilly, 2009); for instance, having to timetable them around the teaching commitments of a full-time job. Initially, I was concerned that to be representative, my observations should experience the fullest range of routines and behaviours possible (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; O' Reilly, 2009). However, I soon realised the overriding importance of different times and contexts, such as classroom, staffrooms, meetings, breaks, lunch and transitions (Woods, 1979).

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[11] Pseudonyms used for schools

Given my interest in talk, some of these times and contexts appeared to provide richer data than others. For example, shadowing classroom assistants in the classroom, actually working with children, provided less rich data than listening to them on their break. It soon became apparent that the ideal day for observations was a Friday. Fridays were atypical in that they consisted of less teaching and more activities such as 'Golden Time' and assembly, yet data collection was richer precisely because of this. Generally, on Fridays, classroom assistants were freed up from working directly with pupils and instead spent time in the support base, away from both pupils and teachers, reflecting on their week and planning ahead. Interactions here were more relaxed, informal and less guarded. They were also livelier as more classroom assistants were involved in the cut and thrust of discussion. Friday also included a staff meeting, chaired by the Principal Teacher of Support for Learning, which provided a very different context. Importantly though, whatever the time or context, these are dynamic processes and ones in which the researcher needs to be fully aware of their own role (Pole and Morison, 2003).

Role and Rapport

It is part of the researcher's own reflexivity to recognise and interpret the ways in which their own identity affects, and is reflected in, the collection and analysis of data (Pole and Morrison, 2003). This can be crucial for a researcher's personal attributes, age, class, ethnic identity, gender, 'race' and status, can act as either a barrier or a resource (O' Reilly, 2009). Whilst some of our personal attributes are not open to 'management', others are; and therefore, before researchers embark on ethnographic research, they should be reflecting which 'self' to present, and how that particular 'self' may affect, and be affected by, the research topic, participants, events and actions. But such choices should only be adopted after careful consideration of the purposes of the research and the nature of the setting (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Essentially my concern here is one of "impression management" (Fielding, 1993: 158), or finding an identity. My own characteristics of being a middle-aged, middle-class, English, White, male, academic/teacher were potentially problematic as the majority of the sample was working-class, Scottish women. In terms of gender, being a male researcher in a setting reserved for women had the potential to be an issue. However, this was a situation that I was not unfamiliar with. From my teaching background, I understood how relatively rare male primary teachers are (Tett and Riddell, 2006). Yet, I also understood, that despite this rarity, males often enjoyed quite a privileged position. It was this realisation that prepared me for this aspect. Regarding classroom assistants in particular, these were women I had experience of working with in a variety of school settings as a teacher previously involved in special education. Being amongst women, both teachers and classroom assistants, was something I was used to, and comfortable with. The issues of class were not insurmountable as I grew up in a working class environment and know many women like those in the sample. Indeed, my sister is a teaching assistant in an English primary school. With regard to ethnic identity a minority of the classroom assistants in the sample were English, so this again was not an insurmountable issue. More important was the issue of status, as a researcher always needs to be aware of the power relationships involved within research and the way that this may influence the actual research itself. It was in the area of status that I felt consideration of my role was most important.

I felt that I did not want to present myself as an, 'academic/researcher', as this might distance myself from the women in my sample. Rather, I felt the status of 'teacher', while not ideal, was potentially less alienating, although it still brings to the fore issues of authenticity and authority (Gordon *et al*., 2007). Nevertheless, being a teacher, and one who had worked locally, in similar settings and with classroom assistants, gave me some credibility with the women. Such credibility, I hoped, would foster a relationship that would produce more natural talk. Of course there could be disadvantages too, for instance, things may be left unsaid because my 'knowledge' of them is assumed. Another potential disadvantage was

that being a teacher was *not* being a classroom assistant. To try and negate this I tried to establish the role of the 'novice' in relation to the women (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Whilst my teaching background stopped me being a complete novice it also gave me the chance of being useful in the setting, which is often attractive, and where possible, probably does no harm (Delamont, 2002). My strategy came from Lofland (1971) who talks of the 'acceptable incompetent', or to use Scottish parlance; the 'daft laddie'. In choosing this role I purposefully detached myself from other teachers. Important here was to learn the language and vocabulary appropriate to various contexts and show behaviour appropriate to particular circumstances (Burgess, 1984). Sharing the cultural habits was a good way of developing this, so I took my turn buying tea, coffee and biscuits for the Friday staff meetings, helped with computing problems and did my share of the washing up. In essence, this involved adopting a persona that foregrounded some parts of my identity whilst backgrounding others. Such trade-offs are common in ethnographic research and any personal discomfort needs to be weighed against the potential success of the research. Yet, such concerns may actually be overstated, for in reality participants often quickly forget that they are subjects of any research and revert to their normal behaviours (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Whatever the particular circumstances and situation, success can only be measured in hindsight.

Data Collection

Data collection was undertaken in two schools, Coalside Primary; as a pilot study, and Sunview Primary; as the main study. Both Coalside and Sunview Primary are towns on the southeast coast of Scotland. Coalside has a population of 5,660, and Sunview 8,020[12]. Both towns have similar backgrounds of older social housing mixed with plentiful, new build, private housing. In 2010 Coalside Primary had a school roll of 402, with teacher numbers of 19.9 (FTE), whilst Sunview Primary

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[12] http://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-scotland.php?adm2id=eln

had a school roll of 752, with teacher numbers of 36.5 (FTE)[13]. Both are non-denominational schools with a nursery class, both sit below the national average in terms of proportions of pupils who were entitled to free school meals and both have attendance that is in line with the national average[14].

Coalside Primary has four classroom assistants (see Table 5.1):

Jean[15] (57) is a full-time Special Educational Needs (SEN) Auxiliary with twenty-three years experience, and a Professional Development Award (PDA) Classroom Assistant (CA), who came to the role from being a playground supervisor. Jean is married and her husband has recently been made redundant. They have three grown up children.

Morag (56) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with twenty-two years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a 'dinner lady'. Morag is married and her husband is in employment. They have two grown up children.

Agnes (56) is a full-time Classroom Assistant with thirteen years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role through the Classroom Assistant Initiative. Agnes is divorced with one grown up child. She has done a range of other part-time jobs for financial reasons.

Janis (53) is a full-time Classroom Assistant with six years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a playground supervisor. Janis is married and her husband is in employment. They have three grown up children.

Sunview Primary has eleven classroom assistants (see Table 5.1):

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[13] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scottishschoolsonline/index.asp
[14] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/index.asp
[15] Pseudonyms used for all staff.

Aileen, (59) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with twenty-two years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role after seeing a job advertisement. Aileen is married and her husband is in employment. They have three grown up children.

Moira, (57) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with thirty years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from doing a childcare qualification at a further education college. Moira is married and her husband is in employment. They have two grown up children.

Heather, (50) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with seventeen years experience, who came to the role from being a playground supervisor. Although Heather started a PDA (CA) this was never completed. Heather is married and her husband is in employment. They have two grown up children.

Alisa, (46) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with three years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a 'parent helper' after working as a receptionist in a bank. Alison shares her role between the primary school and the high school. Alison is married and her husband is in employment. They have two children at high school.

Lesley, (48) is a full-time Classroom Assistant with six years experience, and two PDAs (Classroom Assistant and Support for Learning), who came to the role from being a parent helper. Lesley is married and her husband is in employment. They have two grown up children and one at high school.

Cara, (48) is a full-time Classroom Assistant with nine years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a parent helper. Prior to this she had been a laboratory technician. Cara is married and her husband is in employment. They have one grown up child and one at high school.

Heidi, (48) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with four years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role after 5 years in a school for pupils with complex

needs. Heidi is married and her husband, who took early retirement, is a 'house husband'. They have one child. Heidi has a degree in Archeology and Classic Studies and works over summer in a 'wraparound' care role for pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN).

Leanne, (48) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary with twenty-two years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a dining hall assistant. Leanne is widowed, but in a long-term relationship. She has three grown up children, including a son with autism.

Lucy, (39) is a part-time SEN Auxiliary (twelve hours per week) with six years experience, and a PDA (CA), who came to the role from being a cleaner. Lucy is divorced but lives with her partner who is in employment. She has five children; one pre-school, one primary aged and three grown up.

All thirteen of these women gave their informed consent to become involved in an extended period of participant observation, the central method of data collection within ethnography, which, for Pole and Morrison (2003), can convey the subjective reality of the lived experiences of the participants. Participant observation, as the name suggests, involves two key elements; participation and observation. Observation is the more challenging aspect as it is these observations that go towards a researcher being able to make sense of actions and events (O' Reilly, 2007).

Gold (1958), in what has become the classic stance, mapped out four positions in regard to the extent of participation. I chose to adopt 'participant as observer', where my identity as a researcher was overt and open, through informed consent, and my role took the form of 'shadowing' the classroom assistants through normal life, witnessing first hand and in intimate detail culture and events of interest (Denscombe, 2010). This resulted in comprehensive and contextualised descriptions of social action, or rich or thick accounts, which respect the irreducibility of human experience (Geertz, 1973).

Data Gathering and Recording

Observations were conducted, for the pilot study, at Coalside Primary on 13 days
between June 2010 and November 2010 (See Table 4.1) and, for the main study,
at Sunview Primary on 20 days between February 2011 and December 2012 (See
Table 4.2). For ethnography, many would consider this a relatively short time to
be immersed in the field. However, the reality of a full-time job and heavy
workload meant that practical constraints had to be considered. Despite these
pressures though, I attempted to spread my observations over a meaningful length
of time, and on days that could potentially provide the most pertinent data.

Table 4.1 Overview of Participant Observation at Coalside Primary School.

Participant Observation Coalside Primary School		
Monday	14 Jun 2010	8.30am – 4.00pm
Wednesday	16 Jun 2010	8.30am – 4.00pm
Thursday	24 Jun 2010	8.30am – 4.00pm
Wednesday	30 Jun 2010	8.30am – 4.00pm
Friday	1 Oct 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	8 Oct 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	15 Oct 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	29 Oct 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	5 Nov 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	12 Nov 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	19 Nov 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	26 Nov 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	10 Dec 2010	8.30am – 1.00pm

Table 4.2 Overview of Participant Observation Sunview Primary School.

Participant Observation Sunview Primary School		
Monday	21 Feb 2011	8.30am – 4.00pm
Friday	25 Feb 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	11 Mar 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	18 Mar 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	8 Apr 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	6 May 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	13 May 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	20 May 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	27 May 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	3 Jun 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	24 Jun 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Tuesday	28 Jun 2011	8.30am – 4.00pm
Friday	1 Jul 2011	8.30am – 1.00pm
Tuesday	19 Aug 2011	8.30am – 4.00pm
Tuesday	23 Aug 2011	8.30am – 4.00pm
Friday	28 Sep 2012	8.30am – 1.00pm
Monday	5 Nov 2012	8.30am – 4.00pm
Tuesday	6 Nov 2012	8.30am – 4.00pm
Friday	9 Nov 2012	8.30am – 1.00pm
Friday	16 Nov 2012	8.30am – 1.00pm

Completing fieldnotes is a key element of these observations. This entailed using a pencil and notebook, the most common ethnographic tools, to record details and the context of observations as soon as possible after they happened. Although this can be awkward initially it is an, "urgent business", and crucial as memory can be, "selective and frail" (Denscombe, 2010: 151). Apart from getting notes down in the field I was also aware of having to extend these notes outside of the field, preferably at the end of each day. Here notes could be deciphered, expanded,

contextualised and theorised. Reflexivity in this process was crucial. Finally, it was important to organise and store the fieldnotes ready for analysis.

Making fieldnotes in a school setting may be slightly easier than in other contexts as they are broadly congruent with the setting (Delamont, 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), and in educational settings, writing is an, "unremarkable activity" (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 26). However, in practice, participants seemed particularly conscious of my note taking initially. Over time though this awkwardness waned and, if anything, my note taking became a 'running joke' between the participants and myself, for instance, Cara, at Sunview Primary, would urge me to, "…*get it down*" (Cara, Sunview Fieldnotes: 3/6/11) as a controversial issue was discussed, or Lucy would joke, "…*oh you're not writing that down are you?*" (Lucy, Sunview Fieldnotes: 5/11/12).

Fetterman (2010) argued that whilst the process of participant observation may seem unsystematic, uncontrolled and haphazard initially, it should become more refined as the researcher begins to understand more about the setting. This was particularly evident in this study. At the outset I knew that I was broadly interested in how classroom assistants talked about their jobs, and originally thought that shadowing them as they undertook their day-to-day routines would best access this talk. Despite these plans, it soon became evident that shadowing was not ideal on a number of levels. Essentially, classroom assistants' talk was closed down by the presence of pupils, other staff (especially teachers), and, to some extent, me. The candour I hoped for was by and large absent. However, such forthrightness was present in more informal situations, away from pupils and teachers. Therefore, my focus switched away from classrooms to the staff base and the staffroom, where classroom assistants were freer and more relaxed in their talk with their peers. It was during these meetings, breaks, lunches and transitions that the women were most open and the data richer.

Initially I noted down, in as much detail as possible, first impressions of the setting, participant, events, etc. but in a fairly wide style (O' Reilly, 2007). If there

was any doubt, I wrote it down, as it is never possible to record too much (Delamont, 2002). In time though my notes became more directed and more precisely linked to areas of interest as I gave thought to how these related to my research questions, and of what to do next, etc. As my fieldnotes became more focused, themes emerged that structured data gathering and recording, giving focus to specific areas. Such themes included, but in particular mothering and care, although with very particular ways of describing these regarding parents and teachers, and it was this which began to take on a central resonance in my developing thoughts. Nevertheless, this process is not just about looking for themes. It is also about searching for more nuanced information such as, who is doing the talking? How are they talking? Who is consenting? Who is dissenting? What are the points of agreement or tension? Where are the silences? With all this in focus, the 'insignificant' took on new meaning as notes became more reflexive, active, specific and detailed (O' Reilly, 2007). Fieldnotes were completed and stored on a computer.

It is important for O' Reilly (2009) that they, "should retain the mood they were written in" (2009: 72), so speech was recorded verbatim, and, where possible, used the "situated vocabularies" (2007: 145) of the participants. They contained all that was relevant, for instance, contexts, times, circumstances, others participants present, etc. as well as non-verbal communication too. This helped minimise any inferences and facilitated the construction and reconstruction of the analysis. Although the fieldnotes collected from Coalside Primary were originally meant to be part of a pilot study, this decision was reassessed as the research progressed. On reflection after the systematic analysis of these fieldnotes it was felt that the data was rich and thick enough for it to be incorporated, and supplement the data in the main study.

However good these fieldnotes appear, in reality they remain highly autobiographical and can only be, "the observations of a single individual selectively recorded" (Waddington, 1992: 30). As such participant observation should never stand alone as a research method and is used more in tandem with

other methods (Brewer, 2000). The routine use of multiple methods extends the range of data and provides 'data triangulation' (Denzin, 2009). As it is acknowledged that all methods impose perspectives on reality by the type of data they collect, and each tends to expose something slightly different about the same symbolic 'reality', then data triangulation can guarantee a more rounded picture of the one symbolic reality as multiple sources of data have been employed to explore it. Fetterman (2010) stated that these multiple methods and techniques ensure the integrity of the data, and objectify and standardise the researchers' perceptions. One method commonly used to supplement observational data is interviewing. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stress that the decision to use participant observation and interview must be made in the context of the purpose of one's research and the circumstances in which it is to be carried out.

Fetterman (2010) stated that, "the interview is the ethnographer's most important data-gathering technique" (2010: 40), as they can explain, and put into context, what the ethnographer has seen and experienced. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with all 13 classroom assistants. This decision was made because this type of interview allows greater flexibility to introduce 'probes' for expanding, developing and clarifying responses (See Appendix 5 and 6). For Burgess this structure can be seen as an *aide mémoire* that merely indicates kind of topics, themes and questions that might be covered, rather than the actual questions to be used. Davies (1999) commented that these types of interviews are very close to a 'naturally occurring' conversation, indeed Burgess (1984) referred to them as 'conversations with a purpose' (1984: 102). However, they should never *simply* be a conversation, the ethnographer should have some research agenda and some control over the proceedings. Such control comes as a result of focusing the interview questions firmly on the research questions. So as the research questions centred on the willingness of classroom assistants to undertake work of a low status, low pay and insecurity, the interview questions sought responses regarding their role, reward, frustrations and relationships, as a means of understanding how they reconcile and justify their roles.

Semi-structured interviews are still structured in accordance with a systematic research design (Brewer, 2000). However, Burgess (1984), citing Zweig (1948), believed it is essential to have done participant observation before any interviews occur. Interviews were completed after the participant observation was well under way, as by this time, a rapport had been built which hopefully lessened any interviewer effect. However, consent was obtained for the interviews (See Appendix 4). Having observational data also meant the interviews had the potential to provide a reliable indicator of behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings. Once again, reflexivity was important in the need to be aware of the situated understandings that interview data can represent.

Interviews, though, can be daunting and onerous to participants as was reflected in the fact that the four classroom assistants at Coalside Primary were remarkably reluctant to become involved. Given the help and support they had already given me, I felt reluctant to push for interviews under these circumstances and chose to reflect on how to handle a potential repeat of this situation at Sunview Primary. Therefore, at Sunview Primary, I consciously changed the language used, in that I omitted the word 'interview' and used words like 'talk' and chat'. I also gave some of the more reluctant staff the chance to be interviewed in pairs on the grounds that this could make the situation less stressful. It also gave the chance of getting slightly different data as a result of the dynamics between the pair. At Sunview Primary all nine classroom assistants agreed to be interviewed. Heather, Heidi, Alison, Leanne, and Lucy were all interviewed individually, whilst Moira and Aileen, and, Cara and Lesley were interviewed in pairs (See Table 4.3).

All interviews were carried out during the school day and were conducted in the privacy of a support for learning room within the school. On average the individual interviews lasted for twenty-five minutes and the paired interviews one hour. All interviews were digitally, audio recorded as this was felt to be generally less intrusive and destructive of open and natural conversation than note taking, and infinitely more reliable than memory. It also allowed me to be much more

aware of other aspects of interaction and let participants and myself enter more fully into development of interview. All interviews were then transcribed in full.

Table 4.3 Overview of Interviews Sunview Primary School.

Interviews
Sunview Primary School
Friday 3 Jun 2011 Heather (26 minutes) Moira & Aileen (25 minutes)
Friday 24 Jun 2011 Heidi (25 minutes) Cara & Lesley (55 minutes)
Tuesday 28 Jun 2011 Ailsa (27 minutes) Leanne (32 minutes)
Thursday 5 Jul 2011 Lucy (60 minutes)

Transcription was a long, time-consuming process (Delamont, 2002) but was not seen as merely a mechanical process (Davies, 1999). Underlying theoretical assumptions and issues such as style of speech, dialect, repetitions, false starts, hesitations, affect transcriptions, and all were carefully considered. Transcriptions also included notes of promising analytical ideas, as well as notes of my own feelings and involvement, but a clear distinction between these was kept. Once transcriptions were complete, my five hours of interview data and thirty-three days of fieldnotes needed to be analysed.

Data Analysis

An ethnographer's key task is to describe and explain that which has been observed in the field. Nevertheless, the aim is not just to make the data

intelligible, but also to do this in a way that provides an original perspective on the phenomena, develops previous work, and/or has the potential to tell the reader more about phenomena of similar types. However, ethnography produces a sheer mass of data, all of it, initially, 'unstructured data'; not organised in terms of sets of analytical categories (Burgess, 1984; Davies, 1999; Brewer, 2000; Delamont, 2002; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Such data needs to be efficiently, rigorously and systematically managed to bring order to the data (Brewer, 2000). This is only possible through the process of analysis, which involves such skills as organising, sorting, summarising and translating (O' Reilly, 2009).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) saw no standard set of steps that the ethnographer should go through in order to make sense of the data, but recognise that central to analysis is transparent documentation and careful thought. Practically, this involves the necessity to really know the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) and means having to read and reread fieldnotes, transcripts and diaries (Delamont, 2002; Pole and Morrison, 2003). Such reading is necessary to be able to organise the data. This means, as far as possible, getting all the data in to a similar format and collated in such a way as to allow notes to be added. Personally, this was achieved through 'Word' files on a computer and, crucially, I made sure all these data files were consistently backed up (Pole and Morrison, 2003).

Initially, data are usually organised in chronological order but the process of analysis will transform the data in to another kind of order (O' Reilly, 2009). The first task in analysing the data is to find some broad, mundane concepts that begin to help make sense of what may be going on. This process is usually referred to as 'coding', and involves the close exploration of the collected data with the aim of sorting and labelling it by assigning it codes (O' Reilly, 2009). Codes must be relevant to foreshadowed problems but can be sorted, or labelled, by different categories; actors, locations, concepts, theoretical ideas. To begin with, codes will be very open and usually not well defined, what Blumer (1954) referred to as

'sanitizing concepts'; important starting point that suggest directions along which to look and provides a focus for further data collection. In the early stages the aim is to use the data to think with, to look for interesting patterns and anything unanticipated (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The codes that do emerge will depend too, to some extent, on the researcher's own interests, readings, and theoretical and epistemological framework.

So my initial interest lay in the area of talk and I had some notion that such talk was linked to performance and performativity. Therefore my initial reading of theory was based on the works of Butler (1990b) and Connell (1987), in the area of gender, and, Bourdieu (1984) and Skeggs (1997), in the area of class. I therefore read and re-read my data to produce a range of general, open codes in terms of classroom assistants' talk about parents, teachers, pupils, colleagues and work. I used a multiple coding technique, in that I used coloured marker pens to highlight each code, on one copy of my data.

Such coding is achieved through reflective and interpretive interaction between the researcher, data, literature, official documentation and theory (O' Reilly, 2009). It involves an iterative process in which ideas are used to make sense of data, and data are used to change ideas. Hence, the process moves backwards and forwards between applying theory, observation, data collection, and even theorising ourselves. Analysis then is not just a matter of managing and manipulating data, it must go beyond the data to develop ideas that will illuminate them, and link our ideas with those of others. Ideas must be tested to consider their fit with further data and so on (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Making sense of the coding necessitates writing 'memos'; thoughts and ideas, associated with the codes, and thinking what these mean in the context of the broader argument of the research. Once again, initially, these memos are quite open. Dey (1993) referred to the importance of the 'interactive quintet' of 'who, what, when, where and why' in the questioning process involved in writing such memos. However, although memos may be brief, they should never be divorced

from context. Additionally certain things will have never have been recorded, hence memory is still an important tool (O' Reilly, 2009). Memos provide the opportunity to work out ideas in more depth and enable the ethnographer to move from the data and codes to links with other ideas, theory and data.

My initial memos were broad and open, taking the form of notes in margins of my data or slightly expanded jottings in a notebook. Such memos outlined my first thoughts, sought links and patterns, and considered areas that may be expanded. These memos lead to an interrogation of data, an exploration of what the data is saying. This interrogation is a dialectical process with data and theory mutually informing and transforming one another (Delamont, 2002). The purpose here is to draw out recurrent patterns from the data, for such patterns are the 'building blocks' of analysis, which when assembled and reassembled produce, 'an intelligent, coherent and valid account' (Dey, 1993: 51). Such patterns lead to more focused codes and memos where ideas, categories and/or insights are explored in more depth and links made between them. Focused memos begin to elaborate ideas and focus themes, making links between disparate codes and sets of ideas. They produce 'definitive concepts' (Blumer, 1954) that compare and relate what happens at various places and times in order to identify stable features that transcend immediate contexts. At this point the ethnographer will return to the data and re-code, sub-code and/or cross reference codes. Hence, the process of coding the data is a recurrent one; as new categories emerge, previously coded data must be read again to see whether they contain any examples of the new codes. The immediate aim is to produce a set of promising categories as a result of the systematic coding of all the data in terms of these categories.

So, for instance, my original codes on classroom assistants' talk about parents were, again, read and re-read. These readings produced further categories that were sub-coded. Such categories were classroom assistants' local knowledge, views on 'good' parenting, and views on 'bad' parenting. From these sub-codes, further, more focused memos, were created, which began to make links to theory, and cross-referenced sub-codes with specific actors in the sample. The memos

began to highlight patterns and links between codes and sub-codes. This was completed physically with multiple transcript copies, a set of highlighter pens and, literally, cutting and pasting.

The next task is to begin to work on those which seem likely to be central to one's analysis, with a view to classifying their meaning and exploring their relations with other categories with a specific analytical argument in mind. This may lead to vaguely understood categories being differentiated into several more clearly defined ones, as well as to the specification of subcategories. In this way, new categories or subcategories emerge and there may be a considerable amount of reassignment of data among the categories (Dey, 1993).

So as my memos expanded, I had to go back to theory to try and explain the data. However, this also led to new theory having to be sought to explain the data. For example, the classroom assistants' talk about parents resulted in reviewing readings that introduced me to Hargreaves (1984) work on 'contrastive rhetoric' that I had not considered originally. This is turn led to the area of 'atrocity stories' as new theory was considered from medical literature. In turn this led to Hochschild's (1979, 1983) notion of 'emotional labour', that is understood as performative, just like the previously considered research of Butler, Connell, Bourdieu and Skeggs.

The discovery of patterns may also uncover instances that run contrary to these patterns, but such instances cannot be ignored, the ethnographer must be honest, and plausible alternative links to those made in the emerging analysis need to be investigated (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Sometimes these exceptions can be important in their own right and can focus thinking on looking afresh of social phenomena.

In my particular sample it was clear that not all the classroom assistants were performing the same way. The most prominent exception was Heidi at Sunview Primary. This obviously called for a different explanation of Heidi's talk to that of

the dominant figures, in particular Ailsa, Heather, Leanne and Lucy. Again, thoughtful consideration of the data through memos led to the notion that 'extremist talk' Hargreaves (1984) could explain Heidi's talk. By this point in the analysis process memos were becoming specifically analytical arguments.

Once the data have been coded and interrogated until exhaustion, it is time to move onto generalising and theorising (Delamont, 2002). Generalising means the thinking out of specific instances to a more general theme or concept. The aim here is to reach a stage that is both the most inclusive of the data and the most comprehensive of existing theories. For example, the themes of mothering and care were congruent with both the talk the women constructed, and the theories chosen to explain these; Butler, Connell, Bourdieu and Skeggs. Gradually, analysis leads to reduced sets of codes and longer memos that act first as an aid to analysis, but eventually as writing to present to an audience. Ethnographic research then has a characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed and may need to be transformed. Eventually its scope must be clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about, and not uncommonly, this turns out to be something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Leaving the Field

All ethnography must end eventually and, when it does, an exit strategy to be able to leave the field successfully needs to be considered. Such a strategy needs to consider both the physical and emotional aspects of withdrawal (Brewer, 2000). While the former may be quite perfunctory, the latter is often more difficult. The better the rapport and relationships; the more difficult it is to leave (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In my case the physical aspect of leaving was relatively straightforward. Firstly, my deadline was always a line in the sand, and secondly, school settings disintegrate naturally, and regularly, at the end of school terms.

Nonetheless, I did put thought into preparing my exit to minimise any potential upset. To this end, I made sure to signpost my leaving date well in advance and when the time came, to thank participants with a card.

Ethics

Whilst most ethical issues apply to social research, generally the distinct nature of ethnography raises specific issues for ethical considerations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This is because the nature of ethnography is about working with people. It is a human process, and often means intimate engagement with the lives of individuals (Pole and Morrison, 2003; Fetterman, 2010). Given this, participants were respected as subjects, not simply research objects.

A central ethical issue was that of informed consent, and in particular, considering exactly what to divulge to participants about what was going to be studied and how. Davies (1999) argued that informing participants of the nature and likely consequences of their participation in the research should be done in a way that is intelligible to them. For Davies, such introductory explanations are not about persuasion, but to provide information so people can assess and make informed decisions. Obtaining this consent should also be free of any coercion or undue influence (See Appendix 3 and 4).

O' Reilly (2009) was of the opinion that, ideally, participants should be given as much information as possible in order to ensure their informed consent. However, in response, others argue that the information a researcher gives out depends on the type of audience and their interest in the topic (Fetterman, 2010). However, a more crucial reason why a researcher may not want to tell participants everything about their research is because full disclosure of the aims of the research may well have an influence on the outcome of the research itself (Davies, 1999; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Essentially, the more participants know, the less naturally they behave. Hence there exists a tension between wanting to give full information and not 'contaminating' the research by informing participants

too specifically about the research question to be studied.

Given the nature of my research questions, and the need for participants to act as naturally as possible, I did not make this information too detailed or specific. Such a decision was not taken lightly and any potential deceit was balanced against what I wanted the research to achieve. Interestingly though, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) also stated that it is not unusual for participants to promptly forget about informed consent once they come to know the ethnographer as a person. Linked to this, Burgess (1984) highlighted the confusion over what activities are constituted as, "doing research" once an ethnographer is *in situ* (Burgess, 1984: 199). For example, was I 'doing research' when I chatted to the participants about their weekends or about their families? I believe that, for me, the answer would have to be yes, but I doubt the participants saw these interactions in that particular way.

Delamont (2002) noted that much insight also comes from speech heard by researchers which is not solicited by them, but is overheard, or would be happening anyway, whether research was going on or not. Some of this will be intended for public consumption, other parts will have been intended for a more restricted audience, which may or may not be meant to include the researcher. Obviously data gathered by open questioning of informants in educational research have a clear status as data. As long as the respondents know that the researcher is working, what they say in answer to direct questions can be regarded as 'on the record'. The ethical status of things informants say, which the researcher can hear is much less clear, but data gathered this way were enormously valuable. In general, participants knew that I was a researcher; hence I assumed anything said in my vicinity was either meant for me or was 'fair game'. Others may disagree with this strategy, but as Bronfrenbrenner (1952) states,

> *"The only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether."*
> (Bronfrenbrenner, 1952, cited in Burgess, 1984: 207)

O' Reilly (2009) believed that, where possible, and where permission has been sought, it is best to use participants real names and details. She argues that it would appear unethical in itself not to use such information given the participants have, "happily contributed" (2009: 12). Fetterman (2010) though, takes a different stance arguing that as ethnographies are usually detailed and revealing, the use of pseudonyms is often a sensible strategy, and one that I adhered to. This is seen to give participants the assurance of confidentiality regarding use of data and anonymity in any publication (Davies, 1999). But Davies went on to warn that even if this is done, researchers must be cautious about the degree that they promise, and realistic of their abilities to protect participants. Rightly, she states that there are limits; and that sometimes, even with pseudonyms, participants and locations are still identifiable.

Ethical decisions, though, are not solely about a personal code of ethics reflecting an ethnographer's individual values. Nowadays many professional associations have developed ethical statements which members are encouraged to follow (Davies, 1999). I needed to become familiar in detail with the ethical code promulgated by my professional association. In light of this I followed current practice for doctoral students within the College of Humanities and Social Science (CHSS) (CHSS: 2008). This meant that my supervisors and I discussed ethical issues and continued to monitor these as my work progressed. We completed an ethical application form (See Appendix 2), although this was not submitted to the Schools' Ethics Sub-Committee for consideration as my planned research did not involve, "an inherent physical or emotional risk to participants" (University of Edinburgh: 2008). As a framework for my ethical considerations I used the guidelines from my relevant disciplinary association, The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (BERA: 2004), as these are widely regarded as authoritative.

Summary

This chapter has argued that critical ethnography, based on the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of critical realism, can provide the most relevant and appropriate philosophical and methodological framework to appropriately address the research questions, and convey the subjective reality of the lived experiences of classroom assistants. The chapter then described the method, or tools, used to gather and analyse such data. Ethical considerations were also discussed. The next chapter begins to present a range of findings from this data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5

Findings: Talk About Working Lives

Introduction

This chapter introduces the lives and social identities of the participants in this study, and, through their own talk, describes their day-to-day experience of work with reference to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The discussion is presented around several broad themes present in the working lives of classroom assistants, including their views on qualifications and training, pay, conditions, planning and communication, and contracts. The discussion in this chapter captures the tensions in the lives of the participants in this research. These tensions illuminate the way in which classroom assistants use talk to construct identities that serve to socialise and enculturate them as 'classroom assistants'. To use Bourdieu's terminology, this talk is classroom assistants as agents describing the position they see themselves occupying in the field. Through this talk we can begin to comprehend the influence of both habitus and doxa on their dispositions and actions within the field. This overview of the social characteristics of the participants will provide the necessary foundation for later discussion.

Talk

All through the following chapters the talk of the classroom assistants is central. This is done for a crucial reason. As mentioned previously, prior research has been 'about' classroom assistants, rather than 'with' them, and as such their own voice was never really heard (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a). This may be due to the research being conducted by those 'in positions of greater authority and knowledge', who were very far removed from the day-to-day experiences of…the classroom' (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a, pp.2-5). To alleviate this, O' Brien and Garner stated that future research should begin from a more ethical stance, one that empowered classroom assistants by presenting their voices through their own

talk. This fits well with the methodology of this particular research, as talk has always been an important aspect of ethnographic data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, it is argued, that it is impossible to understand human intentions whilst ignoring the setting, institutions and sets of practices in which they are embedded (Schutz, 1973). Therefore, talk should not be seen as an alternative, or a replacement, for what people actually do, and should only be fully understood as part of action (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). It is through talk that people perform social actions; through talk they justify, excuse, explain and rationalise both their own actions and those of others. Hence, it is not enough to simply reproduce excerpts of talk without detailed analysis. Here my opinion of research differs to that of O' Brien and Garner (2001a). They do not see the researcher's role as to provide a critical superstructure, indeed they state that 'academia' will taint the meaning conveyed by talk. On the contrary, my view is that the researcher needs to examine the form and function of talk within the context of the larger ethnographic study. In doing so such enquiry should attempt to discover the doxa; the socially shared formats and conventions, which relate to the culturally appropriate conventions of the particular field. These should be related to the social situations in which they are produced and shared, along with the social position of the speaker and their audience. Research should seek to relate the 'micro' world of the individual to the 'macro' world of institutional meanings, which they both inhabit and re-create. So at its most fundamental, research is an inquiry into the relations between subject and object (Clough, 2002:12). To achieve this, the women's talk (my data) is presented in detail, rather than through singular or isolated quotations from fieldwork transcriptions. In this sense they should be seen as 'critical moments' used to challenge the dominant social order.

The study of talk comes under the umbrella term of narrative inquiry, or narrative; a set of methodologies, with an interpretive approach, that attempt to capture personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and take account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). At heart a narrative is a story told by an individual or group of individuals (Plummer, 2001). These provide links, coherence and meaning to

things they experience and perceive, and are the way people construct and present accounts of their lives (Goodson, 2013). As such, they act as devices for making sense of social action and can give privileged insights into how people make sense of the world (Lawson, *et al.*, 2006). Bruner (1986) too argued that narratives help us make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives, and contrasted these with 'paradigmatic mode of thought', which draw on reasoned analysis, logical proof, and empirical observation to explain, and predict reality, and to create unambiguous objective 'truth' that can be proven or disproved. Narrative inquiry can span disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, organisation studies and history. Narratives can occur across a variety of thematic and/or stylistic categories including fiction, non-fiction, and is found in all forms of human creativity and art, including speech, writing, song, film, TV, games, photography, visual arts, theatre and story-telling. Given the breadth of the field of narrative inquiry, and potential confusion arising from this, my data; the naturally occurring talk in the workplace, and that of more structured interviews, will be referred to as 'talk' throughout this study. However, this is not to deny that this talk is part of narrative enquiry, or does not include aspects of storytelling. Given this, the chapter continues by providing an overview of the social characteristics of the participants in order to provide a foundation for later discussion.

The Social Characteristics of the Participants

Examination of the women in the sample confirms the overwhelming similarities between this sample of classroom assistants and research evidence of much wider populations from both Scotland in particular and the United Kingdom in general (see Table 5.1).

The entire sample was women (Schlapp *et al.*, 2001; EOC, 2007) and all but one over 40 years of age. Only three of the women were lone parents, and all had children, the majority of whom had gone through the school themselves (SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007).

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Table 5.1 The Social Characteristics of Classroom Assistants at Coalside and Sunview Primary Schools (N=13).

Coalside Primary School	Experience Qualifications	Previous experience	Gender, Age, Ethnicity & Marital Status	Family
Jean SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	23 years PDA (CA)	Playground Supervisor	Female, 57, White – Scottish Married	Partner: Unemployed 3 grown up children
Morag SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	22 years PDA (CA)	Dining Hall Supervisor	Female, 56, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 2 grown up children
Agnes Classroom Assistant (Full Time)	13 years PDA (CA)	Parent	Female, 56, White – Scottish Divorced	1 grown up child
Janis Classroom Assistant (Full Time)	6 years PDA (CA)	Playground Supervisor	Female, 53, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 1 grown up child
Sunview Primary School	**Experience Qualifications**	**Previous experience**	**Gender, Age, Ethnicity & Marital Status**	**Family**
Aileen SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	22 years PDA (CA)	Parent	Female, 59, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 3 grown up children
Moira SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	30 years PDA (CA)	Further Education College	Female, 57, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 2 grown up children
Heather SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	17 years	Playground Supervisor	Female, 50, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 2 grown up children
Ailsa SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	3 years PDA (CA)	Royal Bank of Scotland Parent Helper	Female, 46, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 2 grown up children
Lesley Classroom Assistant (Full Time)	6 years PDA (CA) PDA (SfL)	Parent Helper	Female, 48, White – Scottish Married	Partner: FT Employed 2 grown up children 1 child High School
Cara Classroom Assistant (Full Time)	9 years PDA (CA)	Parent Helper	Female, 48, White – English Married	Partner: FT Employed 1 grown up child 1 child High School
Heidi SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	4 years PDA (CA) UG Degree	SEN Auxiliary Special School	Female, 48, White – Scottish Married	Partner: Retired 1 child High School
Leanne SEN Auxiliary (Full Time)	22 years PDA (CA)	Dining Hall Supervisor	Female, 48, White – Scottish Widowed	3 grown up children
Lucy SEN Auxiliary (Part Time)	6 years PDA (CA)	School Cleaner	Female, 39, White – Scottish Co-Habiting	Partner: FT Employed 3 grown up children 1 child Primary School 1 child Pre-School

The under-representation of minority ethnic classroom assistants was obvious, in that the entire sample were White – Scottish, with the exception of two, both of whom were also White (Schlapp *et al.*, 2001). Agnes, a single parent, had had second jobs in the past for financial reasons (SCER, 2006). Only Leanne had personal experience of disability in her own family. Other research has suggested that this is often an influence on women deciding to become classroom assistants (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a; Cole, 2004).

All the women lived locally and the majority had been recruited through previous work experience connected with the schools, making that 'natural progression' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009) from playground supervisors, dinner ladies, cleaners or unpaid parent helpers (SCER, 2005; Barkham 2008); stressing that the most important reported attributes of classroom assistants are previous relevant experience and social skills (SCER, 2005; Warhurst *et al.*, 2009; TES, 2012). Hence, the majority of the women had been recruited through informal channels, but all had gone through a formal selection process (SCER, 2006).

None of the women were intending to be teachers (SCER, 2006; Barkham 2008), which is common in other literature, although often constructed in terms of self-sacrifice, "…if I train to be a teacher who's going to do what I do? Because someone's got to do it" (Simpson, 2001: 129). But there were some regrets; even though Jean loved her job she did admit, "*I wish I'd done teaching*" (Jean, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10). A high average length of service appears to confirm that classroom assistants both enjoyed some job satisfaction and viewed their role as a long-term commitment (Woolf and Bassett, 1988).

Finally, classroom assistant posts at Coalside and Sunview Primary are still very popular, with no shortage of applicants (EOC, 2007; Warhurst *et al.*, 2009),

At Sunview Primary interviews have been scheduled for two 2 new classroom assistants and one new auxiliary. All three are part-time posts. According to the chat in the support base there have been over 50 applicants from as far away as Nairn, in the Scottish Highlands, and the Philippines. Some of the applicants had degrees and some Masters qualifications. The successful applicant for the auxiliary post (16 hours per week) was a trained speech and language therapist with qualifications in British Sign Language and 'sign-a-long'.[16]

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 19/8/11)

'We've Done Learning Off Our Own Bats': Talk About Qualifications and Training.

Although formal qualifications are not essential for classroom assistants (EOC, 2007; Warhurst *et al.*, 2009) these women did hold a range of qualifications, ranging from post compulsory education, to Heidi, who had a degree in archaeology and classics, and who was qualified well beyond the requirements of her role (Stead *et al.*, 2007). Since becoming classroom assistants the majority of the women now held the Professional Development Award (PDA) Certificate for Classroom Assistants (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5), a college based introductory level qualification, with some aspects assessed in the workplace (specifically aimed at those wanting to be classroom assistants). The only one without the PDA, or equivalent, was Heather. Heather had started the PDA over a decade ago but did not complete the certificate due to her mother's illness, and subsequent death. However, Heather was now being encouraged by the school management team to complete her PDA. This though, was not without some friction,

Ailsa is on the computer looking at HNC courses for Heather, who although she has 16 years experience still needs to complete her PDA. Heather is not impressed and feels she "could teach them [the course tutors]". To make things worse, the nearest Further Education college does not provide the qualification and although another one does, this is a one-year, part-time course, one night a week. It is also some distance away and Heather does not drive. Moira is less than subtle in reminding Heather that she "had to get up at 5.30 when I did mine."

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[16] Where possible the classroom assistants' talk is presented as speech as this creates a particular relationship, which has the potential for the audience to hear and engage with the intimacy of this talk.

Lucy is telling me about the PDA that in her opinion, "genuinely doesn't make any difference, hands on experience is better [and then] Oh you're not writing that down are you?"

Heather and Lucy's views on the relevance of qualifications and in-service training are not rare. Simpson, herself a learning support assistant, stated, "I don't see the point in having a piece of paper for the sake of it…I need something that is relevant to me doing my job now" (Simpson, 2001: 129).

In addition to their PDAs, classroom assistants attended in-service training to provide themselves with the knowledge, skills and understanding to support learning (TES, 2012). In the early days of classroom assistants they were largely ignored for in-service training (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992). More recent studies though have shown that classroom assistants, throughout the United Kingdom, now have access to in-service, although this is sometimes unpaid (Lee and Mawson, 1998). Lee and Mawson reported that involvement in such training opportunities increased classroom assistants' levels of job satisfaction. They also reported that the main barriers to attendance were pay, childcare issues and time. Such issues lead to an irregular quality in the impact of professional development on classroom assistants (Cajkler *et al.*, 2007).

These concerns were also echoed in a study of English teaching assistants (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). Here the majority of teaching assistants interviewed attended in-service training, but numbers were higher when this was school based. Again any difficulties attending events were due to family and childcare ones, although release from school and funding were also important (Woolf and Bassett, 1988). Blatchford *et al.* reported that teaching assistants appeared broadly satisfied with the training they received but less so with the range of opportunities available. The women in this study articulated some of these tensions too. Whilst attendance at in-service training was something that classroom assistants appeared to be interested in, and thrive on, it is also something that, at the same time, they were very frustrated by and resentful of. Such issues extended to both the content

and organisation of in-service training. Generally, the women seemed to prefer in-service training to the alternatives of administration or menial work and they also displayed a level of discernment about which particular courses would be useful and which would be not,

> *There is confusion over the coming in-service day, whether they had to come in and what they had to do. Although they may need to travel to a relevant courses Aileen is clear that she would "rather go on that one than sit here and listen to stuff that's not relevant, or tidy cupboards and stuff."*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 13/5/11)

In making such decisions, 'common sense' appeared to be foregrounded at the expense of 'academic' knowledge, which is curricular, organisational and pedagogical knowledge and understanding of learning theory. Such talk of common sense appeared to be based on the quality of 'care' that classroom assistants possessed innately as a consequence of fore-grounding the importance of mothering,

> *The classroom assistants are discussing an 'accelerated reading' in-service course that Jean had missed. Jean was stating that she was worried that she had no training in this area. However, Morag's response was to state, "that's sometimes the best way" and Agnes agreed that she had, "worked it out myself". Morag summed up that Jean "didnae miss anything, except a Kit-Kat", with Agnes adding that "it was a chaos" and that she is "none the wiser anyway."*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

Even when staff had attended in-service training, and found sessions reassuring, there were still issues with organisation. Some of these issues hint at an undercurrent of tension between classroom assistants and teaching staff,

> *The classroom assistants are reflecting on the previous Fridays in-service on 'attachment theory'. They feel that they "recognised kids" showing such signs and were "reassured that what I'm doing is OK". Overall it had been interesting. They did not have to attend but the Head Teacher had suggested it would be valuable. Cara though was disappointed that teachers in front of her were "yakking" all the way through and that she couldn't hear. They were also filling in sheets that nothing to do with the talk.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 11/3/11)

Another tension that manifested itself was in the area of contractual differences. Classroom assistants such as Agnes, Janis, Lesley, and Cara were contractually obliged to attend five in-service days per year. The SEN auxiliaries did not have this in their contracts, even though they were paid more than classroom assistants. Even though the auxiliaries did choose to attend some in-service training, there did exist a noticeable tension between some staff,

> *...why...would we want to be sitting, you know doing the same job as somebody else and not getting paid the same rate for it?...it did cause a lot of problems, not personally, not, not in the school but just overall.*
> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

However, despite this all the women, like support staff in other studies, appeared keen to take on appropriate training (Barkham, 2008). "Teaching assistants spent a lot of time discussing practice between themselves...reflecting on teaching and learning" (Dillow, 2010: 135), "I loved learning...and discovered that there was so much to learn" (Nicolas, 2001: 36),

> *Ailsa is talking about possible in-service courses with Heather, Cara and Heidi. All join in and are enthusiastic, informed and engaged. A good deal of thought is put in to what they could do and how valuable they could be. There is obvious a desire to improve both themselves and pupils.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 20/5/12)

There was evidence that the women put thought, effort and reflection into activities (O' Brien and Garner, 2001; Dillow, 2010),

> *I just felt it was such a waste a' time most nights. And we were there for three hours; we could have had it finished in half an hour. And me being me, I got myself stressed out about, like we'd get homework and I started it when I came home that night. It was maybe not to be in for a month. But you'd guarantee every other night I went back and changed a sentence.*
> (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

Perhaps the most serious resentment was the fact that not only did all this training amount to nothing in terms of financial reward, but also it meant nothing in terms of status,

We've done learning off our own bats, but are not rewarded for it.
(Agnes, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

Indeed, the suggestion was that training may actually be counter-productive in that classroom assistants were asked to take on more work as a result of training, but with no recompense of any sort for this. Classroom assistants, did appear to be on a 'sticky floor' (Berheide, 1992), as this informal upskilling was not reflected in either increased pay or status (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009),

> *We can put all this extra effort in [but] there's nowhere to go from there…it seems like the better we perform, the more we get thrown at us…is that job satisfaction or is it not?*
> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

There was present, also, the concern that groups of classroom assistants could be expected to work beyond their policy remit in areas such as teaching new concepts, assessing the learning and development of pupils, looking after a class and planning the curriculum (SCER, 2005; EOC, 2007). Hence boundaries were becoming blurred and classroom assistants roles were showing an 'upward role stretch' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009).

'We Are Teaching. Whatever They Say': Talk About Teaching

This upward role stretch is in fact nothing new; such concerns were evident at the advent of auxiliaries in classrooms (Kennedy and Duthie, 1975). These concerns still exist despite the SOEID (1999a) stating that classroom assistants must be supervised and directed by teachers, and the GTCS (2003, 2006) trying to ensure no confusion between tasks to be undertaken by teachers and classroom assistants. The reality however was somewhat different with evidence of classroom assistants being used to cover teacher absences, McCrone time[17] (Scottish Executive, 2001) and being expected to undertake some teaching, if only in terms of cover. This would appear not to be uncommon across Scotland as changes to

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[17] An agreement reached to improve the professional conditions of service and pay for teachers, which included reduced class contact time for teachers.

supply teachers' pay has caused recruitment problems resulting in classroom assistants filling this gap (TES, 2012),

> *The school has staffing problems this morning with two class teachers and a member of nursery staff absent. Agnes is asked to cover a P6 middle mathematics set (19 pupils) because they have no class without teacher. She engages them in appropriate mathematic activities successfully for over 30 minutes until the Head Teacher takes over.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

> *Agnes is covering McCrone time for Class Teacher and is advised to get the class ready for the upper school assembly. However, this means the class arrives in the hall very early, which results in lots of waiting and the pupils getting restless.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

> *Cara:*   *In a lot of ways we're doing the same job as them because we're taking groups, we're doing planning…*
> (Cara & Lesley, Interview 24/6/11)

> *Cara:*   *We're not far away from, well we are teaching. Whatever they say.*
> *Lesley:*   *Well we are teaching, yeah.*
> *Cara*   *That was always the thing – "You're not teaching" and they always used to say, "You're not teaching, you're just reinforcing". Well I would argue now that we're teaching.*
> *Lesley*   *Yeah, we are.*
> (Cara & Lesley, Interview 24/6/11)

Watkinson (2003) believed that it is clear that teaching assistants use teaching skills, such as planning, preparation, questioning, extending, pacing, motivation, assessment, etc. already in their roles. Indeed UNISON, the largest union for classroom assistants, was so concerned about this that it called for local authorities to re-evaluate classroom assistant jobs (UNISON, 2008). Interestingly though, in England, there is evidence of the view, from learning support assistants themselves, that they should indeed cover classes when the teacher was absent, as learning support assistants know the children and the routines better than supply teachers (O' Brien and Garner, 2001). Not all have agreed, with Nigel de Gruchy, of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) - the largest teachers' union in the United Kingdom - once, rather

tactlessly, stating that pupils should not be the responsibility of 'pig ignorant peasants' (BBC, 2001).

In-service training also raises financial issues for classroom assistants in terms of pay, over-time, time off in lieu,

> *The classroom assistants are discussing who should be present at an in-service as Morag and Jean do not usually do, or get paid for, in-service training, as they are Special Needs Auxiliaries. Morag tells to Jean to ask the Head Teacher directly as she herself had asked the Depute Head Teacher and response was simply a "glazed look". Morag and Jean consider asking if they could 'bank' their hours to be used as leave later as time in lieu. Morag says she has done this before, but Jean is not confident it will be successful.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)

> *After a Friday in-service afternoon the classroom assistants are left with the issue of their pay for this time. The classroom assistants would have to claim for over-time and use this to claim back as time in lieu.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 11/3/11)

Such issues are common in the literature, "…trips are a bit of a grey area really, you do not get paid, you are like a parent-helper, *you are enjoying yourself*!" [Emphasis in original] (Dillow, 2010: 69), "…to be honest, we do not get paid for the time, and 80 per cent of the material is nothing to do with us, so why would we opt to attend?" (Dillow, 2010: 74), only add to confusion and tension. O' Brien and Garner (2001) asserted that what is essential is that support staff need to know where they stand in regard to time off in lieu of extra hours worked, payment for staff development, and paid or unpaid attendance at staff meetings. Such issues begin to overlap into the area of pay, status and conditions, which will now be further discussed.

'You Don't Come Into This Job For The Money': Talk About Pay

One thing is quite clear, in terms of salary for classroom assistants, there are, "woeful rates of pay" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001: 1), but this is not why they do

the job, "The money could be a lot better but it is not the motivation for doing the job" (Stanton, 2001: 26),

> *No, definitely not doing it for the money.*
> <div align="right">(Moira, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

> *The money's crap! Absolute crap! And we do twenty-five hours a week here. And what did I come out wi'? Just under £800a month [but]…you don't come into this job for the money…you don't do it for the money [laughs].*
> <div align="right">(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

> *Heather is chatting about her work just after she has changed a pupil who had soiled himself, "Oh, I've got poo on my scarf! But I've got a job at least…and the holidays are good!*
> <div align="right">(Heather, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)</div>

Like Heather, many classroom assistants see poor pay as a trade off with working hours that suited both childcare and family life (Warhurst *et al*, 2009). Such feelings were supported by ethnographic studies of learning support assistants in the United Kingdom and teaching assistants in England, (O' Brien and Garner, 2001; Barkham, 2008; Dillow, 2010), where staff talked of, "super convenient, tailor-made hours" (Dillow, 2010: 110) and, "[the] job suits me perfectly, especially the holidays" (Dillow, 2010: 73). Barkham stated that the job enables the women to prioritise their ongoing family responsibilities and that, "to some extent further career aspirations have been surrendered to their family requirements" (2008: 845). Pay looks even more woeful when one considers that the actual pay classroom assistants receive is pro-rated to reflect , the hours they work, as these are less than the standard full-time hours (SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007),

> *The money ain't great. It sounds good on an hourly. But then of course you're getting it split into the fifty-two weeks.*
> <div align="right">(Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)</div>

Yet, despite this, trade union membership is not strong due mainly to family friendly working conditions, and the general lack of militancy in the caring professions (Warhurst *et al*., 2009; Gilbert *et al*., 2011). While the majority of

Scottish classroom assistants are members of UNISON, this was not the case at Sunview,

> *Cara and Lesley tell me that they moved unions from UNISON to Voice precisely because the latter is a non-striking union. Apart from these two the other classroom assistants were not union members.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/6/11)

This though is not an issue solely about pay but one also about status, and how poor pay, "diminishes their status" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001: 3),

> *It's nothing to do with money, but just status wise, we'll never rise in status because we are classroom assistants.*
> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

> *I mean you look and you think 'what dae I do?' But I do think what I do I'm good at. I do.*
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

For the majority of classroom assistants, pay ceilings are reached relatively quickly and therefore factors such as qualifications, training and actual job content or demand do not affect their level of pay (EOC, 2007). One option classroom assistants have to get extra pay, although, "*not a lot*", (£30 per month), (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11), is to take on medical responsibilities for pupils in the school. This requires extra training and, given the inclusion of pupils with a range of additional support needs, can be a major responsibility, "…the responsibility is too great for the poor wages" (Woolf and Bassett, 1988: 62),

> *But when you go down the road a' Caitlin who's hypo'ing three and four times a week and Russell being the way he is and having to go away on trips. I went to camp this year with Russell, wi' the cystic fibrosis. But I was also caring for the wee girl from East Fields[18] that was a diabetic cause no one down there would do it. That was awkward because that poor wee girl a' had didn't know who I was.*
> (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

> *And I think doing the first aid; I feel causes more [stress], because we're actually giving injections and everything now as well.*
> (Moira, Interview 3/6/11)

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[18] A small primary school in the catchment area.

Moira arrives in the support base momentarily after doing physiotherapy for a girl with "bolts in her hips". She also has to look after a "boy with a cast on his leg, which still seems squint though" and a girl "who needs help feeding after having e-coli". She leaves the base after a short time to go and take care of "Rebecca's blood test".

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 16/11/12)

Such responsibility easily leads to stress,

Moira asks Principal Teacher about cover for Caitlin, a diabetic pupil, but gets no answer. Moira responds ironically to herself, "So I guess the answer to my question about Caitlin is 'nobody'?" She then audibly counts to ten.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)

Even when not overtly stressful, the responsibility can also impinge on the working day. There were many examples of the women having to miss breaks, lunch times and, sometimes, contact time with pupils,

It's just before lunchtime and Moira appears in the base. She has not had time for a break until now as she supporting pupils in class and was on call for medical issues.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 9/11/12)

Medical issues also give a glimpse of the tensions evident around parents and parenting and hint at how classroom assistants position themselves. Classroom assistants frequently resort to the fact that they themselves are mothers and how mothering is paramount to being effective in their role; "*just an extension of being a mother…I treat children how I'd like mine to be treated*" (Jean, Coalside Fieldnotes: 1/10/10). This is a view supported in other studies (O' Brien and Garner, 2001; Dillow, 2010),

A boy comes in to the support base after being sent from his class by his teacher because he is feeling 'sick'. The school office are to phone mum, although Ailsa knows that mum will be "out on her walk?" Moira and Heather know the boy is "at it" and is well enough to be at school. The boy is sent home, but eventually returned later by his mum. Moira and Heather both support this parental decision. The boy may have outwitted the class teacher, but not his parent and the classroom assistants.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 27/5/11)

> *Ailsa is dealing with Graham who has been physically sick at school, even after being absent previously because of feeling unwell. Heather is critical of the parenting involved and feels "Graham should not have been back at school."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 18/3/11)

What is evident here is the fundamentally dichotomous nature of classroom assistants' talk regarding parents and parenting, or more specifically, mothering. In the first example above, the classroom assistants' 'local' knowledge (Stead *et al.*, 2007) is clearly evident. This is something classroom assistants appear to feel that teachers lack. Pedagogic knowledge is regarded as a very different thing to maternal knowledge. In contrast the second example highlights how classroom assistants can often be critical of what they perceive as 'bad' parenting; that is a lack of maternal knowledge based on the notion of 'care'. These were recurring tensions throughout the fieldwork.

'This Happens Every Bloody Friday': Talk About Conditions

It is not only pupils' absences that cause tensions however. Getting time off when a classroom assistant, or her children, is unwell is another issue of tension,

> *Cara is commenting on having to have time off for a medical appointment. She will lose pay for a full half day even if she returns promptly. In her opinion she "may as well just take the half day, it's silly"*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/11)

Yet the evidence from wider studies suggests that support staff have very few days' absence (O' Brien and Garner, 2001), and when discussing holidays, there was a hint of a lack of self-worth, combined with self sacrifice in the discussion,

> *Leanne:*   *Do we deserve it [long summer holiday]?*
> *Ailsa:*   *Teachers do.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)

When there were absences there was never cover. Rather, the remaining women were expected to reorganise and cover for the absence as best they could. Such reorganisation appeared ad-hoc and usually relied on classroom assistants' self-

organisation, good will and flexibility rather than any management initiative. This, however, could sometimes lead to pupils being left without appropriate supervision,

> *With Agnes off ill all week Jean had to do playground supervision alone. Today I am outside with her, on cold, damp morning. She's glad of this, "Good job you're here. Nobody came to say, 'will you manage or will you cope.'" As playtime progresses two girls accidentally bump heads and Jean has to take them inside, leaving me alone in the busy playground. On her return two more girls accidentally clash heads and one receives a nasty cut on the forehead from the other girls teeth. Again Jean has to take both girls inside to the office. However, none of the office staff have first aid training and are not keen to help. It is only the chance passing of a teacher with first aid knowledge that lets Jean back out to resume playground supervision. After playtime Jean and I are warming ourselves against a radiator as the Depute Head walks by. Jean, sounding genuinely guilty and apologetic for doing nothing, and responds, "You caught us Mrs. Cunningham."*
>
> <div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)</div>

Even when not expected to cover other colleagues', time is of a premium and the role of classroom assistants was being stretched to the limit. It was common to observe them missing breaks and having to work over lunch. Although there was some tension, this appeared, generally, to stay between these women rather than to be directed at teachers or management. Again, such working practices could sometimes lead to pupils being left without appropriate supervision,

> *Lucy:*   *Did you get a lunch yesterday?*
> *Ailsa:*   *Yes, but I didn't get a break.*
>
> <div align="right">(Lucy & Ailsa, Fieldnotes: 25/2/11)</div>

> *Principal Teacher (joking):* *Off to lunch at 2.50?*
> *Heidi:*   *How long you going for?*
> *Principal Teacher (joking):* *You get an hour for lunch!*
> *Lucy (joking):*   *So they tell me!*
>
> <div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/02/11)</div>

Lucy, who is heavily pregnant, takes over the supervision of Matthew in the dining hall from Heidi so Heidi can get her lunch. Lucy has to have her lunch with Matthew and the other children. Matthew ends up just playing with his lunch and becomes loud and physical. Lucy tries to get him back to the base but he runs off on the way and behaves dangerously on the stairs. Lucy is in no condition to run after him.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/11)

Heather has reported timetable problems to the Principal Teacher as only Leanne and herself are covering Matthew and Callum. This means that they are getting neither breaks nor lunch. Heather is angry that they"…won't get lunch today [even though] we could be shits and go out for our lunch". Neither woman does though.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)

Such situations appear to be common, "I don't actually have much of a break. I have about 5 minutes…" (Dillow, 2010: 46). O' Brien and Garner (2001) also report staff using their lunch breaks to work with pupils rather than withdraw them from other classes.

But despite this commitment and self-sacrifice, it was still common to observe incidents of classroom assistants being used by teachers for mundane tasks at the expense of pupil contact, which is often resented, "We do have brains, you know!" (Hamilton, 2001: 112),

Janis is literally running around school trying to find a key to a drawer to get something that is needed for assembly. Janis is frustrated, "…this happens every bloody Friday."

(Coalside Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

With the pupils out at an animation lesson Jean tidying up the classroom. The class teacher is not doing any tidying. Jean is asking questions about what to do with various things, to which the class teacher has no answer. It is left to Jean to phone others to find out answer to these questions. The class teacher should be doing an audit of policy documents, however Jean tells me she will do this as, "I'll know what they are better than him."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 30/6/10)

Morag is discussing a male class teacher whilst tiding his room covertly behind his back. Although Morag does not approve of the mess she does comment that the teacher is, "…so considerate to you [and] doesn't treat you as a lackey [he] actually includes you in decisions."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

As the end of term parties are arranged a constant stream of teachers come in to the support base wanting things such as, spoons, plastic cup vases, etc. The teachers expect the classroom assistants to the answer to all there requests on where such items are kept and, if not satisfied with answer, search anyway.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/12)

In the past, Kennedy and Duthie (1975) commented on support staff being given, "…useless jobs that older pupils could have done, would have enjoyed and might have benefitted from" (Kennedy and Duthie, 1975: 51). Some years later little seemed to have changed with Balshaw (1999) stating that classroom assistants were still treated as, "overgrown pupils" (Balshaw, 1999: 12), and even more recently, "There were the odd few who thought I was a fetch-me-carry-me person" (Simpson, 2001: 126). This feeling of an apparent lack of respect extends to the Senior Management Team (SMT),

As playtime ends four boys begin arguing over a skipping rope. Agnes deals with this but almost straight afterwards two boys begin a very physical fight with fists and feet flying. Agnes has to physically intervene to separate them. Scott is very angry and needs restraining and calming by Agnes to stop him carrying on the fight. Two class teachers come out to get the lines in but neither shows any sign of getting involved even though one was the teacher of one of the boys involved and Scott seems set on taking the fight inside. Agnes takes Scott to the Depute Head Teacher's room but she is not available. She sits outside and calms Scott herself. The two teachers walk past on their way to assembly but again show no interest. Agnes reports the incident to Head Teacher as soon as she is free. The Head Teacher does not speak to the boys but tells Agnes that they are not allowed outside next week. Agnes is frustrated that the Head Teacher. "Didn't want to speak to them, like she should". Agnes confides in me that she found the Head Teacher, "dismissive" and that is hard not to "take it very personally. It makes you wonder if they [SMT] like you. When you take pupils to them you are just dismissed, like your view is not important.'

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

During the next few days Morag, commenting on the fight, adds that the SMT are, "…not interested in our views, we are just sent away. Not very often that you get their full support."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

Yet these women, like the majority, put in their own time outside of contractual hours. Blatchford *et al.* (2012) noted that over two thirds of the teaching assistants they studied were likely to work extra hours that were voluntary and unpaid,

typically up to three hours per week, usually in the form of arriving early and leaving late. This appeared to be done out of a strong sense of duty to do the best for the pupils they supported. Such goodwill was, "clearly indispensible" to schools (Blatchford *et al*., 2012: 54), although others described this state of affairs as undesirable (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group, WAMG, 2008). It was also clear that this was a job that it was difficult to switch off from, even after you did leave for home,

> *After a busy day I sometimes feel myself getting stressed and on edge. My moods at home reflect my success at school…so I went to B&Q to get some paint, to paint bedroom to de-stress but before I started I scribbled down some notes about Donald. I did six pages of notes and showed them to the PT the next day.*
>
> (Leanne, Fieldnotes: 23/9/12)

> *Leanne:*   *Where do these opinions come from? I didn't used to have opinions.*
>
> (Leanne, Fieldnotes: 16/9/12)

This was common across other research in this area; be it literally, "You often find yourself taking things home…" (Pester, 2001: 98); or emotionally, "The job is such that I take most of it home. I can't switch off…" (Simpson, 2001: 122). However, there were familiar coping strategies, "…shopping therapy's good!...or I go out and have a *really* good drink!" [Emphasis in original] (Simpson, 2001: 128,). Drink played an important social bonding role in my own observations too,

> *The discussion is about a possible new recruit to the team and whilst discussing desirable personal attributes Cara hopes that they, "…can hold a drink as well…that's important."*
>
> (Cara, Fieldnotes: 24/6/11)

Yet, despite this, the job is still fulfilling, "…at the end of the day I could pull my hair out but I still love my job" (Mackenzie, 2011: 68). Such emotional attachment means that classroom assistants display deep-seated views about their jobs and any impact on them. At Sunview Primary, school management plans to change the structure and role of support provided for pupils by classroom assistants have not been warmly welcomed,

The support base is going to be changed. It's going to become more like a behaviour unit. That's almost exclusion.

(Leanne, Fieldnotes: 9/11/12)

At the end of the day who's suffering? The kids

(Leanne, Fieldnotes: 19/8/11)

Leanne: *There's no atmosphere anymore. It's not a happy place."*
Lucy: *It's madness in here now.*

(Leanne & Lucy, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

'I Don't Know If I'm Mark Or Martha This Week': Talk About Planning and Communication

However, without doubt, by far the most tension in a classroom assistant's working day, was due to a lack of time for planning and communication about pupil learning with teaching staff (Barkham, 2008),

Interviewer: *What about the frustrations of the role?*
Heidi: *[Laughs]...I think you know it...it's the communication issues...and the amount of time that we have to communicate any information to each other...*

(Heidi, Interview 24/6/11)

The following selection of excerpts from Coalside Primary fieldnotes stresses the informal, inconsistent, ad hoc and last minute nature of planning and communication within the school. Indeed, sometimes teachers did not appear to know classroom assistants were even due in their class,

Oh, are you with me today?

(Agnes, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

Usually have assembly on Friday but the minister is leaving so we're having assembly on Thursday. I only found out this morning, we never find out about anything.

(Janis, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

A teacher catches Morag in the corridor on her way to a P7 concert rehearsal. The teacher wants Morag to help support a girl with a national test. The teacher appears to know Morag is busy but stresses she only needs 20 minutes and constructs it as necessary for pupil; not to do it would let the pupil down. Later in the day the same teacher is giving instructions to Morag about supporting a pupil with broken arm. Again these are very last minute negotiations.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 16/6/10)

Morag is on way to support a maths group but has "no idea of what to do" when she gets there. The teacher only gives her instructions and the resources when Morag arrives in the class.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 24/6/10)

It is 'Play Day' with the P7s showing the younger pupils a variety of playground games. This happens once a year as part of Anti-Bullying Week. The classroom assistants are expected to help in the playground but Janis doesn't know what she's to do, or where she should be. Eventually she's handed a camera by a teacher and told to take pictures. This is done on the spot with little sign of planning.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 29/10/10)

At registration time Jean is dealing with notes, forms for trips and book fair money. She is, "...supposed to have all this done in 10 minutes, but some days it takes longer". Jean tells me that she, "...didn't know about the [class] trip. Nobody told me they were going". The class teacher is assuming Jean will be going on the trip to support class but Jean doubts this.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)

Agnes:	*The timetables have been changed again, I'll be running along top corridor like a mad thing.*
Elsa:	*How's things?*
Agnes:	*I don't know if I'm Mark or Martha this week. Tuesday mornings I've got four different things. I'll forget where I have to be.*
Morag:	*I still don't know where I am.*
Jean:	*I've got a bit of everything, a bit of variety.*
Morag	*The spice of life! This got dumped in my tray this morning. The bairns are supposed to be doing this. This was a rush yesterday…Everything gets left to the last minute…It wasn't a pleasure, it was a rush job…It's been a last minute job.*

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

Janis tells me that she is, "…not sure what I'm doing after break, I have a new timetable." When she gets to the class the teacher gives her instructions, which takes 20 seconds at most. Janis then has to get resources for the task but these are not readily available and she has to improvise on the spot.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

Even in the face on all this evidence, there is the usual self-sacrifice, with Jean commenting to a teacher after a breakdown in communication,

Don't blame yourself; you've got so much going on.

(Jean, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)

Such issues are not particular to Coalside Primary; they are much in evidence at Sunview Primary too. The following selection of excerpts, from Sunview Primary fieldnotes, consolidates the issues raised above, as well as highlights the tensions and frustrations present. More importantly though, they raise bigger issues such as the implicit and explicit criticisms of teachers and the senior management team, along with the appropriateness and effectiveness deployment of classroom assistants,

I ask the classroom assistants about staffing and Leanne comments that she will, "…not know until the last minute", Ailsa adds that this is the, "…norm for us."

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/5/11)

Aileen:	*Is this a meeting to tell us what is happening.*
Moira:	*I doubt it. This is double Dutch to me Kevin, I'll just go where they tell me.*

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 24/6/11)

Moira:	*Right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. You should have seen me yesterday, Heather said, "…when Moira starts swearing you know she's had enough". If they can't take the time to tell you what you're doing, then what?*
Leanne:	*You back over there this afternoon?*
Moira:	*Well I've not been told otherwise.* *[Then audibly counted to ten].*

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)

Interviewer: Do you get any time to prepare what you're doing with the class teachers?

Ailsa: No.

Interviewer: Is that an issue?

Ailsa: Sometimes. Because the teacher 'll give you what they're working at in the class. The teacher 'll give you that and say right go an' complete that, but if I've got an afternoon with say Andrew, and she's given me something to complete and after fifteen minutes we've done it. You know if I go back and say, she'll just oh just do whatever, just do…So it's sometimes, but then other times she'll give us enough work to keep us going for two or three days. But no we don't prepare anything. She just gives us stuff. With Matthew I think it'd been a lot better if we had got stuff from the teachers because we were just left on our own to work out what to do with him.

<div align="center">(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)</div>

Lesley: That doesn't happen in phonics really. We're, like Cara said we're given – this is what you're expected to do – and then we plan things round about it. We're, we've actually for all the information that we've had on how to do phonics cause we haven't done alphabet magic with children before, we've actually had to go and ask people, go and get information ourselves. We haven't been given anything.

Cara: And, and ask "…are we doing this right?" and constant reassurance "…is this right? Is this OK?" and we get comments like "…well you can't really go wrong" or "…whatever you do would be fine", because we've got the bottom two groups, which is very challenging because alright I don't think they're saying it doesn't matter cause you've got the bottom two groups but it's like maybe it's not as drastic as if we were taking the top two groups. But there's an awful lot more pressure that we actually do it right and we, we help these children, we bring them on.

Lesley: Yeah. The thing is even when we've been to the meetings when they do occasionally ask us it's usually because they want to swap the groups around and trying to get information for, you know like a bit of reassurance – are we doing the right thing or like maybe this child's having difficulty or what, what can we do – it's very, very difficult to get anything out of anybody.

Cara: And when things change they make, say the primary two teachers that I'm working with they maybe make a decision with [the DHT] that they're going to do something in a different way, they don't communicate it to us. Some are better than others at communication aren't they? But I think they're really busy, they don't always pass it onto

us…and, you know if they're not going to communicate when there's a major change we always feel like we're running to catch up.

(Cara & Lesley, Interview 24/6/11)

Initially we had weekly planning meetings but when Matthew was assessed and we realised sort of how low his cognitive abilities were we...we've stopped having such a sort of structured educational plan for him. So we haven't had such regular meetings and I do sometimes feel that we possibly could have more...it would be good to have more contact with the teacher and more time to actually plan. But Matthew's time, really the auxiliaries who work with him we've put together some folders with work for him to do that's been more or less left to us to...to deal with. But because of the level that Matthew is at...yeah. I...I do think we could have a bit more support from the teachers although in Matthew's case it's complicated by the fact that it's a job-share...with two teachers working with him…One of whom has experience of working with autistic children in an autistic unit so the other one is a bit more guided by us because we know Matthew better.

(Heidi, Interview 24/6/11)

But when it actually came to it we were fine. I'd, one just keeps jumping to my mind and it's just cause she's lazy. And that's, I was taking a…a wee maths group out. And she gave me nothing. She just said 'were doing maths, we're doing time today'. And I don't know, three or four weeks down the line we had got w'ur hour, quarter past, half past and quarter to. And she gave me into trouble because at Level B we don't do quarter two. And I was like 'well I don't know that' [laughs]. You should have gave me the work but…

(Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

Interviewer:	*Do you feel you get enough time to be able to sit with Callum's class teacher and talk about what's needed and what you want to do or is it…?*
Leanne:	*That, that's now difficult. Yeah. We don't, we don't sit down. We, there was, we always spoke about we'll make time, we'll have a meeting and we did at the beginning and then it all fell through and I think that's where the teachers struggle a bit.*
Interviewer:	*And why did it fall apart then?*
Leanne:	*'Cause we had other things to do. And the time where Miss Smith made arrangements we had gone off to do something else…it was swimming and we had to come back…specially to do this meeting. Which was, which was fine and then it just, it was happening at the beginning of term, we did do it every week. And then as time was going on we didn't have to do it every week. It was just every month and then it just all fell through.* (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

Moira:	Yes within the base. You can feel a bit, you know, somebody will say 'oh such and such is to be done'. And you say 'well you didn't say that', you know. I feel there's not enough communication. And things get changed. And maybe two or three people know about it and then you go tae do something and somebody snaps at you and you think 'well wait a minute, you know, I'm not a, I just want a quiet life' [laughs], you know.
Aileen:	I fully agree wi' that. I feel the same way. The communication is just not happening. I don't know. We've not had our Friday morning meetings for a while…Which did help. But it's the same, like the child you are working wi', there should be meetings wi' the class teacher going on to see what you are going to be doing, what work you are going to do with them. That's just not happening.
Moira:	We're not involved in the planning of what they're doing. But we have our own input. You know if a teacher, if I go and collect a child and the teacher says 'I'd like you to do this with them'. And you take them away and you feel this is not working. And you can think of a better way to explain it, I would go back and say to the teacher 'this is not working, do you mind if we do it this way cause it's more simple for this child and I can get through to this child this way'. I wouldn't just do it. I would go and check. And the teachers, nine times out of ten they'd say 'yeah that's fine, we respect you, you know, what you're doing'. But some teachers, not with me, but I've seen with other people, seem to think that anything that goes wrong, it's the support. And to me the child is the responsibility first of the teacher.

<div align="right">(Moira & Aileen, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

Once again, the issues raised by the women at Coalside and Sunview Primary are common for support staff throughout the wider literature, "I have no idea what resources are available and there is no time to ask anyone." (Dillow, 2010: 109). The general feeling was that, "…communication could have been better, it is hard to get information about anything…we always seem to be in the dark about what is happening and what plans have been made…" (Dillow, 2010: 73-74). This resulted in, "…planning…monitoring and assessment…usually has to be done *en route* to the staffroom!...[it is] not built into my daily programme and is often *ad hoc*!" [Emphasis in original] (Skuse, 2001: 58). Tyrer *et al.* (2004) comment that, "…liaison often occurs in a corridor, or even over a 'snatched' cup of tea and incorporates brief interchanges of information about pupils' learning or behaviour" (Tyrer *et al.*, 2004: 58). This is not surprising when one considers that

only a small minority of teachers actually receives training to help them work with teaching assistants (Neill, 2002). For Russell *et al*. (2013) this can result in many teaching assistants reporting feeling unprepared for the tasks they were given. Mackenzie (2011) even suggests that such problems might actually stem from predominantly female environments being prone to hierarchies of status and characterised by 'cattiness'.

With little or no time to talk to teachers before lessons, teaching assistants described how, in many cases, they had to 'tune-in' to the teacher's delivery in order to pick up vital subject and pedagogical knowledge, and information and instructions relating to the tasks they supported pupils with" (Russell *et al*., 2013: 13). This is not helped by local factors impinging on individual schools. In Coalside Primary, because classroom assistants had to do playground and lunch duties, they very often had their breaks at different times to teachers in deserted staffrooms. At Sunview Primary classroom assistants simply did not use the teachers' staffroom,

> *I ask Leanne about not using staffroom upstairs, with the teachers. Her reply is that it is, "Not as friendly upstairs".*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/12)

The crucial issue here is that this formal lack of planning and liaison time is considered to be the, "main barrier to effectiveness" between teachers and classroom assistants (Dillow, 2010: 10). Whilst, in reality, there will always be informal liaison Tyrer *et al*. (2004) argued that this needs to be balanced with more formal input. If this formal time is created then the results on effectiveness are positive (Russell *et al*., 2013).

Cases of formal planning not being sustained are common, "We have half an hour on a Wednesday with our teacher – when we are supposed to look at what is happening in the next week, but it never happens…" (Dillow, 2010: 45). Lee and Mawson (1998) commented that classroom assistants should be included in planning with teachers, but Blatchford *et al*. (2012) noted that even now the majority of teachers in England have had no training to help them work with

teaching assistants, and that there is no allocated planning, feedback or other allocated time with teaching assistants who work in their classrooms. In Scotland, Medwell and Simpson (2008) did provide brief advice for student teachers regarding working with, and planning for, classroom assistants, but it is unclear how widely this advice is disseminated.

'Not Knowing From Year To Year Whether You're Gonna Have A Job': Talk About Economics

Finally, even in the face of all these issues, classroom assistants do not even enjoy the security of a long-term, permanent contract and every summer are faced with uncertainty over the extension of their posts. During observations at Coalside Primary, the Head Teacher outlined future staffing projections at a budget meeting and, as usual, job security was in doubt. Although their jobs were safe until June, the mood was still grim,

> *We're all depressed today. Last week I was rewarded for 20 years service, and then we get news like this. The Head Teacher is perhaps just preparing us for the worst. It happens every year, but at my age I just need security. I didn't have much enthusiasm for anything yesterday.*
> (Morag, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *I'm gutted. It feels like the legs have been kicked from under you again.*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *All the work we've done, all these years, but there you go, and they wonder why you get despondent. This time last week we were celebrating 20 years now we're just about out the door. Anyway today's another day…bugger it.*
> (Jean, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

Anyone who knows Jean would tell you that to hear her swear was most out of character and, surreally, to add to the situation, she was dressed as Little Miss Muffet as the school was celebrating World Book Day. Later in the fieldwork the mood had still not lightened,

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Next year we may be filling shelves in Tesco. There is talk of being offered other jobs in other schools but it's the same everywhere, there are no jobs on offer. It's very unsettling, but we've lived with this for years.

(Morag, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

It's been like this for years, but this is a different ball game, it's very unfair.

(Jean, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

Such tensions were clearly evident too at Sunview Primary, although Heather was more forthright in her language than Jean,

I think really the only thing frustrating is, at times, Council. Have you got a job to come back tae? Are you getting your hours cut? I think that's the only negative thing that I can think a' tae working here...I mean I remember there was, years ago there was two, there was another two girls that worked. And they were told on that morning, last day, 'there's no job for you', that's it. I thought that you don't treat people like that. But the Council treat us totally like shite!

(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Not knowing from year to year whether you're gonna have a job or not...Just the contracts being temporary all the time and there's no permanency. That's, that's frustrating.

(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

However, with some degree of black humour a plan is hatched,

The classroom assistants are talking about the possibility of forthcoming job cuts Heidi suggests that they, "Let Callum and Matthew loose in the council offices", to let people see what they are expected to deal with.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/02/11)

Such concerns are common all across the entire United Kingdom, "The instability of the hours can be worrying and the fact that, even if you have a job things become uncertain when a child with a statement moves to another school" (Nicolas, 2001: 36), "...contracts are often temporary and that affects how assistants feel about their jobs and about themselves" (Dillow, 2010: 122, "...it was the last week of term before we found out what classes and hours we would be getting in September" (Dillow, 2010: 74). In Scotland itself recent evidence suggests some local authorities trying to reduce the numbers of support staff to make savings following recent budget cuts (TES, 2012). Instances are common in

the press and cover the length and breadth of Scotland (BBC, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; The Daily Record, 2011; The Herald, 2013; The Scotsman, 2013). But yet again, even in the bleakest of times, there is the element of self-sacrifice,

> *Morag:*   *Wouldn't like her [HT] job to be honest. She tries her best [for staff].*
> <div align="right">(Morag, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)</div>

> *Jean:*   *Not her [HT] fault…she's dong her best.*
> <div align="right">(Jean, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)</div>

Dillow's (2010) work in England highlighted identical feelings, "The Head Teacher, like all Head Teachers, was grabbing and saving bits of money wherever she could, shuffling around resources and budgets and trying to do her best for everyone" (Dillow, 2010: 122).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to enquire why classroom assistants are willing to undertake their work, and how they create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment. This was attempted through introducing the working lives of the 13 classroom assistants in the study and, in part, with reference to the wider corpus of literature previously discussed in the 'Context' chapter, Chapter 2. The talk of the women emanating from both my own observations and their own direct accounts informed the data for this chapter. The classroom assistants, as agents, described their position in the field, along with the influence of habitus and doxa on their dispositions and actions. This captured the tensions apparent in the micropolitical world of their work and social lives within the school environment.

The main findings of the chapter can be summarised by firstly stating that, in terms of social characteristics these women appeared representative of support staff in other studies throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom. In terms of qualifications the majority of the women had achieved their PDA and were keen to undertake further in-service training to improve their effectiveness with pupils. However, there was a level of cynicism with regard to the relevance, quality and

availability of such training. Nevertheless, overall, the women were engaged with, and reflective of the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to fulfil their roles. Further, some of the women were of the opinion that such training indirectly resulted in them becoming responsible for some elements of 'teaching', even though this did not garner financial reward or any particular increase in status.

In any case, financial reward was not the main motivator for becoming a classroom assistant. Rather the convenient hours and holidays resulting from working in a school provided the trade off with poor pay. Other working conditions were also poor and there was tension over areas such as time off in lieu, payment for staff development and attendance at staff meetings, medical training and the lack of long-term job security. However, the greatest source of discontent was agreed to be the lack of formal time available for joint planning and communication with teachers. Most importantly though, and permeating all these other tensions, we begin to identify an underlying discord between classroom assistants, teachers and parents.

In the next two chapters the focus is on the extended talk of the classroom assistants, with attention very much on what is being said, and how it is being said. The focus is firstly on the structure and content of the talk before switching to examine the purpose and function of the talk.

Chapter 6

Findings: Talk About 'Mothering' and 'Care'

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the lives and social identities of the women in this study, describing the talk they used to express their day-to-day lived experiences, specifically attitudes to qualifications, pay and conditions. In doing this, the chapter captured a range of tensions present in the working lives of these women. In the next two chapters, the focus is still on the extended talk of the classroom assistants, and as before, data are drawn from observations and the participants' own accounts; either through direct assertions about themselves, or comments made more generally. Again, via Bourdieu, we hear agents portraying their position in the field through reference to habitus and doxa. In this chapter the content and structure of the talk is scrutinised, whilst in the next chapter the focus switches to examine the purpose and function of the talk. In both chapters the focus is primarily to address how classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities through their work.

This chapter begins by examining the talk, grounded in 'emphasised femininity' (Connell, 1987), that promotes the notion that knowledge of mothering, ideally through being a mother, is an essential requirement for the role of a successful classroom assistant. Next it argues that Hochschild's (1979, 1983) notion of 'emotional labour' is important to understanding such talk. However, using Noddings (1984) work on 'natural' and 'ethical' care, it is argued that classroom assistants see their labour as different to that of teachers. The chapter then goes on to argue that as local women, living within the school catchment area, their talk displays a unique local knowledge of pupils and their families. Whilst this can have positive benefits, it is often used more negatively to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' parents, or carers. This has the potential to result in certain parents and carers being marginalised. Classroom assistants appears to position

'care' more highly than academic 'knowledge', such as curricular, organisational and pedagogical knowledge, and understanding of learning theory, which in turn can result in teachers and teaching being marginalised too. The chapter concludes by conceding that not all classroom assistants think and talk the same way and uses Hargreaves' (1984) notion of 'extremist talk' as an analytical device to explain dissenting talk. The chapter begins by exploring talk about being a mother and a classroom assistant.

'Just an Extension of Being a Mother': Classroom Assistant as 'Mother'

The common consensus, evident in both Coalside and Sunview Primary, was that being a mother was the best training for being a classroom assistant. It comes as no surprise then that all the women in the sample were mothers, and some also grandmothers. As a result, their talk is grounded in what Connell (1987) referred to as 'emphasised femininity' (1987: 183). Emphasised femininity was seen as an exaggerated form of femininity that stresses compliance, nurturance, empathy and childcare as female qualities. Hence, emphasised femininity becomes part of the dominant patriarchal gender order and is compliant with gender inequality. At societal level this usually plays out as mothering in older women, and is particularly linked with domesticity. According to Connell, emphasised femininity, although not fully enacted by most women, is the version of femininity that all women are required to adopt. This would seem particularly accurate based on the evidence of the classroom assistants' talk. The women describe the classroom assistant role as,

> Jean: *…just an extension of being a mother.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> Leanne: *I just think it's, this is, this is someone's child. This is, you know and he has parents, that's the way it is. I treat him the way I would like ma child…having that, knowing the responsibility of being a parent is what's probably important in this job.*
> (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

Interviewer:	*Do you think being a parent yourself helps?*
Ailsa:	*Yes. 'Cause I think I look at the kids now and think oh gosh, my two, what my two did when they were this age, and yeah I think it does help an awful lot.*

(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

In previous research these views are common too. O' Brien and Garner (2001b) summarise learning support assistants' views on mothering with, "Being a parent yourself was the best training to have to start with" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001b: 132). This appeared to be because parents were felt to understand children, and know how to approach them. In Scotland, Warhurst *et al.* (2009) reported that all of the female respondents in their study held similar essentialist views that drew parallels between the role of classroom assistants and mothers. Respondents in their study suggested that the best person for the job, "would probably more likely be female, because they are more understanding…women are more in the family home doing everything with the kids" (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009: 184). One particular respondent summarised these parallels by stating that classroom assistants need a, "good knowledge of children…mothers really" (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009: 184).

Given this, 'feminine' skills were cited by the women as those helpful in successfully fulfilling the role of classroom assistant. Such feminine skills were named as listening, negotiating and patience. Patience was high on the agenda with the women in this study:

Ailsa:	*Patience (laughs). Just to have fun as well with them. Just enjoy what you're doing because sometimes you just have to have fun.*

(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

Heather:	*You need a lot a' patience. A lot of patience. If something does go wrong you've got tae just, that's it and start, you know, start again…And, you know, you need to like kids actually to be in this job…And, you know, at the end of the day it's got tae be fun for them. You've got to make it fun as well for the children. But we have a totally different relationship with the children than what teachers do…*

(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

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> *Lucy:*   *Just patience…I think you have to be quite loving. And I know we probably shouldn't be as…but you do get attached. I think more because you are one to one…Yeah I don't think you could do the job if you didn't, if you could wave bye-bye to them at the end of the year.*
>
>   (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

> *Heidi:*   *Huge amounts of patience and tact and diplomacy and that's for dealing with other members of staff not with the kids [laughs].*
>
>   (Heidi, Interview 24/6/11)

Warhurst *et al.* (2009) too found that the most important attributes for the job were the possession of certain skills and that the recurring theme was that these skills were 'feminine' ones, "I think a lot of them are feminine skills" (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009: 184). Across the United Kingdom in general many accepted this somewhat essentialist view, that being a classroom assistant is a very female-orientated role, unquestioningly (Mackenzie, 2011). Along with these views and skills, it was noticeable that the actual spoken language, its imagery and associated behaviours classroom assistants used in their work privileged mothering and care. This will now be considered.

'All The Wee Darlings': Classroom Assistants' Talk

Wittgenstein (1953) argued that people use the vocabularies available to them to make sense of and describe their worlds, and this would appear to be true of the women in this study. As noted earlier classroom assistants are predominantly mature, White, working class, local women who are partnered and have school aged children. Given these social characteristics, and the positioning of mothering in their talk, it is not surprising to constantly hear the vocabularies of mothering and care throughout their talk,

> *…wee lamb…lovely wee girl…what's wrong sweetheart?…good girl!…how did you get on darling…its OK, there's a seat here honey…right darling…there you go honey…poor wee soul…thank you darling…let mummy know when you get home darling…you alright sweetheart?…he's a lovely wee thing…bye darling, have a nice weekend…sweetie…careful sweetheart…*
>
>   (Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

Such words should be regarded as examples of what Hochschild (1979, 1983) called 'emotional labour', the publically visible language, facial and bodily displays of emotion at work. Such emotional labour, Hochschild argued, is an extension of 'emotive work', the similar acts performed in the private context of everyday social exchanges. This emphasis on emotions at work presents a socially desirable performance, and Hochschild argued that it is by the use of emotional labour that social actors, such as the women in the sample, attribute feelings and meanings to their shared, lived experiences as classroom assistants. However, as Guy and Newman (2004) stressed, work that requires emotional labour, such as caring and empathy, is often thought to be 'natural' for women and as a result women tend to dominate many such occupations. Yet this emotional labour is not part of any formal job description and is financially unrewarded.

Emotional labour is a conscious, staged performance (Goffman, 1967), as they, as classroom assistants, act out the roles expected of them within their particular occupational context. It is also a performance that is shared with others and hence enables the women to display their caring qualities, professional demeanour and character as aware, competent, patient, rational, sensitive and understanding. As such, this emotional labour gives the women the ability to present a contextually desirable performance (Li and Arber, 2006), or what Goffman referred to as 'impression management'. Hence emotional labour can be argued as crucial to the construction of a moral identity, a concept that will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

The language of emotional labour permeates much of their more extended talk and through it certain themes begin to emerge. Firstly, mothering is positioned as something natural to their own histories,

> At 'tidy up time' Jean plays a game with the class and tells them that this was, "a game that my mummy played with me."
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)

At 'show and tell' one girl mentions a new baby in the family. Morag tells them that there is, "...nothing nicer than a new baby."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

Beyond this there is also a sense that their role with pupils is that of a quasi-mother and they appear to take emotional ownership of pupils. Discussion of pupils is in terms of a 'caring discourse' (Mackenzie, 2011) and the women often talked about 'looking after' and 'caring' for the children they supported,

Morag comments on Jack, one of the, "wild bunch" of troubled and troubling boys, "I fair like him, there's something about him, I don't know what it is."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

Agnes points out one pupil to me, "That's my Mark", a boy she worked with. It was said with affection and pity.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)

As a group are waiting to come in to the Support for Learning room James begins kicking the wall very hard. Morag tells us, "That's James kicking off" to which, Jean replies, "That's my boy", with real affection.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

Leanne: *I love my job...I get a lot of reward out of it. Callum gives me great pleasure. I just want to see him very happy and try and do the best I can for him.*

(Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

A result of this is that the women demonstrate overt care for the pupils in an openly maternal way,

Is your eye nipping? I can phone mum cos I have anti-histamine in bag if you need it.

(Agnes, Fieldnotes: 30/6/10)

Jean asks Louise, "What have you done to your eye? That looks sore. Poor thing." She is also very concerned about Louise's friend who had fainted yesterday.

(Jean, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)

Heather and Lucy are in the Support Base discussing a female pupil who has a sore upper lip that needs cream put on it twice a day. The classroom assistants have been applying the cream and by Friday the lip looks much better. However, it is not applied at home over the weekend so by Monday the lip is sore again. Heather applies the cream herself but Lucy encourages the girl to apply the cream herself in the hope she will do it at the weekends.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/10)

However, such talk, grounded in emphasised femininity, can have the tendency to be unquestioningly gendered (Mackenzie, 2011) and as such uphold the dominant gendered sex roles present in patriarchal society,

In the playground some girls are being very tactile with Jean, and vice-versa, cuddling and linking arms. Jean lets me know that, "…these are my cuddly girls." Jean tells me that although she realises that such behaviour is difficult in school nowadays, she does see a role for it. Jean goes on to say that, "…boys needs a cuddle too", as they are, "…not getting this at home"

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

At break Jean reprimands some of the boys, "Boys remember girls are a little bit more fragile…some girls, some girls". The latter is added almost self consciously and apparently for my benefit.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

As mothering and care are seen to be a major part of classroom assistants' role, the women tend to be particularly critical of anyone who is not seen to care (Mackenzie, 2011). Therefore, also evident in this talk is a sense of pity for certain pupils often based on a perceived lack of care, either from teachers or parents, or at the severity of need,

Morag is speaking about a pupil, "Somebody has upset him. He had a good morning. It's a pity"

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 16/6/10)

Leanne says hello to two nursery pupils with severe needs, afterwards she confides in me that their conditions are, "…just awful"

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 28/9/12)

Perhaps, overall, the talk of the women is similar, on some levels, to Corbett's (1996) view that, "'special needs' is the language of sentimentality and prejudice"

(1996: 5). Agnes' comments on one particular pupil were an example of this duality,

> *Agnes points out a girl in a very grubby school polo shirt. Agnes tells me that the girl is "one of five…what can you do?" Agnes then whispers to me that mum is an, "alcoholic".*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)

Here we see sentimentality in, *"one of five…what can you do?"* with its imagery of protection, care tenderness, love and pity. But we also see prejudice in, *"alcoholic"* with its sense of mistrust, loathing and hostility. For Corbett, a danger lies in both pervasive elements of this dualism and both are equally damaging. This is because they both create stereotypical images and categories that marginalise real need by disengaging it from an educational context.

Interestingly though, such sentimentality, although very common, was not universal and there were some instances were particular pupils were not included in this talk,

> *Jean describes a particular girl as a, "sleekit[19] wee girl" who has "…got everything".*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

Here we also get hints at the women's differentiation of 'good' and 'bad' parenting, an argument that will be discussed at length later in the chapter. Finally, there is a clear sense of humour and irony in the talk on some pupils,

> *Morag, with genuine affection, expresses her pleasure with, "…all the wee darlings", a knowing combination of maternal care and irony.*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

Here Morag knowingly subverts the language of mothering and care, but still confirms her affection for a group of troubled and troublesome young male pupils.

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[19] A Scottish term for cunning or deceitful.

What this talk suggests, is that classroom assistants see their relationships with pupils as very different relationships to those that teachers have with pupils. Classroom assistants see themselves as much more emotionally connected to pupils, perhaps through being more physically connected. Here we can see the physical embodiment of Noddings' (1984) work on 'natural' and 'ethical' care. What the classroom assistants are displaying is natural caring, the care of a mother for a child; that, Noddings argues, arises almost naturally out of women's experiences. Such caring, although requiring significant physical and mental effort, does not involve an ethical effort to motivate it. Natural caring does not involve detailed justifications to explain we ought to treat one another positively. Rather, as we have seen earlier, it is a moral attitude, of wanting to care, arising out of the experience and memory of being cared for. In contrast, the classroom assistants often portray teachers as merely displaying what Noddings called ethical care. For Noddings (1999), natural care comes before ethical caring, and is preferable to it. Whilst ethical care arises out of natural caring it is different in that it has to be summoned. Ethical care is about what 'ought' to be done rather than what one 'wants' to do. So whilst many teacher care in that they conscientiously pursue certain goals for students and work hard to help them achieve these goals, Noddings, and the classroom assistants, would argue that this is caring in a 'virtue' rather than a 'relational' sense. It is the classroom assistants who feel a monopoly in this relational sense of caring, and in their relationships with pupils.

Certainly many of the roles of the classroom assistant revolve around very personal and intimate relationships such as changing, cleaning, feeding, and the medical care of 'leaky bodies' (Shildrick, 1997). Such work means being physically close to pupils in terms of space, which appears to lead to a very close personal and emotional relation between teaching assistant and child, where children are known intimately (Barkham, 2008). Due to this closeness it was quite common for the classroom assistants to be on first name terms with pupils, and Morag is quite commonly referred to by a nickname, 'Miss C'. This closeness is something that appears to give classroom assistants satisfaction in their work,

But we have a totally different relationship with the children than what teachers do. They can call me Heather if they want and that's fine. I can have a laugh and a joke wi' them. You know, high fives and we can have really good fun. But then we'll work. But then after that work we can go and do something nice…, I mean I've got a fantastic relationship, I would say, with all the kids in the school…Cause I enjoy it. I still get up in the mornings and think 'going tae my work'.

(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Heather's reference of fun being important is apparent in other women's talk too, and sometimes classroom assistants appear to be complicit with pupils in deriving fun at the expense of other staff,

The Head Teacher tells Agnes that, "Cameron's gone looking for mirrors". "Knowing Cameron", Agnes whispers to another pupil, "we won't see him again till lunchtime." Both Agnes and the pupils smile at her joke, complicit in recognising the naivety of the Head Teacher.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

Agnes is tying a pupil's shoelace during mental maths session and says in jest "You're just trying to get out of doing this [the test]". They both smile.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

William cannot find anything on his desk and is jokingly called a "messy pup" by Agnes. William replies, "Have you seen the teacher's desk lately?" Agnes is genuinely amused by his joke.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 16/6/10)

Such closeness and fun does have boundaries though, and there is a noticeably traditional, conservative tone to the talk deriving perhaps from their maternal view of the role,

Jean points out to me, loud enough for the pupils to hear, the good manners the class has. She tells me that she is, "a stickler for good manners" and that the, "majority of pupils very good."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

Morag tells me that her and her group, "have fun, but know how far to go." I later witness an example of this:
P7 Boy: Miss C gie us a pencil.
Morag: Excuse me?
P7 Boy: Only joking. Please may I have a pencil?
[This is said with an apologetic smile and genuine respect]
(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 16/6/10)

There was evidence that pupils genuinely respected the approach of the classroom assistants,

Jean is working one-to-one with Emily on problem solving from a textbook, quietly supporting and praising, "...good girl...well done sweetheart...good girl, goodness me Emily." Jean then tells the Depute Head, loud enough for Emily to hear, "What a change in that girl." As she leaves the girl, genuinely, says, "Thank you", to which Jean replies, "You're welcome."
(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 10/12/10)

This traditional view of standards extends also to presentation and appearance. There is evidence of overt criticism of certain parents' standards of care for their children, but in some cases 'common sense', although harsh, explanations of the 'causes'. Once again these foreground the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' parenting,

I'm chatting about a pupil with Agnes. She tells me that his sister was recently at a rugby festival, outside in the cold, wearing, "shorts and a strappy top." Not only this, but, "the top was black [dirty]", and she was, "...wearing it the next day, and it was still black."
(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)

It can be argued that such explanations are often based upon the local knowledge these women have of pupils and families as a result of living in the school catchment area themselves. The potential consequences of such knowledge will now be considered.

'There's Something Going on at Home': Local Knowledge and the Marginalisation of Parents

Stead *et al*. (2007) commented on the informal nature of relationships in schools, especially between classroom assistants and pupils. This they, and others, defined as a strength, in that classroom assistants possessed information and understanding of pupils and their family circumstances (Cremin *et al*, 2003). O' Brien and Garner (2001a) argued that this information and understanding was a direct result of classroom assistants living and working within the local school community. Here they naturally come in contact with pupils and parents both inside and outside the school context. There seems little doubt that classroom assistants have an intimate knowledge of local families and their relationships,

> *Agnes is chatting to girl about nail varnish and then asks about her sister who she knew was at High School. She knew that the elder sister was considering hairdressing after school.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

> *Agnes tells me about a pupil who is, "poor at everything". She goes on to tell me that he is from a, "family of five children [who were] all like it."*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

> *Janis is working with a pupil is an, "only child, and you can tell!" She then tells me that, "dad is a professional footballer…but he's not with mum now." The pupil is described as a "difficult boy [who in the past] wouldn't leave his mum, but is now so cocky!"*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

> *The classroom assistants are discussing the issues of a particular girl in class and her frictions with other girls. Morag tells us that she is, "using my phone as a stick." Morag knows the girls aunt and has the aunt's number on her phone. The girl knows this and as the aunt is her primary carer the girl is worried enough to comply. Agnes comments that the girl is, "getting a more settled home life, and that everything is beginning to settle."*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> *Janis asks Katie about her new baby brother, and later tells me that Katie's older brother, "is completely different to Katie. The problem is, Katie is just wooaahhh!"*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 29/10/10)

This can sometimes result in simple black humour, as below, but can often hide darker, overtly critical views that will be discussed later,

> *Aileen comes in to the Support Base with a homemade cake brought in for the staff and baked by one of the pupils. Leanne's first question is, "Who made it?", on hearing that she decided it was safe to eat as, "She's OK."*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 13/5/11)

As mentioned previously, because classroom assistants tend to share many of the same social characteristics as parents, a bond may be formed, "I like to feel that they see me as friendly and open…some parents often find it easier to speak to a teaching assistant and many little problems can be sorted out that way" (Dyer, 2001: 86), and, '…readily approachable and empathetic [and] are trusted for their expertise' (Barkham, 2008: 847). Again the 'common sense' view that, "[Being a parent] helps you deal with parents" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001b: 132) is present. It was certainly present and explicitly articulated at Sunview Primary,

> *They, most of the parents are fantastic. Really good relationship wi' parents. Cause you see them without, you know, outside as well. And they say 'Och, och he's fine', you know…Like Callum's mum. I grew up wi' Ashleigh and her husband. Cause they are Sunview born and bred, the same. I mean we grew up wi' them, you know. And it's nice but it is nice, you know. And how's, you know, cause Ashleigh will say 'Oh what was he up to today?'. I say, you know, I say 'He's such a joy to work wi'', you know, yeah.*
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Graves (2011) explained this in terms of 'emotional geography' (Hargreaves, 2001). For her, teaching assistants, who have traditionally been drawn from the communities within which they live, and are often parents of pupils in the school, may be very much rooted in the school and the community. As such they can offer a vital resource to schools in terms of acting as a conduit between home and school. This may offer a vital, but largely unexamined, resource in terms of connecting schools and teachers with parents and the wider community. A belief in this kind of relationship is clear in the talk of the women in this study,

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Heather: *I get a lot a' feedback fae parents…all these parents are, you know, they'll, they're so nice, so good. And it's, 'Wee Johnny's no very well today but you know him. Just you keep an eye on him'. 'Are you going tae York wi' them?' 'Yeah'. 'Oh well thank goodness for that', you know. 'You going tae school camp wi' them?' 'Yeah'. All the parents, you know.*

<div align="right">(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

Heather: *Because I know the kids and I know they don't mean it. I know the troubles, their backgrounds that they've got, you know…I know the kids and I know they don't mean it, you know.*

<div align="right">(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

Leanne: *When, Callum was going in tae the [Support Base] she [mum] was just devastated and I mean I knew she was gonna be devastated when she heard this and she looked at me and she said, "What d'you think?", and I nodded tae her and she, she just kinda like wiped her tears and she says, "D'you think so?" and I said, "This will really, really work for Callum", and she just dried her eyes and sort of sit up and thought OK then.*

<div align="right">(Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)</div>

Such views are also visible in other studies, "As a parent yourself you realise there are anxieties and worries with all childcare and I just think you can deal with them on a parent-to-parent level" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001b: 132), and would seem to be mutually held by parents,

Callum's mum comes in to the Support Base and is on first name terms with all the staff. As it is nearing the end of the school year she has presents for all the staff. Callum gives them out with a very polite, "You're welcome". The staff are genuinely touched. Callum's mum tells Leanne that she will, "See you over the summer", and then sits and chats to Heather about her son's progress. Mum seemed pleased and tells Heather, "You do a fab job". They hug before she leaves and mention keeping in touch via Facebook.

<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)</div>

The talk also evidence the fact classroom assistants display better local knowledge than the teachers and often use this, as Graves (2011) suggests, to connect teachers with parents and the wider community,

Morag:	*Alex is not good going.*
Support for Learning Teacher:	*I'm surprised by that.*
Morag:	*There's something going on at home.*
	(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

Morag:	*Chelsea hurt somebody today.*
Support for Learning Teacher:	*I wonder if she sees her mum?*
Jean:	*Friday, usually…goes to see her mum with her social worker.*
	(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

At a staff meeting a pupil is being discussed:

Leanne:	*Has something happened?*
Principal Teacher:	*No everything is OK at home, but Dad tells him not to bother.*
All:	*Dad? Derrrrr!*

[The implication being that this is not his dad)

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/10)

However, what this can result in is this intimate knowledge of local families and their relationships being used to justify the cause and explain away particular educational issues,

Agnes reflects about a particular female pupil, "Mums not well…a lot of stress going on there [home] now."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

Richard arrives late and upset to his class. Morag speaks to the class teacher to give her the full details of the reasons for this. Later I ask if this was normal of Richard and Agnes tells me it is and that, "…something will have happened at home."

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

Heidi discusses Matthew's needs in great detail and gives me a full background of his particular autism. She tells me that he is one of four boys and that home life is, "chaotic."

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/10)

What is evident throughout this talk is the notion of pity. Care, or the lack of it, is considered by the women in terms of biological and social determinism and is therefore usually described as a personal tragedy located within the material and social condition of the family. The women adopt a position of sympathetic sorrow towards the child and this is transposed onto the child as pity. This 'personal tragedy' perspective normalises any physical or cognitive impairment evident and

instead focuses on issues of individual adjustment in coping with, or making the best of, misfortune. Personality factors are seen as crucial for success (Thomas, 1999). Whilst, on the surface such talk reflects the view that, "You certainly empathise with what they're [parents] going through" (O' Brien and Garner, 2001b: 132), one must question whether this is actually the case. The concern is that such talk can quickly slip in to becoming overtly critical of certain parenting styles, and, indeed certain parents. In her sample Mackenzie (2011) reported that there was a belief that the causes of behaviour problems lay in family background, particularly 'broken homes'. Initially these types of talk appear to simply be ways of justifying behaviour and often contain elements of humour and genuine care,

> *Janis is discussing various pupils with me in an impromptu way. One is described as a, "...lovely wee boy, and his sister, you couldn't have made two nicer children". But their older brothers, who have now left school, have, "...been in the papers."*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

> *Lesley is having a one-to-one chat with pupil about his behaviour management. Heather tells me that, "...he's not got a mum", but has, "...got two older brothers", as a means of explanation. Leanne adds that the, "...bairn lacks love and attention. He's got a bit of a temper and others know that and push him."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 18/3/11)

> *Heidi tells me about two siblings, Merlin and Saxon, and admits to that initially she, "...thought Saxon was a dog", she goes on to explain, "...when you see dad you will understand."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/10)

> *It's playtime and Morag, as usual, is on indoor playtime duty with the pupils who are not allowed out because of their poor behaviour. This group is "getting more and more" and some pupils "never get out"; the "lifers" as Morag refers to them with genuine affection. Commenting on these pupils Morag comments with sympathy that, "when you look into their backgrounds you can understand their behaviour."*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

Some of these criticisms start off at a fairly general and low level with common themes such as criticism of the lack of support and continuity from parents,

Lucy comments that Matthew got the hang of Picture Exchange Communication (PECs) at school, "...but back to square one after the holidays", as there was a lack of continuity at home.
<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/10)</div>

Lucy and Ailsa are talking of Matthew baking yesterday, but are disappointed that the cookies are still in his bag today, which is, "...such a shame", the implication being that the parents are not interested.
<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/10)</div>

Jean: "Carly's like her brother, he was the same. Mum doesn't follow it [school work] up. It's all to no avail".
<div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)</div>

Nevertheless, this view of parenting lacks consistency. So whilst some parents are criticised for a lack of discipline at home, others are criticised for too much,

Matthew runs off from a heavily pregnant Lucy and is being dangerous on the stairs. When he returns to the Support Base he is "hyper" and is climbing on furniture. Lucy has to raise her voice to him and Heidi comments that, "he doesn't get stopped at home."
<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/10)</div>

Heather is telling the others about Callum's mum being upset due to bereavement. The mum thinks Callum's reading is really coming on, and is giving him work at home. Leanne looks doubtful and thinks, "He should just be a normal boy and play at home." Lucy agrees, and feels, "he's bombarded with stuff". Heather adds that he gets, "too much" at home, and that, "our children wouldn't get that". Ailsa worries that he, "doesn't play really, just works", and Heather agrees that he, "should chill out". Aileen agrees with the previous comments and Leanne sums up with the view that, "mum in denial."
<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 18/3/11)</div>

Such talk is found too across the wider literature, "In my time as a learning support assistant I have found that some parents are not always as realistic about their children as they could be" (Gray, 2001: 105). This can perhaps be summarised not as 'mother knows best' but that 'certain mothers know best'. This can ultimately result in some parents being held up to harsh and pejorative comments about their lives and behaviours that exclude them from the mores of these women,

Jean:	David's behaviour has been shocking.
Agnes:	How's mum doing?
Morag:	She's in an electric wheelchair"
Jean:	It's not a new thing [behaviour] it's always like that. It's in their nature, that's just how they are.
Morag:	Mum was mouthing off again.

<div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)</div>

I'm chatting about a pupil with Agnes. She tells me about his other siblings who were, "churned out" by his mother.

<div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)</div>

The classroom assistants are talking about a pupil who was upset, as his dad had just gone to prison. The talk is that there were, "drugs involved', and that the dad has, "lots of kids scattered about". Lucy wonders how, "anyone could sleep with someone so sleazy."

<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/11)</div>

Leanne:	Was she [a parent] off her face [drunk]?
Ailsa:	No.
Leanne:	Looked like it.
Ailsa:	Always does. Stinking though.

<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 3/6/11)</div>

Through the language of emotional labour classroom assistants then appear to share a mutual 'knowledge' of 'typical' parents. Typification, in this sense, means that they tend, unconsciously or unreflectively, to categorise parents in particular ways based on their description of a parent's character and behaviour (Treweek, 1996). The presenting of accounts in a calm manner, with a degree of local knowledge, and the use of extreme examples strengthens the classroom assistants' accounts of events. Such accounts, contrasted with their own caring and competent performances, enables classroom assistants to construct their own expertise in mothering and care vis-à-vis the lack of such expertise in certain parents, and be critical of the practices of these parents. The language of emotional labour used serves to develop categories of parents and these along with particular types of parent 'biography', construct parents in the binary opposition of 'good' or 'bad'. Qualities and troubles can both be constructed and resolved through the language of emotional labour of classroom assistants. This will be discussed fully in the next chapter.

***'All She Needs are Some Cuddles and Some Love': Care and the
Marginalisation of Teachers***

Yet despite this talk of 'good' and 'bad' parenting, the women, paralleling
Noddings (1984), still regarded the biological family as important for children's
emotional wellbeing. Like Lawler (2000), they shared the view that, "children's
needs, and especially their emotional needs, are the point of motherhood" (2000:
125). This became clear in their ambivalence to children being taken away from
the family home and being 'looked after'; put in to local authority care,

> *Janis mentions that in the school there are quite a few children in care,
> which is a, "real shame."*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

> *For Leanne the, "damage is done when they're [pupils] taken away from
> parents."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/4/11)

Indeed, there is some suspicion about the motives and trustworthiness of these
types of carers and even a feeling that institutional caring should not be equated
with work,

> *Heather is critical of some carers who she feels do it for the money rather
> than the child. She refers to local carers getting money for the children in
> their care but spending it on themselves rather than the children.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/4/11)

> *Lucy and Moira show me a clipping of a letter from a parent printed
> recently in the local paper. The letter is critical about teachers' hours and
> holidays. There is obvious dislike for the parent. Later the same day
> Leanne and Aileen also comment to me about the letter, letting me know
> about the parent, "He doesn't even work, he's a carer for his partner"
> However, this is said with an implication of 'doubt' and topped of with,
> "[He has] kids all over the place."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 2/5/11)

This highlights another theme that is evident in the women's talk; that of finance.
These views revolve around the deserving and the undeserving poor and seem to
be based on a sense of commonly held 'fairness',

The classroom assistants are discussing a child whose family has asked school for help with the financial cost of school trip. However, the child told one of the classroom assistants that that her family were having a party on a boat with a limo to take them there. Some 'surprise' is shown at this.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 24/6/10)

Leanne is chatting to Ailsa about Matthew and his parents and says that, "Robert [her partner] says the council are never away from their [pupils] house."

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)

However, in some cases institutional care is seen as a last resort if the immediate and extended families are not the most suitable place for a child,

The classroom assistants are discussing Chelsea's life after Jean said her family had been on the television the previous night. Morag whispers that, "She's had a shit life." Jean's thoughts are that Chelsea would have been better off placed with another family totally rather than another part of her own as her aunt has issues too. Jean hints that violence has been present in Chelsea's past.

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

This talk foregrounds the importance of the care of 'good' parents over that of local authority care. Other talk takes this position further and foregrounds the care of 'good' parents rather than academic knowledge. In a study from England, Dunne, *et al*. (2008) argued that primary teaching assistants were not convinced that curriculum subject knowledge was needed, although 'ideally, some knowledge' was useful (2008: 242). They went on to state teaching assistants themselves did not think there was any real difference between teaching assistants with or without such knowledge. Dunne, *et al*. suggested that this was perhaps due to historical notions of a primary teaching assistants' role being that of 'carer, parent helper, and/or substitute mother and not a role with its own recognisable professional discourse or knowledge base' (2008: 242). The traditional perception of the primary school merely developing life skills and values, before secondary school takes on the real transmission of knowledge and key vocational skills was also not helpful. The teaching assistants' view is that they fulfil a caring, nurturing role rather than an educative one, again perhaps due to the mothering identity that appears intrinsic to the primary school context.

Here we can see echoes of Martin (1992) who argues that whilst, historically, the physical, emotional, and social needs of children have been met by the family: primarily by mothers; today, more mothers are drawn into the workforce with the result that this historic role of the domestic sphere in the education and development of children is drastically reduced. Martin sees these changes as a defining moment for schools, and presents a philosophy of education that is responsive to such changed and changing realities. She views this as an opportunity to recreate, within schools, the nurturing tasks traditionally performed at home. Consequently, Martin advocates removing the barriers between the school and the home, making school a metaphorical "home", a safe and nurturing environment that provides children with the experience of affection and connection otherwise missing or inconsistent in their lives. What classroom assistants may be doing, it could be argued, is attempting to create something similar to what Martin called a 'schoolhome'. This is a space that integrates the values of the home with those of social responsibility, and becomes a learning environment whose curriculum and classroom practice reflect not merely an economic but also a moral investment in the future of children. Such a schoolhome opens its doors to, what Martin called, a '3C curriculum', one of caring, concern, and connection, where learning is animated by an ethic of social awareness. The schoolhome is a domestic environment characterised by safety, security, nurturance, and love, with a focus on students' individual emotional and cognitive needs.

Nevertheless, evidence from the women in this study suggests that they see their role developing into a more educative one. In the previous chapter the women's talk made it clear that emotional needs were not fully attended to by academic learning as it,

> *...genuinely doesn't make any difference, hands on experience is better.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

This view is evident too in wider research, "I need something that is relevant to me doing my job now" (Simpson, 2001: 129). Further evidence from both the Coalside and Sunview Primary data suggests that, at best, classroom assistants are

prone to be nonchalant about the importance of academic knowledge and learning,

> *When I asked about a pupil's needs Jean tells me that he has, "always been like it" and although, "there's a name for it" Jean could not recall it, but she knew he received "no support in class", however, he was, "very polite."*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> *Ann is working with a pupil who appears to have global delay, She does not recall what he has been diagnosed with but knows, "there is a proper word for it."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/10)

This nonchalance extends to medical diagnosis, with the classroom assistants dismissing prescription medication as a possible solution to a pupil's needs. Instead, despite their agreement on the extent of his challenging behavioural issues, a dysfunctional family was seen as the major issue, and the solution as nothing more than the need for love and care,

> *There is a discussion between the classroom assistants of a boy who was "off the wall". He had since been prescribed Ritalin, but this made him, "like a zombie", with the qualification, "mind you he was awful". Jean "didn't agree with it [Ritalin]" and is of the opinion that a, "little bit of perseverance" and "little bit love and care" is what was required. Jean tells us that he told somebody to "F-ing get out of the way" [Jean self censors], but explains this by stating that "…it's coming up to the weekend." Agnes adds, "Dads visit", as if this explained everything.*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

Although the opportunity for serious discussion about pupils is generally lacking, a fact bemoaned by the classroom assistants themselves (See Chapter 5), when such meetings do take place the agenda is often dominated by a few of the stronger personalities amongst the classroom assistants. In one particular extract from the fieldwork Elsa, the Support for Learning Teacher, attempts to discuss a pupil who may be displaying signs of autism, but these views are not taken seriously. Given her youth, and relative inexperience, there appears to be an underlying, unspoken understanding that Elsa's 'bookish' knowledge is of no substitute for actually being a mother. And of course these women, who are

literally old enough to be her mother, outnumber Elsa. Barkham (2008) commented on teachers in her study too who felt overawed, 'by the seniority of an experienced teaching assistant who was much older than she was' (2008: 848). From the classroom assistants' perspective, Mackenzie (2011) noted that they thought it important to have mature and experienced teachers working with pupils, and were concerned that some teachers lacked knowledge and experience. As a result of such pressure, Elsa often withdraws, but this appears to be through consent and compliance rather than apathy or resentment. From the classroom assistant's perspective there is no dislike of Elsa, but rather a mutual mother/daughter respect,

> *Elsa reports that those at the meeting had considered whether Asperger's could be part of the pupil's needs. There is some level of surprise from the classroom assistants but Elsa perseveres by describing the pupil's traits; lonely, angry, withdrawn, lacking friends, in an attempt to justify the Asperger's link. Agnes responds to the friendship issues positively at first by suggesting a 'circle of friends' approach but Jean is less focused on the Asperger's and states that she "just sometimes wonders if that all she [the pupil] needs are some cuddles and some love", that the pupil "just wants affection". Jean then goes on to ask, "How's mum? I've never seen her". From Jean this is a real cutting put down, the implication being that the lack of affection is the fault of mum. Morag takes an opposite tack, but no less cutting, "Is she spoiled? She comes across as spoiled". Before an answer can be given Agnes adds, "What does she do out with school?" The implication being that she needs to get out more. Elsa is silent as the three older and more experienced women make their views clear. This domination of these meetings is not new and Elsa's usual response is to vary between silence and consent. Jean is now in her stride and referencing the local knowledge that all three women have. She comments on the marital state of the pupil's parents, that they have "Not been apart too long and have both got new partners". In her opinion this was "too quick" and "bound to have an effect". Agnes goes back to before the marital breakdown and wonders, "what was happening at home before the split?" The implication being that any acrimony could have affected the pupil. Morag adds, "there's a lot like that here", making the specifics of this particular pupil more general. However, given the precarious job situation for the classroom assistants after summer Agnes does see a possible silver lining in this situation as a diagnosis of Asperger's may mean 'extra resources' and maybe job security. Morag gives this short shrift though and states, "She doesn't need a label". With this the discussion is over.*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 10/12/10)

Once again a pupil's needs are not regarded as being of a cognitive or medical origin but instead explained as family centred. It is interesting however, that there is little agreement between the classroom assistants, with Jean suggesting maternal neglect and Morag suggesting that the pupil may be spoiled. Parents it appears, are 'damned if they do and damned if they don't'. Nevertheless, the common, agreed solution is once more seen as a need for love and care in a stable family home. Jean's comments seem out of touch with contemporary theory on autism and more a reflection on the now discredited 'refrigerator mother' thesis (Frith, 2003). However, they are left unchallenged and, as usual, there is no discussion or acknowledgement of any other explanation beyond the family. However, although the family is central to the classroom assistants' talk, it is a particular view of the family they have in mind, one of 'normality' and while a 'pity' discourse is often evident in such cases, this is missing in others, as here. Morag's rejection of job security is very telling and reflects the self-sacrifice of a mother and, by extension, a classroom assistant. Here, as generally, the talk of the classroom assistants silence academic discourses.

'Some people, they've got a set view of how things are done': Talk About Dissent

It would though be naïve to think that all classroom assistants are the same and indeed one classroom assistant in the sample presented some form of challenge to the dominant talk of the majority. The individual presenting the challenge was Heidi from Sunview Primary. Heidi, with her degree and experience in a special school setting, often used talk that displayed broader concepts of need and focused on issues beyond mothering and care such as teaching and learning, the curriculum, timetabling, budgets and finance, and staff politics. This type of challenge could be described as 'extremist talk' (Hargreaves, 1984). Extremist talk is usually the repertoire of subordinate figures such as Heidi, rather than the dominant majority. It consists of alternative views of existing practice, of challenging 'what is', and is presented in a matter of fact, but informed, way,

rather than being trivialised. Whilst these are hardly radical, she did at least air concerns not generally considered by the other women,

> *Heidi shows me Matthew's work folder. His work is planned with the Communication Outreach Teaching Service and makes use of the Elaborated Curriculum and visual timetables…Heidi comments on Matthew's needs, "ASN we call it now". This is the first time I've heard this terminology used.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 21/2/11)

> *And obviously there…there are gaps I think that both Matthew and Callum would…would benefit more from more specialist teaching…*
> *…Because I kind of feel that because there hasn't been so much specialist input with the boy…as much input with the boys as I think there should be, it's sort of frustrating in a way seeing that maybe where they could be and where they actually are at the moment…*
> *…the speech therapy provision has been very patchy, when somebody's been off there hasn't been somebody to cover for them…*
> *…a lot of decisions seem to be taken on a purely financial basis and not on the needs…individual needs of the children…*
> *…as I say I think you know that even just that physical division between the staff room and the base contributes to that sort of feeling of separation…*
> *…some people, say, because they've been here a long time they've got a…you know, maybe a more set view of what their role is and how things are done.*
>
> (Heidi, Interview 24/6/11)

Hargreaves argues that extremist talk involves a high level of commitment from those involved as it often leads to resounding differences of opinion. Such an isolated and contrary stance comes with disagreement and fallout, even over the most mundane issues,

> *Ailsa and Heidi are discussing what is best to be done for Matthew and Callum teaching. Tables and chairs are being moved to provide the most ideal workstations. However, there is clearly friction between the two women and they cannot not agree, or compromise, on the most appropriate layout. The two appear to have different agendas.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/25/11)

Some kind of friction and tension was often manifested within Sunview Primary. This may have been the result of Heidi being relatively new to the school compared to the dominant personalities of Heather and Leanne and also she was

not *"Sunview born and bred"* (Heather, Interview 3/6/11). This cast her as an outsider and she did not socialise with the others after work or at weekends. The result at work was that Heidi was scapegoated and ridiculed by the other women,

We do have some frustrations. Mind you, I shouldn't say that. Some frustrations sometimes when we're, when you're working with children and you're meant to be keeping to plans and some people [Heidi] don't. They just follow their own pattern and things and don't do what's meant, what's down, is in a structured day…I don't know…Because you'll, you'll say something and you'll explain it and that'll be yep, fine and then five minutes later you'll turn round and you'll think – oh, that's no what we're meant to be doing – and then you'll say it, oh, oh yes, right OK then. And then she goes off on her own wee way…

(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

I don't, I just, I don't know. I don't know what it is about her [Heidi]? You, you tell her and she'll go "yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes, I know, I know" and turn around and she will not do it…Mmm. I mean she is, strikes me as very individual and very sort of strong minded and perhaps because she's come from a different sort of background…

(Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

… we think we are working the same and Heidi's different…But from a, an educational side, what, like when Matthew first started and we didn't work, Heidi was the only one that worked with him in nursery, and it was counting to ten and doing his colours and his shapes. And then we got in there and we were like 'you can see yourself, Matthew isn't capable a' doing all that'…It's just the way Heidi works. I think Heidi's maybe…I just think Heidi's Heidi…

(Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

Such friction in the social order is evident in other research. Mackenzie (2011) reported a hierarchy of teaching assistants, with those who have been in post for a long time knowing 'how to work the system to their advantage' (2011: 67). At Sunview, such advantages included the dominant personalities having the ear of the Principal Teacher (Support for Learning) and having control over timetabling and workload.

Although a minority of one, Heidi's displays of extremist talk cannot be overlooked. In fact, Hargreaves was of the opinion that extremist talk can be a viable source of change in educational practice because it attempts to expand,

rather than constrain, boundaries of existing power. These boundaries of power are important and will be discussed fully in the following chapter.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to understand how classroom assistants created and sustained positive social and professional identities. It appeared that this is achieved partly by foregrounding the notions of 'mothering' and 'care' found throughout talk grounded in emphasised femininity. It was found that an overwhelming majority of classroom assistants subscribed to the idea that being a mother is an essential requirement for the role of a successful classroom assistant. It was then argued that the actual language, imagery and behaviour that classroom assistants demonstrate in their occupational context could be understood by using Hochschild's (1979, 1983) notion of emotional labour. Although, using Noddings' (1984) work on 'natural' and 'ethical' care, it was argued that classroom assistants see their labour as different to that of teachers. Further, it was contended that classroom assistants' unique local 'knowledge' of pupils and their families, could be used positively, with the classroom assistants acting as a conduit between home and school, but more often negatively to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' parenting or care. This often resulted in certain parents and carers being marginalised and criticised. The chapter then argued that classroom assistants appear to position 'care' more highly than academic 'knowledge' in their responses to pupils' education and wellbeing, which resulted in teachers and teaching being marginalised too by such talk. The chapter concluded by highlighting some limited evidence of dissent to the dominant, majority view and used the notion of extremist talk as a device to aid analysis.

The next chapter moves beyond the structure and content of talk to look at its purpose and function. It attempts to explain how such talk derives the power to work in the way they do. To do this, it focuses on the use of certain rhetorical devices, and in particular focuses on the centrality of 'contrastive rhetoric' and 'atrocity stories'.

Chapter 7

Findings: Talk about 'Atrocity' and Professional Relationships

Introduction

The previous chapter foregrounded notions of 'mothering' and 'care', found in the talk of the classroom assistants in this study, to explain how classroom assistants created and sustained positive social and professional identities. Drawing on Hochschild's (1979, 1983) work on 'emotional labour', the focus was on what was said, and how, with a particular interest on the content and structure of the talk. It was also argued that classroom assistants see their work as different to that of teachers, basing it more on 'natural' care, grounded in the care of a mother for a child, rather than 'ethical' care, what one 'ought' to do (Noddings, 1984). The chapter concluded that classroom assistants' unique local 'knowledge' of pupils and their families was often used to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' mothering and care. This often resulted in certain parents and carers being marginalised. This central positioning of 'care', rather than academic 'knowledge', in their responses to pupils' education and wellbeing, also resulted in teachers and teaching being viewed as different too. This chapter now moves the focus from the content of the talk to its purpose and function. The chapter addresses what it is that gives this talk the power to work the way it does, and how talk creates and sustains positive social and professional identities.

The chapter begins by defining the concept of the atrocity story as dramatic, sometimes outrageous, talk through which a storyteller attempts to defend their particular occupational group, its body of common sense knowledge and practices, against the encroachments of powerful others. It is argued that the 'truth' of these atrocity stories is irrelevant and that rather they should be viewed as 'moral parables'. The chapter then moves on to consider the functions of atrocity stories. It argues that there are two important functions. Firstly, at an individual level, atrocity stories form part of the doxa (Bourdieu, 2005), the shared oral culture of any occupational group and through this they stress what it

is to be a competent member of such a group. Secondly, but simultaneously, atrocity stories have an important influence on the social production of occupational boundaries. In short they both 'include' and 'exclude' members of occupational groups. Next, the chapter focuses specifically on classroom assistants and how their atrocity stories, with a recurring theme of care, work to create occupational boundaries between themselves, teachers and parents. Finally the chapter uses Baruch's (1981) framework of salient features of atrocity stories to examine some extended talk from the data in an attempt to discover their shared formats and conventions. The goal is to move beyond the storytellers' point of view and instead focus and reflect on the recurring character of their depictions of action.

Contrastive Rhetoric and Atrocity Stories

In the previous chapter it became clear that whilst classroom assistants held a range of views about mothering and care, and displayed a range of thoughts in this area, they did so within very definite and unquestioned limits, often through the conduit of emphasised femininity. Using the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), it could be argued that these dominant versions of 'reality' regarding mothering and care became deeply embedded into the consciousness of classroom assistants and delineated the boundaries of their commonsense, but for the most part remained beyond analysis and question. Hargreaves (1984) argued that such boundaries of normal and acceptable practice are maintained, in part, by certain interactional strategies. One important interactional strategy he called 'contrastive rhetoric' (Hargreaves, 1984). Contrastive rhetoric works through members of an occupational group introducing outrageous and stereotypical examples of alternative practice into conversation. Examples of this are common throughout the women's talk of mothering and care,

Janis mentions a boy who, "never gets a row at home", and that this makes it difficult when she has to give him one at school. She views him as spoiled, rather than neglected, and mentions that even his Home-School diary showed he was not doing much at home, except "always play-fighting with dad or Xbox"

(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10)

This stylised, trivialised and pejorative manner in which alternative practice is discussed works to highlight and cement its unacceptability. Hargreaves argued that contrastive rhetoric works most successfully when it is utilised by dominant personalities. This can be seen clearly in the talk of Agnes, Jean and Morag at Coalside Primary, and Ailsa, Heather, Leanne and Lucy at Sunview Primary. In the language of Bourdieu, the success of contrastive rhetoric hinges on the habitus, the "structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (Bourdieu, 1984: 166); the kind of knowledge, assumptions and interpretations classroom assistants bring to interactions, and on the doxa, the "universe of tacit presuppositions that organise action within the field" (Bourdieu, 2005: 37); or the skills of the dominant personalities on stressing particular elements of classroom assistant culture. Hence, experience is central to such interactions and in this way the dominant personalities justify the accounts presented. One particularly powerful form of contrastive rhetoric, that is evident throughout the talk of the classroom assistants in this study, is the 'atrocity story'.

The term 'atrocity story' was coined by Stimson & Webb (1975) in the field of medicine. Dingwell (1977), in his seminal work, described atrocity stories as, "dramatic events staged between groups of friends and acquaintances that draw on shared understandings about the way of the world" (Dingwell, 1977: 375). Allen (2001) is of the opinion that such stories possess "dramatic or shocking events that may take on legendary or apocryphal status in the oral culture of an occupational group" (2001: 76). Indeed, for Bromley *et al.* (1979), it was the "outrageous, larger-than-life quality" (1979: 52) of atrocity stories that was crucial as this highlighted the blatant breach of a core cultural value of the storytellers group. As such, they can be seen as similar to folklore, urban myths, or even 'barbed comments made to the researcher' (Delamont, 2002: 136). Baruch

(1981) argued though, that what characterises atrocity stories are themes of conflict and disagreement. Nevertheless, Dingwell made the point that, despite the use of the word 'atrocity', such stories are not always centred on disaster. Rather the phrase characterises the dramatic quality of the account by which a complaint is transformed into a 'moral tale' that relates the right-minded audience to the position of the storyteller rather than the others in the story.

Although atrocity stories are not restricted to the powerless, Dingwell argued that they tend to be more common within this group. Bromley *et al.* (1979) believed that at the core atrocity stories describe, "a struggle for the construction of social reality" (1979: 43). As such each side attempts to construct their own definition of reality and justify their own activities at the expense of other groups. To be able to do this the storyteller adopts the role of 'hero', someone who is rational, understandable and in the right (Dingwell, 1977). Through the telling of atrocity stories the hero overcomes the ineffectiveness of others, and in doing so, their colleagues and social structures are protected from the violation of powerful others. This can be in the narrow occupational sense, or more generally, against the breaches of others, and right a real or supposed inequality (Silverman, 2005, 2006).

Atrocity stories need not be long. Dingwell was of the opinion that sometimes they may be nothing more than a single sentence,

> *The Head Teacher has asked for an audit of policy documents and Agnes is to help one of the class teachers. She tells the other classroom assistants, "I'll know what they are better than him."*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 30/6/10)

In this example Agnes concisely sums up her superior knowledge in an area that the class teacher should know best. The teacher's professional organisation is discredited and Agnes's knowledge gives her heroic status. Indeed, sometimes the storyteller need only mention key components of a story to get the appropriate reaction from their audience,

Some staff tidying the Snoezelen [multisensory room] as it is due to be upgraded over holidays and be complete for their return. However, Moira comments, "This is the council we are talking about!"

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/4/11)

In this example Moira's mere mention of the council reminds her colleagues of both her own rationality and the council's previous incompetence, nothing else needs to be added. The audience is left to fill in most of the additional, and presumably obvious, detail (Hargreaves, 1984). Crucially, what differentiates atrocity stories from just being grumbles or niggles is the vocabulary used and, in particular, the plea to the belief of 'right and wrong'. In both of these examples above, the clear, logical and rational nature of the classroom assistant is portrayed as 'right', whilst the incompetence of more powerful others in the story is depicted as 'wrong'. It is not important whether atrocity stories are actually right or wrong. Indeed, whether such stories contain some element of truth, is not only difficult to confirm but largely irrelevant, it is the plot of atrocity stories that determines their power. But for Silverman (2006), an atrocity story was no less powerful because of this, and in fact stories may actually gain their persuasiveness from their embellished, inflated and overstated qualities (Bromley *et al.*, 1979).

The Functions of Atrocity Stories

Once one realises that atrocity stories are a common type of talk used by occupational groups, the next aim is to attempt to understand the purpose and function of such stories within particular organisational and cultural contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). After a review of the literature, Allen (2001) determined that atrocity stories have been analysed as serving a range of social functions; communicators of guilt, relievers of anxiety and tension, mechanisms for communicating shared difficulties, facilitators of occupational rites of passage, vehicles for the transmission of an occupational culture, and resolvers of ambiguities over occupational boundaries (Allen, 2001: 77). Dingwell proposed that atrocity stories are one component of group talk, which symbolise features of that group's shared culture, or doxa. It is through such talk that occupational groups have the opportunity to demonstrate the nature of their own expertise and

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to construct implicit ideals about appropriate conduct and performance that they hold in their particular social setting (Li and Arber, 2006). So the atrocity stories told by classroom assistants have the potential to serve as a channel for making themselves appear as rational and sensible beings whilst, simultaneously, making parents and/or teachers appear to have acted inappropriately, irresponsibly or insensitively. As such they can serve to redress the unequal allocation of power within the school context (Li And Arber, 2006). Through these stories classroom assistants can present themselves as possessing considerable expertise that parents and teachers do not recognise, and in which they themselves ought to have greater confidence. As such they act as moral parables, which stress that they should have more confidence in their own abilities and should not be constrained by formal boundaries (Allen, 2001). Hence, they become a strategy used for the construction of the moral identity of 'classroom assistant' (Li and Arber, 2006). So storytellers focus on their appearance as moral persons; competent and adequate members of their group. And as noted in the previous chapter, one interactional strategy to achieve this is through Hochschild's (1979, 1983) notion of 'emotional labour'. Using Li and Arber's (2006) research from the area of nursing it can be argued that classroom assistants too use language of emotional labour as a platform to present themselves as competent and caring individuals. It is through the telling of these stories, they achieve the standing of moral adequacy. However, this is not the only function of atrocity stories.

Dingwell (1977) originally outlined two ways that atrocity stories may be used. Firstly, as argued previously, atrocity stories are used at an individual level to assert the rational character of the individual. Here the stories appeal to the reasonable behaviour of the storyteller, in contrast with the implied or stated positions of others. Such stories become a markedly dramatic part of the oral culture of the occupation, and when directed to novices can illustrate the performance requirements of the work and the difficulties that lie in their path. Indeed, Dingwell commented that a rite of passage is when a novice is able to tell an appropriate atrocity story, at an appropriate time, to an appropriate audience. Staff acquire a repertoire of stories and should be able to identify appropriate

occasions for telling them in order to become competent members of their respective occupational 'in-group'; a doxa, in Bourdieu's terms. Atrocity stories can also tend to have a competitive nature with members each building on the previous input to become part of a collective experience (Allen, 2001). However, as these stories present a version of events, which members are required to master and use in order to achieve recognition as competent members of the in-group they can also be used as a type of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), with reference to deviant members of this group who may be unpopular with the majority of staff (Allen, 2001). As was discussed in the previous chapter dominant members of the in-group at Sunview Primary narrated atrocity stories during interviews that clearly exclude Heidi from membership of this group,

> *We do have some frustrations…when we're, when you're working with children and you're meant to be keeping to plans and some people don't. They just follow their own pattern and things and don't do what's meant, what's down, is in a structured day…she goes off on her own wee way…*
> (Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

> *I don't know what it is about her? You, you tell her and she'll go "yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes, I know, I know" and turn around and she will not do it… she's come from a different sort of background…*
> (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

> *…we think we are working the same and Heidi's different…*
> (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

Secondly, Dingwell (1977) argued that atrocity stories are important in the social production of occupational boundaries that unite occupational groups through the sharing of common problems and the mutual acceptance of their challenging make-up. Dingwell viewed the social structure of a society as involving a classification of occupations. He sees two problems with such a classification; that of 'inclusion', defining what is within the remit of an occupational group; and 'exclusion', defining what falls out with the remit of an occupational group. He argued that one way of resolving such problems is through the telling of atrocity stories, which function to assert and defend the remit of an occupational group against illegitimate claims to its work. Being a competent member of an

occupational group involves drawing on a doxa, a body of common sense knowledge. Such common sense knowledge is not only connected to that occupation but also actually constitutes the occupation. Any disagreement between others with similar bodies of common sense knowledge has the potential to lead to conflict and raises questions regarding a group's abilities to implement their own versions of the world. Hence, atrocity stories help occupational groups defend the rationality of their body of common sense knowledge in the face of attempts to question it. Atrocity stories therefore play an important role in managing uncertainty about professional boundaries and help to define the occupational group. As such, atrocity stories can be seen of a means for occupational groups of attempting to gain respect from superiors and deference from subordinates. The survival of an occupational group depends on its success or failure to convince others of its legitimacy through various claim-making devices and rhetorical strategies (Gray *et al*., 2011).

Allen (2001) agreed that workplace talk contributes to the social production of occupational boundaries and refers to Dingwell's second function as a form of 'boundary-work'. She viewed atrocity stories as important mechanisms, and part of the political process, through which occupational difference is socially constituted in the workplace. As these stories are primarily for other members of the occupational group, they function to create a moral division of labour and construct social differences between occupational groups. Atrocity stories build solidarity and function to constitute occupational groups by underlining shared experiences. Whilst they may be affiliative or disaffiliative, both are an important means of constructing relationships and positioning people in relation to one another. Hence, Allen argued that storytelling performed a dual boundary-work function, in that it constructs a boundary between in-groups and out-groups, whilst simultaneously constituting the in-group.

Atrocity stories accomplish this dual boundary work function in several interrelated strategies, through juxtaposition of in-group/out-group points of view, by aligning the audience with the in-group point of view and by framing in-group

experiences as a mutually shared pattern of a collective experience of the out-group. Such strategies are accomplished by moving seamlessly between descriptions of a specific episode to observations of more general patterns of behaviour. Each strategy contributes to the talk and makes atrocity stories a powerful device for accomplishing agreement and a shared perception to the given situation. There is a high degree of consensus that marks the production and receipt of atrocity stories, and this solidarity and common sense of identity is strengthened through shared language, and shared laughter that identifies the audiences understanding of the implications of the stories (Dingwell, 1977; Allen, 2001; Gray *et al.*, 2011). By focusing on a body of common sense knowledge in this way, atrocity stories display superior competence in respect of the in-group, and as the object of their collective scorn and/or humour, casts the out-group as outsiders. Thus storytelling performs boundary-work by affirming the collective experience and shared perspectives of the in-group with respect to the out-group. However, this positioning of in-group and out-groups differently can lead to 'turf battles' (Allen, 2001: 94). In this particular context such turf battles could be expected, not only between classroom assistants and rival occupational groups, such as teachers, but also between classroom assistants and parents, given the centrality of mothering and care to classroom assistants' occupational identity.

Classroom Assistants and Atrocity Stories

Evidence from previous chapters has stressed that classroom assistants are subordinate players in the micro-political world of the school (Stead *et al.*, 2007; O' Brien and Garner, 2001a; Dillow, 2010). Such a position clearly has the potential to create tensions and strains (Allen, 2001). Given the relationships between classroom assistants and parents on one hand, and teachers on the other, the significance of atrocity stories as markers of social friction is not surprising. So whilst classroom assistants narrate many kinds of atrocity stories it is parents and teachers who figured in them prominently, and nearly always in a critical or negative light (Dingwell, 1977).

Previous research on parents, and data from this study, shows that classroom assistants rank parenting skills as a vitally important part of their work (Warhurst *et al.*, 2009; O' Brien and Garner 2001a),

> *Jean:*   *...just an extension of being a mother.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

However, this view is problematic in that it suggests that any parent could be a classroom assistant as their body of common sense knowledge and vocabularies of motive are very similar. Therefore, classroom assistants feel the need to protect their occupational boundaries from parents who could be seen as aligning themselves together in terms of social esteem. This provides the grounds for expecting to find issues of 'inclusion' (Dingwell, 1977) as classroom assistants attempt to face the question of how to reconcile the mothering nature of their role, but assert that they are more than mere parents. Such a problem stems from the demarcation between their respective zones of competence. In order to establish their differences from parents and assert their own worth, classroom assistants tell atrocity stories that concentrate on appeals to the quality of their respective services based on the quality of their care they provide. Here we can see classroom assistants stressing their qualities of natural care (Noddings, 1984).

Parents are not the only group that classroom assistants tell atrocity stories about though. Teachers also figure in such stories. Both common sense and sociological theorising about education tends to regard teachers as the archetype of the profession. They are then likely to be the key reference point for classroom assistants' claims to recognition as professionals. However, classroom assistants are not teachers and, officially, should not be teaching (SOEID, 1999a; GTC, 2003, 2006; SCER, 2005), even though in some cases this is not strictly the case,

> *Cara*   *Well I would argue now that we're teaching.*
> (Cara & Lesley, Interview 24/6/11)

What this provides is the grounds for expecting to find issues of 'exclusion' (Dingwell, 1977) as classroom assistants attempt to identify and maintain the

discrete character of their occupation against the pressure of assimilation in to teaching. But, it is teachers that are in control. Classroom assistants have no formal control over their practice, as they work, "under the direction and supervision of teachers" (SOEID, 1999a: 1). Yet this is despite the fact that many classroom assistants have numerous years of experience and that shifting populations of teachers means that in many cases classroom assistants feel that they are 'older and wiser' and 'know' more than the teachers in the school; Agnes's earlier comment on the audit of policy documents, or attitudes to Elsa, being a cases in point. What this imbalance has the potential to lead to, is teachers tending to assimilate classroom assistants to a readily available typification, that of an 'extra pair of hands'. This is not a role that classroom assistants appear comfortable with though and atrocity stories can function here to redraw such occupational boundaries. Many of these stories centred on the 'ideological ambiguity' (Allen, 2001) in the language of differences between 'academic knowledge' and Martin's (1992) '3C curriculum', of care, concern, and connection.

So in summary, influenced by Dingwell, it can be argued that the blurred distinction in occupational boundaries between classroom assistants and parents needs to be sharpened, whilst the sharp distinction in occupational boundaries between classroom assistants and teachers has come to be blurred. In both cases though, the recurring themes in the atrocity stories presented work to constitute the value of classroom assistants' in-group knowledge and their distinctive contribution to 'care'. What follow now are examples of extended, larger-than-life, and sometimes, outrageous, atrocity stories from the data; which will be examined in order to discuss their shared formats and conventions. To achieve this, the social context in which the stories were produced and shared, the composition of the audience, and the status of the storytellers will be considered (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, there is an attempt to move beyond the storytellers' point of view and rather focus and reflect on the, "patterned character of participants' portrayals of action" (Silverman, 2006: 384). This will be attempted by using discursive analysis, influenced by Baruch's (1981)

framework of the common rhetorical strategies generally used in atrocity stories. The lens is on the classroom assistants' attempts to define and police their roles as negotiated events accomplished through social interactions (Gray *et al*., 2011).

'By God She's Street Wise!': Rose-Marie's Story

Heather (50) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for 17 years. She is married and has two grown up sons (See Table 5.1). Heather enjoys working with challenging pupils and does not like it if it is, "*too cosy*", "*no challenge*", or the pupils are, "*wee nambie pambies*" (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/11/12). Heather is one of the most dominant personalities of the Sunview Primary in-group. During her interview Heather discussed her time with Rose-Marie, a particularly challenging girl who she supported from primary one through to primary seven,

> *Because I know the kids and I know they don't mean it. I know the troubles, their backgrounds that they've got, you know. I mean I used tae run up the High Street for Rose-Marie. And we used tae end up, I used tae say tae her, 'I cannae run in my high heels, you'll hae tae stop Rose Marie.' And then she would sit on the pavement rolling and laughing! Put that arm round her, 'you okay?' 'Aye.' School camp, she jumped off her bunk bed. She says, 'Fucking square go then Heather.' I said, 'You get your arse up there, lie down, shurrup.' 'Alright, night Heather.' 'Night Rose-Marie.' 'I love you Heather.' 'Okay, night.' I know the kids and I know they don't mean it, you know. And it's the same wi' Alan, you know I still enjoy it. They can call me all the names they like. I mean Rose Marie, one time she said to me, 'You're nothing but a fucking fat bitch.' I says 'I'm maybe a bitch…', I says, '…but I'm no a fucking fat bitch!' And she was powerless! But I got on really well wi' her mum, you know. So cause I, I'm allowed to restrain her, cause her mum said. But I get on so well wi' her mum. She's in P7. Beautiful girl, big girl. But by God she's street wise! She was street wise in primary one. Rose-Marie, she's not got the, you know…she can't, she can hardly read. You know, like that. Rose Marie, you can see the path that she's gonnae take which is sad but, but her mum was brought up like that and it's just a circle, you know. It's just going round and round, shame. But you know what's gonnae happen to her. She'll be pregnant.*
>
> <div align="right">(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

The first thing to notice is Heather's repeated use of, *"I know…"* and *"I mean…"* These serve to stress her knowledge and the competence of her performance. But

Heather also stresses, *"You know..."* throughout the extract. This can be understood in terms of intersubjectivity; that is the agreement between people on a given set of meanings or a definition of the situation, or to the 'common sense' shared meanings constructed by people in their interactions with each other and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life (Goffman, 1969; Schutz, 1973). Heather is appealing to the features of an everyday world, which are the common experience of 'ordinary' people. The use of, *"You know..." and "You can…"* includes me, as her audience, in that world (Baruch, 1981). Added to this are phrases such as, *"...she's not got the, you know…she can't, she can hardly read. You know, like that"*. Here Heather leaves statements incomplete and appeals to my ability to complete their meaning, and in doing so, confirm her claim to rationality and competence (Baruch, 1981). Another example of this would be, *"And it's the same wi' Alan, you know"*. This 'sameness' is left for me to confirm and agree with.

Heather's language is not the technical language of an 'expert' but the everyday language routinely used in daily life and to communicate with others (Baruch, 1981). The language might be crude at points but there is a consistent, orderly, even functional, sense to it. It is Rose-Marie who swears first and Heather's reply is in the everyday language that Rose-Marie will understand. Heather's decision not to censor herself at the interview demonstrates that she views her responses as rational, and by implication, that I will too. Despite this crude language, the extract is also full of humour and emotion, stressing the quasi-parental care Heather has for Rose-Marie. This can be compared with the parenting skills of the mother, *"...but her mum was brought up like that and it's just a circle you know."* Here Heather is not only making clear her knowledge of this 'circle', and assuming I agree with it, but also implicitly critical of Rose-Marie's mother. Something appears to be missing, or wrong, regarding her relationship with her daughter.

What we are beginning to see through this extract is the creation of two 'realities' (Baruch, 1981), based around mothering and care, essentially 'us' and 'them'

(Norris, 2001). Heather is locating herself in one particular reality, whilst the parent is located in another. Both realities are regulated by rules and standards, which define the nature of activity within them and what it is that counts as an adequate performance by those who occupy them (Baruch, 1981). This will become clearer in the next extract.

'He Kicked Lumps Out Of Mum': Talk About Paul

Leanne (48) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for 22 years. She is widowed and has two grown up children, including a son on the autistic spectrum (See Table 5.1). Leanne is another one of the most dominant personalities of the Sunview Primary in-group. Leanne has recently been given responsibility for Paul, a new primary one pupil with challenging behaviours. Leanne supports him in class and in the support base. These extracts are her reflections after one-to-one sessions in the base,

> *Leanne is still getting to know Paul and she feels that she has a problem. She tells me that his class teacher, "just doesn't want him in the class and I can understand that to an extent." This is because of Paul's challenging behaviour. Leanne has been, "concentrating on his behaviour and the spitting and biting have stopped." She comments that Paul's mum, "used to batter hell out of him", and tells me that when, "mum and dad split up there was lots of arguing and shouting." Leanne thinks maybe the, "cause of it [the behaviour]", and what makes Paul, "kick off, rip things off the walls and then the whole corridor gets demolished." Leanne admits that at the moment she, "can't stand the lad because I don't know him, don't know his triggers." In her opinion, "Paul is special at home, important, but mum does that just for an easy life." She then adds that she is, "not sure if there is a boyfriend about."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

> *Later she says to me, "you wouldn't know that I don't like him." She admits that she was, "devastated when I got Paul. I thought, 'What have I done to deserve this?'" She tells me Paul, " kicked lumps out of mum. She's stressed to the max, but getting stronger."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/11/12)

> *Leanne has a theory that Paul had witnessed, "domestic violence." She tells me that mum could be, "vicious", and that it had been a, "difficult break up with his mum and dad." Leanne often repeated that there was, "no affection at home."*

<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 16/11/12)</div>

Leanne, like Heather, through the language of emphasised femininity, is involved in the creation of two 'realities' based around mothering and care. Leanne is very clearly locating herself in one particular reality, whilst the teacher and parent are located in another. In Leanne's reality her behaviours display moral adequacy, whilst in the other reality the parent and teacher are portrayed as guilty of acting in an incompetent manner, judged against the standards of the everyday world (Baruch, 1981). Here, as in the previous extract, emotionality is important in the reality of the classroom assistant. Paul is devoid of emotion at home, where this is, *"no affection at home",* and possibly, *"domestic violence."* In this other reality, we see mother who, displaying no natural care (Noddings, 1984), is, *"vicious",* a behaviour that is 'alien', and beyond comprehension in Leanne's reality and the everyday world (Baruch, 1981).

However, Leanne does admit that she, *"can't stand the lad because I don't know him, don't know his triggers."* In Leanne's reality this is reasonable as the triggers are important in getting to know, understand and help Paul. This can be compared with, *"Paul is special at home, important, but mum does that just for an easy life."* On the face of it this seems reasonable too, but what appears reasonable in the parent's reality is unreasonable in the everyday world as it does not help Paul to make progress with his behaviour at school (Baruch, 1981).

Paul's behaviour in explained by Leanne in common sense and rational way; the violence Paul has witnessed at home makes him violent at school. No other explanation is considered necessary. It should be noted too that Leanne never reports Paul being violent to her, and indeed with her consistent and competent approach to his behaviour, *"the spitting and biting have stopped."* Leanne also reports that mum, although stressed, is, *"getting stronger."* The implication here is that she is learning. Generally, it can be seen that by attending to relevance of

mothering and care, Leanne is enhancing her status as a competent classroom assistant group member (Baruch, 1981).

But it is not only the parents who inhabit Leanne's other reality; teachers do too. We can notice that Leanne repeats the teacher's statement that she, *"just doesn't want him in the class and I can understand that to an extent."* In uttering this she shows herself as reasonable and focused on care (Martin, 1992), but at the same time suggests a teacher devoid of emotion (Baruch, 1981). An infant teacher who lacks care and emotion, is again, a behaviour that is 'alien', and beyond comprehension in Leanne's reality (Baruch, 1981). This is certainly not the idealised view of a teacher of young children as a 'loving mother' watching over 'her children' to 'nourish…bodies and…minds' (Miller, 1996: 100).

'So Bad, But We Love Him': Talk About Donald

Heather and Leanne feature too in the next extract along with Lucy. Lucy (39) is a part-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for six years. She has a partner and five children (See Table 5.1). Despite her relative youth and inexperience, Lucy is another of the most dominant personalities of the Sunview Primary in-group. All the women work with Donald, a primary one pupil with challenging behaviours. He is supported in class and in the support base. These extracts are reflections between the women and myself and begin to show how each storyteller builds upon the previous talk,

> *Leanne comments that Donald, "has a long day, 7.30am – 5.00pm at wrap-around care and school…Too long, he gets tired…No attachment with mum. Just is no connection. He needs a relationship at home." A classroom assistant has to phone Donald's dad each day at 2.30 to tell him about his day. There is a scoring system each day for his behaviour (0-10) and I told that the parents tend to concentrate on bad behaviour. Leanne says that when she is on the phone Dad is, "busy taking notes about what is being said... analysing it." The parents also send, "lots of email, always have emails…some nasty emails." But Leanne tries, "not to get involved." Leanne feels that staff are trying to build up a relationship with his parents but that the parents are not working with the school. The parents' view is that, "all the problems at school, not at home." The parents are, "a bit odd and he [Donald] is very controlled at home."*

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Leanne tells me that the class teacher has a different approach with Donald than the classroom assistants. After he had misbehaved in class she refused to let him go outside at playtime, "to hit and kick people. She told him off right in his face. Then Donald flipped and locked the door etc." Leanne's strategy then was to ignore him and, "eventually he came out and asked me in. He'd already started tidying up." She tells me that, "Aileen told the teacher to, 'Butt out'... he doesn't need different instructions, he needs consistency." Later in the day the class teacher pops in check on Donald's behaviour. All responsibility appears to have devolved to the classroom assistants

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 28/9/12)

Leanne, "He's so bad, but we love him. Last week he battered lumps out of me." Lucy comments that the family live, "in a lovely house in Sunview...[but are] emotionless parents." According to Lucy the parents see, "no problems at home, although Dad is opening up a bit and said they'd had a traumatic weekend." However, in Lucy's view, "How can a P1 be traumatic?"

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

Donald is refusing to come out of chill out room after lunch. Heather tells me, "It's all down to the parents." The principal teacher goes to fetch Ms. Roberts, a more experienced teaching colleague, to get Donald out. The classroom assistants watch the situation develop and find the situation humorous, hoping for Ms. Roberts to fail. Ms. Roberts goes into the room with Donald who initially reacts badly but eventually calms down and tidies the room before leaving. The classroom assistants are very disparaging of approach of this one-to-one approach on health and safety grounds, as well as being open accusations of 'assault'. Ms. Roberts does not share her strategy with the classroom assistants and both refused Lucy's offer of help and the classroom assistants' experience and relationship with Donald. Lucy puts Ms. Roberts's success down the fact that she was a, "new face" to Donald. Later in the day the principal teacher says to Lucy that Ms. Roberts knew she was successful because she was a, "new face." This pleases Lucy.

Leanne feels her phone relationship with Donald's dad is getting better. However, he still doesn't tell us about what is going on at home, "A phone call each morning would help." Lucy comments too that the phone calls are shorter and have less analysing and questions. This worries Lucy.

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/11/12)

Leanne tells me that Donald was spitting at a boy in his class this morning and that he, "Wouldn't apologise. Wouldn't write an apology. Wouldn't say the word 'sorry'. How can a six-year-old be so in control?"

Donald is finding leaving support base to go home difficult and is wasting time. Leanne says to me, "You watch his behaviour if mum comes in."

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Leanne eventually encourages Donald in to his class line and out of school to his mum.

After school Leanne says that Donald has been, "Kicking members of staff and refusing to apologise. How a child that age cannot apologise is beyond me. It's just rude." To make things worse mum had spoken to staff this morning about Donald being 'jostled' in his class line. Leanne's response is, "It's a battle of wills, honestly." Donald ends the day by spitting at another boy in his class, even though his behaviour had been good until that point. Leanne talks about how horrible Donald's spitting is and tells me that the, "[class teacher] encourages pupils to tell their parents about it because nothing is being done. I [Leanne] would be livid if my son came home spat on."

(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 9/11/12)

Once again it is clear to see the classroom assistants using strategies to position parents in a separate reality from the one they themselves inhabit. Initially, this is achieved through Baruch's (1981) notion of what appears reasonable in the reality of the parents' world, is deemed as unreasonable in an everyday world. So the mention of, *"a long day, 7.30am – 5.00pm", "parents tend to concentrate on bad behaviour" and, "he [Donald] is very controlled at home",* all imply a critique of natural parenting approaches (Noddings, 1984). Such critiques are backed up by other rhetorical devices; the view that the parents are, *"a bit odd",* and *"busy taking notes",* suggests alien actions on their part, along with a lack of emotion, *"No attachment with mum…"* Finally, the view that the parents are, *"not working with the school",* implies they are acting incompetently according to the standards of the everyday world of classroom assistants.

This can be compared to Leanne's statement, *"He's so bad, but we love him",* which not only focuses on the importance of emotionality in the world of classroom assistants but also highlights the failings of, *"emotionless parents",* even those with a, *"lovely house"* (Noddings, 1984; Martin, 1992). And the parents do not seem to be able to win, for even when the phone calls become shorter, less analytical and less questioning, Lucy is still worried by this. And even though the daily phone calls are demanding, *"A phone call each morning would help."* Additionally, when mum does show concern about her son, *"being 'jostled' in his class line,* this is unreasonable to the classroom assistants given his general behaviour and wider range of unattended needs. Indeed, how can mum

make such a trivial complaint, *"How can P1 be traumatic?"* or, *"How can a six-year-old be so in control?"* As their audience, the feeling appears to be that I will agree with this. Through the intersubjectivity in her talk Leanne says, *"You watch his behaviour if mum comes in."* Again this is left unfinished; there is no explanation of what to look for. Simply viewing her behaviour, all the statements regarding the parents will fall in to sharp relief.

Once again there is evidence that teachers are cast in to this other reality through the use of very similar rhetorical strategies. The teacher's refusal to, *"let him go outside at playtime",* although reasonable, given Donald's behaviour in class, is portrayed as unreasonable in the reality of classroom assistants. It also supports a common classroom assistant view that teachers' tend to view behaviour problems as mere naughtiness (Mackenzie, 2011). In comparison, due to the actions of classroom assistants themselves, *"eventually he came out and asked me in. He'd already started tidying up."* The mention that, *"Aileen told the teacher to 'Butt out'",* is characterised as 'heroic', competent and reasonable, according to the standards of their everyday world. By contrast the class teacher's apparent lack of interest in, and responsibility for, Donald's education is seen as alien, devoid of emotion and beyond the understanding of the classroom assistants. Finally, there is the bond of shared humour and laughter (Dingwell, 1977; Allen, 2001; Gray *et al.*, 2011) amongst the classroom assistants as they hope for, *"Ms. Roberts to fail."*

Nevertheless, as stated by Barkham (2008), it was noticed during observations that whilst often the content of atrocity stories portrayed teachers' actions as unacceptable, unreasonable or unjustifiable, the classroom assistants seldom felt it to be worth direct challenge. Rather, the response was one of quiet persistence (Dingwell, 1977). In addition, whilst classroom assistants readily made criticisms of teachers amongst themselves, these were never repeated to other teaching colleagues or parents. Sorsby (2004) argued that this could be due in part to an omnipresent sense of passivity with tinges of resentment as a result of their seeming professional marginalisation.

'Would You Trust Him Alone With Your Daughter?': Talk About Alan

The final extract also involves Leanne, Heather and Lucy, but also, Ailsa, Moira and Heidi feature in the next extract. Ailsa (46) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for three years, she is married and has two children (See Table 5.1). Moira (57) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for 30 years, she is married and has two children (See Table 5.1). Finally, Heidi (48) is a full-time SEN Auxiliary, a post she has held for four years, she is married and has one child (See Table 5.1). Despite her inexperience, Ailsa is another of the most dominant personalities of the Sunview Primary in-group, whilst Moira, although experienced, is one of the less dominant personalities. Heidi is not a member of the in-group at all and is often cast by the other women as an 'outsider', although here she takes an active part in the creation of the atrocity story.

All the women work with Alan, a troubled and troublesome primary seven pupil, who was in foster care but has recently gone in to residential care. He is supported in class and uses the support base to 'chill out'. Whilst this extract still contains many of the rhetorical devices of the previous talk, it is included as an example of how atrocity stories function as moral parables,

> *Moira, Heather and Leanne are discussing Alan. Moira is critical of his foster carers talking in front of him about him going into residential care. Heather is more critical of foster carers in general who she feels do it for the money rather than the child. She makes reference to local foster carers getting money for a child but spending it on themselves. Leanne feels that the, "damage is done when they're taken away from their [natural] parents."*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/4/11)

> *Moira tells the others that Alan's foster carers, "packed his bags when he was out." Heather adds that he is, "now in care with some older teenagers." Leanne says he's, "coming to school late and not in uniform." Moira adds that he as, "set fire to part of the home and is going to be charged by police."*

Heather tells the other women that she caught him, "going through the base drawers." She thinks he's been, "stealing money…he was very shifty with his bag." Lucy says he has, "got nobody who cares for him…and needs a good wash." Heather says she checks Alan's browsing history on the base computer, and admits, "I'm nosey."
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 6/5/11)

Heather tells me that Alan set another fire this week and that he was, "like my puppy yesterday." Moira says that he is, "not in lessons", and Heidi adds that he has been, "hanging around here rooting in cupboards." Heather concludes, "He's got nobody besides us."
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 13/5/11)

Leanne thinks that it is, "too late, his life is non existent." Heather agrees, "It's a damn shame." Moira thinks that he, "is so damaged", and Leanne says he, " will have to fight all his life."
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 20/5/11)

Lucy is talking about Alan and is surprised by some sexual allegations that have been made against him by female staff at the care home. Moira says, "All he needs is someone to love him", but Lucy says he is, "damaged goods." For Lucy, " It breaks my heart. I could take him home." She thinks that, "in a normal family he would have been OK." However, Heather warns, "But would you trust him with your daughter?"
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 27/5/11)

Heather tells us that, "Alan was in yesterday. He's dyed his hair and got a 13 year-old 'girlfriend'." Moira also says, "He's got convictions now." Ailsa reflects on the stories of his behaviour, violence, and sexual allegations and says, "But he's never been like that with us." Leanne wonders if he should go, "to a secure unit. He would like the routine. They won't let him down by giving him empty promises. He got them all his life." She believes, "We will have had an effect on him. But he won't realise it until later though." Moira has some hope for Alan, but Leanne and Heather are pessimistic and think that, "the damage is already done."
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)

Leanne tells me that Alan is now in a secure unit due to his behaviour but, "still up to his hold tricks." Leanne describes this as, "Basically a school in a 'prison."
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 9/8/11)

This particular extract contains more outrageous features than the others selected, and is a genuine 'atrocity' story. The talk builds over a relatively short period, less than six months, and goes from Alan leaving his foster carers to ending up in a secure unit. Each woman's talk builds and embellishes, inflates and overstates the

previous one (Bromley *et al.*, 1979): *"packed his bags when he was out"*, *"set fire to part of the home and is going to be charged by police"*, *"stealing money"*, *"set another fire"*, *"sexual allegations"*, *"got convictions now"* and, *"still up to his old tricks."* None of the incidents reported by the women is backed up by concrete evidence, and certainly none is asked for. The story may contain some elements of 'truth', however, truth is not of consequence here. The women narrate the inconsistencies between the 'real' and the 'ideal'. The power of this particular atrocity story stems from its plot rather than the truth (Bruner, 1990). It functions as a moral parable. Lucy distils the essence of the parable when she states, *"in a normal family he would have been OK."* However, emerging from this construction is the view that, without the normality of maternal love and care (Noddings, 1984), Alan's life has descended in to a downward spiral with dire consequences, even with the classroom assistants' support.

This is achieved in a persuasive, rather than a dispassionate style (Garfinkel, 1956) and again features the rhetorical device of emotionality. The emotionality in this extract can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, there are the moral implications deriving from those individuals who were the incapable and deficient in the face of knowledge about complexities of parenting and care, *"got nobody who cares for him"*, *"too late, his life is non existent"*, *"They won't let him down by giving him empty promises"*, *"It's a damn shame"*, and, *"[he] will have to fight all his life"* (Noddings, 1984). The notion of 'damage' is central here with the women each adding to this talk, Leanne, *"[the] damage is done"*, Moira, *"[he] is so damaged"*, Lucy, *"[he's] damaged goods"*, and Heather, *"the damage is already done."* This can be compared with the second view of emotionality, that, *" It breaks my heart"*, and, *"all he needs is someone to love him."* The only love and care Alan received, has come from the classroom assistants, *"He's got nobody besides us."* Once again this stresses the heroic nature of their care, *"[He's] never been like that with us"*, and, *"We will have had an effect on him"* (Martin, 1992). Yet despite all this, Heather still resorts to the intersubjective with the use of an everyday idiomatic expression, *"But would you trust him with your daughter?"* The use of this device makes this assertion difficult to counter or challenge within

the context of the discussion and is effective in closing down counter arguments. It acts as a robust device that summarises and achieves a sense of closure around the issue (Baruch, 1981).

In summing up, throughout these extracts, the classroom assistants utilise a series of rhetorical devices to accomplish their status of moral adequacy. Firstly, they resort to intersubjectivity to appeal to features of the 'everyday world', and locate parents, and, to a lesser extent, teachers outside this world. This stresses that their own actions are consistent, competent and reasonable, whilst those of parents and teachers are incompetent. Secondly, they construct acts of reasonableness by parents and teachers as unreasonable in the everyday world of classroom assistants. Finally, by focusing on the centrality of standards of mothering and care, they enhance their own status whilst criticising and dismissing these in parents and teachers.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to further understand how classroom assistants created and sustained positive social and professional identities. It was argued that atrocity stories are positioned as doxa, the common form of talk used by occupational groups, including classroom assistants, within particular organisational and cultural contexts. It was argued that atrocity stories are usually outrageous and larger than life talk that use certain rhetorical devices to create two contrasting 'realities' of 'us' and 'them'. However, these stories and realities should not be regarded as 'truth', but rather as 'moral parables'. In terms of classroom assistants, these two realities are regulated by rules and standards around the area of parenting and care, which define the nature of activities that classroom assistants undertake and what counts as an adequate performance by those who undertake them.

It was then argued that atrocity stories function in two ways. Firstly, at an individual level, atrocity stories function to assert the competence of the

storyteller, in this case as a classroom assistant. Secondly, and more importantly, they contribute to the social production of occupational boundaries, in this case between classroom assistants and others. This 'boundary-work' itself has a dual function in that it constructs boundaries between the in-group and out-groups, whilst simultaneously, constituting the in-group itself. In the context of classroom assistants, the dual boundary-work of atrocity stories functions to create boundaries between parents, teachers and themselves. By focusing on the centrality of mothering and care, classroom assistants attempt to identify and maintain the discrete character of their occupation and to protect their occupational boundaries from parents who may appear to align themselves with classroom assistants in terms of social esteem, and at the same time, against the pressure of assimilation into teaching.

The following chapter begins by summarising the findings from the previous three chapters before proceeding to discuss, in depth, the issues raised in them.

Chapter 8

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter begins with a synopsis of the study so far. It reviews the research questions, methodology and methods, theoretical framework, and then discusses the key findings derived from the fieldwork. The structure of this chapter mirrors that of the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 3). It commences its discussion by reviewing the Marxist concept of alienation as a possible explanation of classroom assistant identity. The chapter then uses the neo-Marxist theory of Bourdieu, particularly field, habitus and cultural capital to extend traditional Marxist arguments. Next, the chapter considers gender as a device for explaining the work choices, attitudes and lived experiences of classroom assistants. Specifically, it questions whether the role of the classroom assistant can be understood as a performance of Connell's (1987, 1995, 2002) notion of 'emphasised femininity'. Finally, in this section, anti-feminist arguments based on Hakim's (2000) idea of preference theory and adaptive lifestyle, are rejected in favour of a more balanced explanation that combines agency and structure.

The chapter then addresses the contradictory and conflictual relations of gender and class through Skeggs' (1997) analytical tool of 'respectability'. Two ways in which respectability sustains class inequality and injustice are discussed. Firstly, respectability is discussed as an ideological form of self-persecution; and secondly, respectability is discussed as a means of monitoring and policing others. This chapter concludes with a consideration of how classroom assistants try to cope under such ideologically dominating pressures.

Before embarking on a discussion of the issues raised, it would be useful to pause and summarise what has gone before. The overall purpose of the study was to understand how classroom assistants, usually recognised as being on the very margins of school hierarchies (Stead *et al*. 2007), make sense of their role and function with respect to the other two adult groups they engage with on a daily basis, namely parents and teachers. Hence, the research questions focused on:

- Why are classroom assistants willing to undertake work that has low status, low pay and insecurity?
- How do classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work?
- How do classroom assistants create and sustain positive social and professional identities in this context?
- Why do classroom assistants appear to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression?

Given that numerous studies, both in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom, have concluded that classroom assistants, in the majority, are mature, White, working class, local women who are partnered and have school aged children, and have worked previously in the school (Schlapp *et al*., 2001; SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007; Barkham 2008; Warhurst *et al*., 2009) the study considered the intersection of class and gender as a possible influence in the construction and performance of identities. To achieve its aim of understanding the role of gender and class, the study needed to be able to comprehend both the subjective reality of the lived experiences of classroom assistants, and the influence of social structures on such experiences.

Taking into account this duality of structure and agency, the study was theoretically positioned within critical realism, a view of society in which human actors are neither the passive products of social structure, nor merely its architect.

Rather critical realism recognises a mutual, dialectic relationship between structure and agency, in which structure has the ability to constrain agency; whilst, simultaneously, agency has the potential to transform structure (Bhaskar, 1998). If one starts from a critical realist stance, then a way of examining human agency in order to understand the relationship between social action and social structure is needed. 'Critical ethnography' (Thomas, 1993) was chosen for this study as it appeared entirely appropriate to such a challenge. Critical ethnography begins with an ontological assumption that society is unfair, unequal and oppressive for many (Carspecken, 1996). Therefore the aim of critical ethnography is to describe and analyse such disadvantage and use the resulting knowledge for social change. Critical ethnographers can be reproached for carrying out research whilst holding a very particular set of value-laden principles. However, I argue that any attempt at 'value-free' research is naïve and unattainable (Becker, 1967) and therefore made my own particular, personal and political sympathies explicit and open to assessment, analysis and appraisal by the reader.

The study itself was a small-scale, critical ethnography undertaken within two comparable primary schools on the southeast coast of Scotland. Coalside Primary was a pilot study, and Sunview Primary was the main study. A total of 13 classroom assistants, four from Coalside Primary and nine from Sunview Primary, made up the sample. Data were collected via participant observation in Coalside Primary on 13 days between June 2010 and December 2010 (see Table 4.1), and in Sunview Primary on 20 days between February 2011 and December 2012 (see Table 4.2). To supplement the participant observation data, five classroom assistants were interviewed individually, and four more interviewed in pairs, at Sunview Primary (see Table 4.3). The classroom assistants in the sample shared many characteristics with the general population of support staff in the United Kingdom, in that they came from the same rather restricted range of backgrounds; essentially White working class women. Therefore a theoretical framework was sought to explain the occupational gender segregation with the classroom assistant labour force.

The theoretical framework first considered occupational gender segregation and in particular, the structural constraints of class. This consideration began with a discussion of classical Marxist theory; that class inequality is a result of the ownership of economic capital. However, it was argued that such Marxist analysis, by concentrating on the economic, failed to take account of a range of other social variables such as culture and ideology. Here, Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus and cultural capital were useful in moving away from mere economic determinism. Nevertheless, it was argued that Bourdieu did not go far enough in exploring the feelings and passions of the actual lived experience of class, and, like Marx, did little to explain the experiences of women. Hence, the focus then turned to patriarchy, and in particular, Connell's (1987, 1995, 2002) analytical tools of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity'. It was argued that class and gender should be considered in tandem, rather than singular realms of analysis, and that this intersection of class and gender had a visible impact on the labour market experiences of classroom assistants. This section concluded with an analysis of women's agency, and the rejection of Hakim's (2000) preference theory, arguing instead for the important influence of 'constraint' critiques (Ginn *et al.* 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2010).

Next, the theoretical framework looked at how classroom assistants created and maintained a sense of integrity and commitment to their work. It was proposed that Skeggs' (1997) notion of 'respectability' should be considered as a crucial analytical tool here since it enables us to understand how classroom assistants negotiate their identity in relation to class and gender. The research also drew on Noddings' analysis of 'natural' care (1984, 1999), and Hochschild's (1979, 1983) work on 'emotional labour', as contributors to an understanding of classroom assistants' identity. Subsequently, the theoretical framework considered the way in which classroom assistants, as an occupational group, negotiated and defended common sense knowledge and practices against the encroachments of powerful others. It argued that this had two important functions; to assert the competence of the storyteller, and to contribute to the social production of occupational

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boundaries. Finally, the focus moved to why classroom assistants appeared to be complicit, to some extent, in their own oppression. It is argued that through interactional strategies grounded in emphasised femininity, White, working class women, not only policed other women (Cohen, 1980), but also have a very restricted self-view.

The findings of the study were discussed in three separate chapters. The first of these, Chapter 5, focused on classroom assistants' talk on themes from their working lives. It attempted to explain why classroom assistants are willing to undertake their work, and how they create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment. It was found that pay was not the main motivator for becoming a classroom assistant; rather the convenient hours and holidays of a school context were paramount. Working conditions were generally perceived to be poor and there was tension over areas such as time off in lieu, payment for staff development and attendance at staff meetings, medical training and the lack of long-term job security. However, the greatest friction was agreed to be the lack of formal time available for joint planning and communication with teachers. In terms of qualifications, the majority of the women had achieved their PDA and were keen to undertake further in-service training to improve their effectiveness with pupils. However, there was a level of cynicism regarding such training. Nevertheless, overall the women were engaged with, and reflected on, the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to fulfil their roles. Importantly, some of the women were of the opinion that such training indirectly resulted in them becoming responsible for some elements of 'teaching', even though this did not earn financial reward or increase in status. Evident across all these tensions, was an underlying, fundamental unrest between classroom assistants and teachers.

The next set of findings, Chapter 6, focused on classroom assistants' talk on themes of mothering and care. It asked how classroom assistants created and sustained positive social and professional identities. It found that a sizable majority of classroom assistants advocated the view that being a mother was an essential requirement for the role of a successful classroom assistant. Through

their talk, imagery and behaviour, classroom assistants demonstrated a particular form of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). This language of emotional labour, along with classroom assistants' unique local 'knowledge' of pupils and their families, could be used constructively, with the classroom assistants acting as a conduit between home and school, but more often undesirably to discriminate between 'good' and 'bad' parenting or care. This often resulted in certain parents and carers being marginalised and demonised. It was also found that classroom assistants seemed to position 'care' more highly than academic 'knowledge' in their responses to pupils' education and wellbeing, which resulted in teachers and teaching being marginalised too.

The final set of findings, Chapter 7, focused on a particular type of talk by classroom assistants, the atrocity story. It was argued that atrocity stories were positioned as doxa, the common form of talk used by classroom assistants within their particular organisational and cultural contexts to create and sustain positive social and professional identities. It was found that classroom assistants' talk derived its power through the use of certain rhetorical devices used in atrocity stories. Such stories were regulated by rules and standards grounded in mothering and care, which defined the nature of activities that classroom assistants perform, and the nature of adequate performance. Atrocity stories functioned in two ways. Firstly, at an individual level, atrocity stories assert the competence of the storyteller. Secondly, and more importantly, they contribute to the social production of occupational boundaries. This 'boundary-work' itself has a dual function in that it constructs boundaries between the in-group and out-group, whilst at the same time, constituting the in-group itself (Allen, 2001). For classroom assistants, this dual boundary-work functioned to create boundaries between parents, teachers and themselves. By focusing on the centrality of mothering and care, classroom assistants attempted to identify and maintain the discrete character of their occupation and to protect their occupational boundaries from parents who may appear to align themselves with classroom assistants in terms of social esteem. Simultaneously, these boundaries protected classroom assistants' occupational boundaries against the pressure of assimilation into

teaching. Taken as a whole, atrocity stories served to create spaces and boundaries through which classroom assistants could negotiate and justify their own roles.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the issues emanating from the research questions in depth. However, in presenting a critical ethnography, the established genres of the research format are not always suitable for reporting as these typically present a detached, controlled, authorially imposed version of the findings. Instead, this chapter attempts to present a mode of textual representation that suits the very particular research experience, objectives and beliefs about the nature of ethnographic knowledge. In doing so it offers a holistic response to the research questions rather than address them individually. It commences with a discussion of classroom assistant identity from Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives.

Discussion of Marxist and neo-Marxist Perspectives

To understand how classroom assistants use talk to construct and negotiate identity from a traditional Marxist perspective, we need to focus on the concept of 'alienation'. Marx and Engels (1932) described alienation as the estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature as a consequence of living in a society stratified into social classes. Alienation then is not merely a state of mind, rather the roots of the individual psyche are located in how society as a whole is organised. Marx and Engels argued that workers psychologically require life activities that lead to their self-actualisation as a person. One way in which workers can develop the social aspect of personal individuality is through their labour. But in capitalist society, although workers are autonomous, self-realised human beings, they are directed to goals and diverted to activities that are dictated by the bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production and purchasers of the labour power of others. Consequently, each worker becomes an instrument, a thing, not a person, and, as a consequence, alienation occurs. Marx and Engels identified four types of alienation. Firstly, the alienation of the worker from the products of their work, as products are owned by and disposed of by others, rather

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than belonging to the worker. Secondly, the alienation of the worker from working, as labour, by belonging to another, does not satisfy the worker. Thirdly, the alienation of the workers from themselves, as a result of work becoming a means to physical existence, rather than an end in itself. And, finally, the alienation of the worker from other workers as manifested through social relationships.

The alienation of the worker from working, and the alienation from other workers are the most crucial to this argument. The former results from a lack of control over the process of production, with classroom assistants having little say over the conditions in which they work and how their work is organised,

> *I only found out this morning, we never find out about anything.*
> (Janis, Fieldnotes: 14/6/10)

> *The timetables have been changed again, I'll be running along top*
>   *corridor like a*
> *mad thing.*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

> *This was a rush yesterday…Everything gets left to the last minute…*
> (Morag, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

This results in classroom assistants feeling physically and mentally stressed,

> *This happens every bloody Friday.*
> (Janis, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *I'll forget where I have to be.*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

> *This is double Dutch to me Kevin.*
> (Moira, Fieldnotes: 24/6/11)

The lack of control over the work process negatively transforms the women's capacity to work independently, and it is not surprising that through their talk they try and reclaim some power and control back from their colleagues.

The women also show alienation from other workers, especially teachers, as witnessed through their on-going social relationships. Marx and Engels argued

that capitalism reduces the labour of workers to a commercial commodity that can be traded in the competitive labour market, rather than as a constructive socio-economic activity that is part of the collective common effort. In the context of the classroom assistants 'care' too becomes such a commodity. However, as a capitalist economy, the owner of the means of production establishes a competitive labour market to extract from the worker as much labour value as possible, this inevitably results in social conflict by pitting worker against worker. However, through the Marxist notion of false consciousness, workers are alienated from their mutual economic interests,

> *Agnes confides in me that she found the Head Teacher, "dismissive" and that is hard not to "take it very personally. It makes you wonder if they [SMT] like you. When you take pupils to them you are just dismissed, like your view is not important.'*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 19/11/10)

> *[The SMT] are not interested in our views, we are just sent away. Not very often that you get their full support."*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

> *I ask Leanne about not using staffroom upstairs, with the teachers. Her reply is that it is, "Not as friendly upstairs".*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/12)

In addition, as workers are related to others, not as individuals, but as representatives of different relations of production, they tend to see other people through the lens of profit and loss. Abilities and needs are converted into means of producing capital, and so others are considered as competitors, as inferiors or superiors. Whilst this Marxist analysis is helpful it does not fully explain the tension between classroom assistants and teachers who essentially come from very similar backgrounds and who, in traditional Marxist terms, belong to the same class. To understand this particular tension further, we need to consider the work of Bourdieu.

Bourdieu's work on field, habitus and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1991) is useful in theorising how classroom assistants come to gain a sense of self as a 'classroom assistant'. Two fields are central to the lived

experiences of classroom assistants: home and school. However, crucially, the practices of these two fields can often be contradictory. In the primary field of the home the structuring practices, those of being a mother, are recognised as legitimate by the classroom assistants. In contrast, given their lowly position in the school hierarchy, the structuring practices in the secondary field of the school are viewed as less legitimate,

> *I mean you look and you think 'what dae I do?'*
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

As a result, the structuring practices of the primary field of the home supersede those of the school. So in the secondary field of the school, classroom assistants often adopt dispositions of the primary field as this stance best creates and enhances their own identity and status. The classroom assistants then often devalue certain structuring practices of the school field.

Dispositions in the field are greatly influenced by an agent's habitus, or the '*le sens pratique*' (Bourdieu, 1990: 52), the feel for the game. In this case being White, working class women and mothers has shaped the habitus of the classroom assistants. As a result they have been enculturated into what constitutes appropriate ways of being in this context. As these have been internalised over time they need to be reconstituted when entering the secondary habitus of the school. However, as it is the field that shapes appropriate ways of being, the structuring practices of the primary field of the home supersede those of the school. Classroom assistants appear more comfortable to remain in their primary habitus, despite this not being reinforced or rewarded by the school field. Given job conditions revolve around short-term contracts, low pay, limited access to formal training and 'low status', this is somewhat understandable, because the structuring practices of the school provide little incentive. Hence, when the primary habitus of the home meets the secondary field of the school, there is a strong probability that there will be resistance, tension and conflict.

Additionally, status gained in a field is derived, primarily, via the accumulation of cultural capital within that field. But, what is seen as capital in one field may not

confer status in another. For classroom assistants, the cultural capital valued in the primary field of the home is care. Nevertheless, care is not always as central within the secondary field of school. So within school, those agents who have a habitus valued by those in power are more likely to be able to trade such dispositions for status. But as the primary habitus of classroom assistants is valued less by those in power in education, the status of classroom assistants is always going to be limited. Again, the result is that classroom assistants have little motivation to conform to the practices within the school field, or to acquire the cultural capital of the school field to try to better their position, as realistically there is nowhere to go,

> *We can put all this extra effort in [but] there's nowhere to go from there…we'll never rise in status because we are classroom assistants.*

> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

The school field then can be characterised as an area of struggle for classroom assistants as they clash with teachers and parents over the distribution of capital. It becomes a, '…*battlefield* wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed…' [Emphasis in original] (Wacquant, 2008: 268). But, due in part to symbolic violence, the domination 'exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu, 1992: 167), classroom assistants can tend to be the least ambitious and more satisfied with their position in the social hierarchy simply because they believe it is natural and inevitable,

> *Jean:*   *Not her [HT] fault…she's dong her best.*
> (Jean, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

> *Leanne:*   *Do we deserve it [long summer holiday]?*
> *Ailsa:*   *Teachers do.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)

The battlefield itself revolves around doxa, the "universe of tacit presuppositions that organise action within the field" (Bourdieu, 2005: 37), the set of rules found within each field. The doxa is essentially, the 'rules of the game', that give classroom assistants their sense of place and the feeling of what is possible and

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what not. In the school field, although classroom assistants and teachers occupy similar positions, and, more or less, the same doxa, there is still tension,

> *The classroom assistants are discussing an 'accelerated reading' in-service course that Jean had missed…Morag summed up that Jean "didnae miss anything, except a Kit-Kat", with Agnes adding that "it was a chaos" and that she is "none the wiser anyway."*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> *The classroom assistants are reflecting on the previous Fridays in-service on 'attachment theory'…[Cara] was disappointed that teachers in front of her were "yakking" all the way through and that she couldn't hear. They were also filling in sheets that nothing to do with the talk.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 11/3/11)

As a result, both sides may become involved in a process of struggle making use of their capital to change the doxa for their own benefit, through actions that conserve or transform the field to that which favours them the most. The conduit for such battles is through talk and especially the atrocity stories used by the classroom assistants. It is through their 'moral parables' that classroom assistants share the oral culture of their occupational group, stressing what it is to be a competent member of such a group. Such talk also has a central role in both 'includes' and 'excludes' members of occupational groups, creating occupational boundaries between classroom assistants, teachers and parents.

Whilst Bourdieu's work was useful in moving away from economic determinism, it did not fully explain the feeling and passions of the actual lived experience of class, and, like Marx, did little to explain the experiences of women (Skeggs, 1997). To accomplish this we need to consider feminist approaches and in particular, the role of patriarchy.

Discussion of Feminist Perspectives

A review of the data certainly provides evidence of the patriarchal influences on these women's lives. The women had all once been married, and the majority still were. For the majority of the families, the man was the main breadwinner, the

only exception being Heidi's family. All the women were mothers, which resulted in skewed gender roles in the majority of families, where it was the women who were responsible for the majority of domestic tasks, especially childcare. This acceptance, and obvious commitment, to family and domestic life suggests that the women were conforming to the interests, needs and desires of men via emphasised femininity. Connell's (1987) notion of the importance of the realms of bedroom and home do indeed appear salient.

These performances of emphasised femininity in the home are also carried over into their work. *This is not surprising given that the particular qualities of hegemonic masculinity include competition, rivalry achievement, and individualism; these impose restrictions on the kind of occupations acceptable to such men. As masculinity is constructed around 'not being feminine' (Connell, 1987), then those occupations defined as feminine will not be considered high status and therefore be of little interest to most men. The consequence of this is that certain occupations become defined as 'women's work'; those that need skills such as caring and sharing, that are non-competitive and communal, and focus on cohesion. In addition, as emphasised femininity is constructed around the acceptance of marriage and childcare, it becomes synonymous with emotional work that involves the responsibility for maintaining and nurturing relationships, and the raising and care of children. As such, work with children is always constructed as feminine.*

The data from the fieldwork is abundantly clear that the role of classroom assistants is viewed as an extension of mothering. This is something that the women in this sample constantly share and reproduce through their own talk,

> Leanne: *...the responsibility of being a parent is what's probably important in this job.*
>
> (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

Such data supports the view that, in general, classroom assistants instinctively accept an essentialist view that being a classroom assistant is a female-orientated role centred on empathy and nurture (Simpson, 2001; Warhurst *et al*., 2009;

Dillow, 2010; Mackenzie, 2011). Such an essentialist view tends to simultaneously dismiss women's intellectual abilities, as evidenced in these women's rejection of theoretical knowledge and practical training as relevant to their role. It is the 'doing', rather than the knowledge or education that is prized (Dunne, *et al.*, 2008),

> *Agnes, [on a training session]:*   *[I] worked it out myself.*
> *Morag, [on the same session]:*   *[You] didnae miss*
> *anything…[we're] none the wiser*
> *anyway.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> *[Training] genuinely doesn't make any difference, hands on experience is better.*
> (Lucy, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

This may be a result of classroom assistants' perceptions that they are performing a caring, nurturing role, rather than an educative one (Dunne, *et al.*, 2008). Hence their "therapeutic discourse of 'care and supervision'" often conflicts with educational discourses established on philosophies of learning and achievement. (Avramidis, *et al.* 2002: 159). For classroom assistants, such educational discourses reflect a perception of teaching that is managerial and corporate rather than 'child-centred',

> *…it seems like the better we perform, the more we get thrown at us…is that job satisfaction...?*
> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

> *[Senior Management] are not interested in our views, we are just sent away.*
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

The role of teaching is presented here as one of power and authority (Dunne, *et al.*, 2008). Such a view stems from the current neo-liberal influence over education. Neo-liberals argue that the market rather than government, should influence education, although with state inspection of quality. Neo-liberalism sees the purpose of education, at an individual level, as being one of the acquisitions of personalised human capital, making people skilled for the economy, rather than 'softer' values of empathy and nurture (Masschelen and Simons 2002). Neo-

liberalism then could be described as grounded in particularly male values, similar to those of hegemonic masculinity, rather than those of emphasised femininity.

However, through their narration of atrocity stories, classroom assistants present themselves as possessing considerable expertise that teachers often do not possess or recognise. The recurring themes in these atrocity stories work to establish the value of classroom assistants' holistic knowledge of pupils, as well as empathy and care as a distinctive contribution to education. The talk cast teachers as poor communicators who lack empathy,

> *[Pupils] did the wrong page yesterday, the teacher had written down wrong page number.*
> (Morag, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.*
> (Moira, Fieldnotes: 23/08/11)

> *The teacher just doesn't want him in the class.*
> (Leanne, Fieldnotes: 05/11/12)

In contrast classroom assistants believe that they display superior communication skills and have a holistic knowledge of children derived through intimate personal daily contact (Barkham, 2008). Hence, classroom assistants form jurisdictional claims through the language of 'care' to establish their professional autonomy vis-à-vis teachers. However, this can obviously create underlying conflicts and tensions,

> *...it's just cause she's lazy [the class teacher] ...she gave me nothing. She just said 'were doing maths, we're doing time today'.*
> (Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)

> *Moira: Somebody will say 'oh such and such is to be done'. And you say 'well you didn't say that'...*

> *Aileen: The communication is just not happening.*
> (Moira & Aileen, Interview 3/6/11)

Yet whilst these conflicts were often the content of the atrocity stories narrated by the classroom assistants, the women very rarely ever challenged teachers openly

(Barkham, 2008). Instead their response was one of guarded doggedness (Dingwell, 1977). Neither did the classroom assistants repeat their criticisms to other teachers, management or parents. Surprisingly, more often than not they tended to proffer public support for class teachers, even when they felt let down by issues such as planning and communication, be this through respectful deference (Skeggs, 1997) or more pragmatic concern about job insecurity,

> Jean [to class teacher]: *Don't blame yourself, you've got so much going on.*
>
> > (Jean, Fieldnotes: 05/11/10)

> *Morag:* *Wouldn't like her [HT] job to be honest. She tries her best.*
>
> > (Morag, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *Lucy and Leanne show me a letter from a parent in a local newspaper that is critical of teachers' hours and holidays. There is support from both women for teachers.*
>
> > (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/02/11)

This talk may represent a continuation of an undervaluing of 'women's work' by the classroom assistants whose perceived primary role is that of 'housewife and mother'. Such talk can potentially enable forms of exploitation as they can systematically devalue the skills of women (Dunne, *et al.*, 2008). This association of care with women's domestic roles undermines classroom assistants' claims to professionalism (Allen, 200); claims that are not helped by their own rejection of theoretical knowledge and practical training. Barkham (2008) further argues that in such talk classroom assistants are deliberately privileging the teacher and surrendering their own position and power. Sorsby (2004) posits that this is due, perhaps in part, to a sense of passivity displayed by classroom assistants as a result of their professional marginalisation. This talk certainly fit with many of the traits of emphasised femininity: acceptance, compliance, fragility and sociability. Indeed, Barkham goes as far as to liken this relationship between classroom assistant and class teachers to 'a marriage', in which the classroom assistant takes on the role of the 'wife' in anticipating and fulfilling her partner's needs (2006: 847). Perhaps the ultimate performance of emphasised femininity at work?

There is also evidence of classroom assistants performing emphasised femininity in other ways though. The data is clear that through their essentialist empathy and nurturing, classroom assistants are upholding and reproducing sexual stereotypes in pupils. Girls are constantly described in certain ways,

> *...cuddly...darling... honey...lovely...sweetie...sweetheart...wee lamb...*
> (Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

When these girls have issues they are supported in suitably empathetic ways, however, when they misbehave, or have issues, these are often dismissed,

> *To a female pupil with sore lip, "Let mummy know when you get home darling."*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10)

> *...a wee madam...tittle-tattle...[or a] drama queen..*
> (Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

Boys, on the other hand, are talked about in very different ways. When they misbehave, or have issues these are accepted, even valorised,

> *...he's a character [he]gets into trouble...they have trouble concentrating...that's James kicking off, that's my boy!*
> (Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

What is evident here is that girls are being associated with the ideals of emphasised femininity; compliance, fragility and sociability, whilst boys are being associated with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity; strength, aggression, and power. It is not just pupils who come under classroom assistants' spotlight of emphasised femininity; parenting, too, is judged by the same hegemonic standards of heterosexual marriage, mothering, and commitment, to family and childcare. Those who fail to live up to such expectations are shamed through the talk of the classroom assistants. Such violations of proper parenting exist on a spectrum from,

He's had no breakfast…She's an only child, and you can tell…Home is chaotic…Emotionless parents…They've not been apart too long and both got new partners…it's too quick…bound to have an effect…She goes between two sets of grandparents
(Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

More often than not, it is the mother who is blamed and the image of the 'bad mother' is a recurring theme throughout the talk of the classroom assistants. Such bad mothers cover a range of shocking qualities,

…alcoholic…churn out [children]…[be]in denial…stinking…mouth off…[be] stressed to the max…batter hell out of [children]…vicious…[and show] no affection…[or]…no attachment at home…
(Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10)

Klein (2010) argued that this culture of blame was a direct result of the public-private split and the continued relegation of women to the domestic domain, and with it the primary responsibility for the emotional and moral development of children. Given this responsibility, mother blaming becomes inevitable when society begins to dysfunction and 'bad mothers' are blamed for a range of ills; from creating homosexual or womanising men, paedophilia, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism and violence (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky, 1998). However, once again such arguments are based on essentialist assumptions that all women want to become mothers, know how to mother, enjoy all aspects of mothering, and are naturally willing to abandon all self concerns as a sign of good mothering. Good mothering is seen as a crucial characteristic of emphasised femininity itself.

However, exceptionally, the blame for poor parenting is seen as the fault of the father, especially if they display a lack of work ethic and/or struggle with monogamy and a commitment to family,

…when you see dad you will understand…Dad is in [prison]…drugs were involved…[he has] lots of kids scattered about… how could anyone sleep with someone so sleazy…He doesn't even work…kids all over the place.
(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/02/11)

What we see in this talk on fatherhood are references to lifestyle choices, anti-social behaviours and their implicit relationship to social class. This is a reminder

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that the influence of gender alone is only part of the story in shaping the identities of classroom assistants. Whilst gender is important, it must be recognised that gender is constituted and represented differently according to differential locations within the global relations of power. Women do not simply exist as women but as differentiated categories of women (Brah 1992). For the majority of women in this sample, they have been educated as 'working class' girls to become 'good mothers' and for what was traditionally seen as 'women's work' (Plummer, 1983, cited in Barkham, 2006: 851). Given this, the intersection of gender and class will be considered, but not before anti-feminist theories have finally been discounted.

Discussion of Anti-Feminist Perspectives

Hakim (2002, 2006) noted that the primary school could be ideal for women with adaptive lifestyles. Ostensibly there would appear to be some justification for her view. Wider research, from the area of classroom assistants seems to support Hakim's argument that these are women similar to the adaptive lifestyle type; in that they are likely to marry, stay married, and have children (Schlapp *et al*., 2001; SCER, 2005; SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007). Further research appears to support Hakim's contention that the preferred lifestyle of these women is that of secondary earner, dependent on a partner who is in regular employment, but whose own income is an important contribution to the family budget (Barkham, 2008). In addition, as Hakim argued, the approach to employment of women with adaptive lifestyles is coexistent with a commitment to their family and domestic life. Barkham (2008) maintained that being a classroom assistant enables the women to prioritise their on-going family responsibilities, and by and large, these women, whilst working, still retain "responsibility for domestic tasks, including being the primary carers of the children within their families" (Barkham, 2008: 843). This work-life balance is based upon "super convenient" working hours (Dillow, 2010: 110) that suit both childcare and family life (Warhurst *et al*, 2009). Finally, as Hakim claimed, these women appear 'content' to settle for less demanding 'female' occupations, such as classroom assistant, and, "to some

extent further career aspirations have been surrendered to their family requirements" (Barkham, 2008: 845). However, given the controversial nature of Hakim's research it would be naïve to take this limited support as *prima facie* evidence of preference theory. To fully understand classroom assistant as an employment, lifestyle choice, we need to consider both women's preferences and constraints. Once we focus on constraints we can begin to deconstruct many of Hakim's assumptions.

Synthesising the work of Ginn *et al*. (1996), Crompton and Harris (1998), McRae (2003) and Crompton and Lyonette (2005, 2010), we can begin this deconstruction at the level of language. Hakim can certainly be challenged on her rather euphemistic vocabulary. So when Hakim argued that women with adaptive lifestyles 'want' to work, and 'want' to combine work and family, it is more likely that they *have* to work, and *need* to combine work and family. The majority of working women do not 'seek' this work-life balance; rather they *need* it because of their circumstances. Further, when Hakim referred to a lifestyle 'compromise' (Hakim, 2000), she again missed the point that such a compromise is a *necessity* for many women rather than a genuine choice. This is not a 'preferred' lifestyle choice; indeed it is not a choice at all, because for many it is *essential*. More importantly though, underneath the semantics, we can glimpse the very real issues that call in to question Hakim's views.

For the most part the classroom assistants in this sample, like those generally, are mature, White, working class, local women who are partnered and have school aged children (see Table 5.1). The women in the sample are not those who can afford to stay home and as such they do not have genuine, unconstrained choice, but rather are constrained by the cultural norms of their family and work values (McRae, 2003). The main constraint they face is financial, especially the availability and cost of childcare (Cartwright, 2004, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2006). By choosing to be a classroom assistant, the women are addressing this very real constraint and making a quite rational decision,

[We're] not doing it for the money.

<div align="right">(Moira, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

...the holidays are good!

<div align="right">(Heather, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)</div>

Like many families there is a 'gender skewed arrangement' where unpaid domestic work in the household is unevenly shared between women and men (Cartwright, 2004, 2005). Therefore for classroom assistants, the working hours and holidays suit both childcare and their other domestic commitments (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a; Barkham, 2008; Dillow, 2010), This can explain Ailsa's decision to leave a clerical job in a bank for the more convenient hours and holidays, but poorer pay, of a classroom assistant. One also has to consider the employment alternatives on offer. Fieldnotes suggest that the women themselves see this as shop work,

"Next year we may be filling shelves in Tesco."

<div align="right">(Morag, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)</div>

| Leanne: | *I can't do this [be a classroom assistant] anymore. What are the alternatives?* |
| Principal Teacher: | *Asda?* |

<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes 19/8/11)</div>

Despite this, these women should not be seen as 'grateful slaves' (Hakim, 1991) but rather as women who are using their, albeit restricted, agency to best balance finance, family, work and domestic commitments, and utilise their 'human capital' deriving from their knowledge of children and childcare. The women are all too aware of the frustrations of being a classroom assistant but realise that compensation, and satisfaction, derives from convenient hours and holidays, rather than the work itself (Ginn *et al.*, 1996, Crompton and Harris, 1998). Once in the role of classroom assistant though, the women very often develop an obvious dedication to their work and an enduring emotional connection to those they work with. This results in the development of committed and principled views on the work that they do (Mackenzie, 2011). Classroom assistants, in general, enjoy job satisfaction and regard their work as a long-term undertaking (Woolf and Bassett, 1988),

I love my job…I get a lot of reward out of it.
(Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

I still get up in the mornings and think 'going tae my work'.
(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Indeed, during the fieldwork Jean and Morag were both recognised by their local authority with an award for 20 years service. Perhaps as a result of this commitment and satisfaction, the majority of women in this sample, like classroom assistants in general, did not have a second job. This again stresses their view of the classroom assistant role as a job in itself (SCER, 2006). Where women did have a second job it was usually justified on financial grounds, again stressing the lack of genuine, unconstrained choice,

I've had other part-time jobs when I've needed the money.
(Agnes, Fieldnotes 10/12/10)

For the majority of women, having a family means they need to work for financial reasons. Within these families, both within the sample and more generally, the traditional and persisting model of family life and employment is that men are the main 'breadwinner' (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005). Such a view usually runs in tandem with the notion that the father should focus on his career without interruption. Yet, although men can typically earn wages that are sufficient to support a one-adult household they do not generally earn wages sufficient to support a household with dependents (Siltanen, 1994). Hence, many mothers need to take on a secondary career, whilst continuing to specialise in domestic care. However, although it is true that mothers generally take responsibility for the majority of childcare, fathers do have a crucial role in holding the childcare 'package' together. Given this, Crompton and Lyonette (2010) argued that it is unlikely that couples working arrangements are 'preferences' simply in accordance with women's attitudes. More likely they should be regarded as a result of the complex interplay of attitudes and personal constraints in which both parents will be involved (Moen and Sweet, 2003). Hence, decisions about couples' employment strategies will often be taken in relation to the needs of the family unit rather than women's individual preferences (Crompton and Lyonette, 2010).

This is not to deny the influence of agency. The women in the sample had exercised a degree of agency in choosing to be classroom assistants, for instance the career choices of Ailsa and Heidi. Nevertheless, agency is severely restricted for the majority of working women. On the basis of this evidence it would seem that 'structural' factors are still at least as important, if not more important, than attitudinal factors in shaping the working arrangements of couples (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005). For Crompton and Lyonette, despite the equal opportunities revolution, structural factors still influence patterns of family and work life. Given the continuing influence of structural factors, it would be fruitful to concentrate on explanations of social processes that establish and characterise gendered experiences. It can be reasoned that there is a link between domestic circumstances and employment opportunities, which is consistent with variations in class and gender. It is this general relationship of employment circumstances to work histories, domestic circumstances, and life-course phases that structures women's availability for paid work, and the type of work they do (Siltanen, 1986; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005, 2010). This is perhaps best explained through the notion of 'respectability' (Skeggs, 1997).

Classroom Assistants, Class, Gender and Respectability

Skeggs (1997) believed that respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class, and this may be able to explain why classroom assistants appear to be complicit in their own oppression. Skeggs defined respectability as a gendered practice based around femininity that involves a constant performance of trying to prove oneself - 'respectable'. Skeggs argued that, through the influence of their mothers, White, working class women are predisposed to respectability from a very early age. Investing in mothering and care is the central method by which respectability is put into effect by such women. The classroom assistants in this sample made this abundantly clear through their talk on the importance of being a mother to their roles[20]. The classroom assistants saw the experience, knowledge and skills of mothering as one of the limited means they have to acquire value

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[20] See Chapter 6: *Talk About Mothering and Care*.

outwith their local fields of exchange. One key signifier here is care, being seen as a caring person,

> *Lucy:*   *I think you have to be quite loving…Yeah I don't think you could do the job if you didn't…*
>
> <div align="right">(Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)</div>

Caring capitalises on prior female experience. It is something that White working class women can do, and something they feel unlikely to fail at,

> *I do think what I do I'm good at. I do.*
>
> <div align="right">(Heather, Interview 3/6/11)</div>

All of the women in the sample have performed care previously, as part of their familial responsibility and use this in their work. Leanne has had experience of caring for a son with autism,

> *Leanne, talking about a pupil, "He reminds me of [my son] I can see what he sees."*
>
> <div align="right">(Leanne, Fieldnotes: 18/3/11)</div>

However, such care is never externally legitimated. This changes though when care is performed through the work of being a classroom assistant. Skeggs argued that this is because caring is a dialogic production, that to be seen as a caring 'self' you need to care for others. Doing caring, then, is fundamental to the concept of the self. The caring self is both a performance, constructed through concrete caring practices, and a technique of investment in these practices that generates responsibility and respectability. The role of classroom assistant shows the women now as capable, practical and responsible, and the role becomes an investment. Their prior feminine cultural capital has been utilised to gain value from its use in a public setting. However, Skeggs argues that for White, working class women focus is on "celebrating the practical" rather than the academic (Skeggs, 1997: 59),

> *…rather go on that one than sit here and listen to stuff that's not relevant…"*
>
> <div align="right">(Aileen, Fieldnotes: 13/5/11)</div>

...hands on experience is better.
<div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)</div>

This rejection of the academic can be understood as a construction of 'not failing' and can therefore be recognised as another attempt by classroom assistants at investing in themselves. However, the logical consequence of rejecting the academic is that intuition, which is natural and innate, rather than learnt, becomes the ultimate caring disposition. Intuition has value, and as intuition cannot be taken away from the women, hence it becomes another way of not failing. Caring then becomes a feeling and White, working class women assess others on their ability to feel the 'right' thing. By considering themselves as caring women, naturally predisposed to care, the women are able to develop for themselves some status, responsibility and moral authority. So classroom assistants are able to construct a form of dignity in their work rooted in the naturalness of their personality. Their caring performances give them value and become a valued personality characteristic. The relationship they share with those they care for, those who are dependent on them, leads to greater feelings of respectability and responsibility,

> *Leanne:* *Callum gives me great pleasure. I just want to see him very happy and try and do the best I can for him.*
> <div align="right">(Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)</div>

So by fulfilling the needs of others, the women are ultimately fulfilling the needs of themselves. Their altruism makes them feel good, and their experience of being known as caring by others consolidates their own investments,

> *Teacher to Jean (genuinely): "Hello lovely Mrs. Powter."*
> <div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)</div>

> *Class Teacher to Janis: "You're an angel."*
> <div align="right">(Coalside, Fieldnotes: 29/10/10)</div>
> *Mum…tells Heather, "You do a fab job". They hug before she leaves.*
> <div align="right">(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)</div>

This can be understood as part of Skeggs' neo-Marxist analysis, which moves beyond the purely economic to argue that capital has now extended into new spaces, and markets based on affect within emotional and domestic relationships

(Skeggs, 2010). Care can now be viewed as capital, and one of the few that White, working class women can actually accrue. However, unlike the middle classes, who can keep amassing capital to use in the future through its exchange value, White, working class women are more concerned with use value. Use value has an entirely different goal and is embedded in the present rather than the future. Through care, loyalty and affection, White, working class women find other ways of generating value for themselves and others, outside the realms of exchange value, in the form of giving away of time and energy to others (Strathern, 1992). This takes the form of them trying to invest, and establish value, through 'respectability' (Skeggs, 1997). Respectability relies on a dominant symbolic structure that results in certain dispositions, cultures and practices to be inscribed with much more value than others.

At the micropolitical level of the school, this leads to the production of difference through the development of the identity of 'classroom assistant'. Respectability is a model of how difference comes into effect through the divisions that can be drawn between those who can add value to their selves in this way and those who cannot. Given their lowly position and lack of upward mobility within school the classroom Skeggs (1997) argues, that such women are not giving up on attempting to attach value to their selves. Rather, they are attempting to attach value to themselves through this performance of respectability. As these women have been predisposed to respectability from a very early age, usually through the influence of their mothers, mothering, and care, it becomes *the* way they can acquire value. Respectability is, in part, achieved through the publically visible language, facial and bodily displays of emotion at work, or what Hochschild (1979, 1983) calls 'emotional labour'. It is through emotional labour that the classroom assistants attribute feelings and meanings to their shared, lived experiences. This emphasis on care defined a socially desirable performance through which the women acted out the roles expected of them within this particular occupational context. This performance enables the classroom assistants to display their caring qualities, professional demeanour and character as aware,

competent, patient, rational, sensitive and understanding. Nevertheless, this performance of caring does not come without issues.

Skeggs (1997) warns of what she calls the 'seduction of caring' (1992: 62), which can lead to feelings of moral superiority to others who can be constructed as uncaring, unnatural and irresponsible. Building on the work of Illouz (1997), Skeggs argues that our feelings and emotions become value statements about ones' capacity' and are crucial to the display of the morality of a person. The projection of negative value onto others is established as a central way in which divisions are drawn. Attributing negative value to the others is a mechanism for attributing value to oneself. However, respectability always takes place under the gaze of a dialogic other, someone who is constantly judging you as lacking. As such, it becomes then a key mechanism in othering, as it positions those without it; and those without it, position themselves against it. Important here is Noddings' (1984) concept of natural caring. Noddings defined natural caring as a longing for goodness that arises, almost naturally, out of women's experiences. Natural caring, although requiring considerable physical and mental effort, does not require an ethical effort to motivate it. Rather, it is a moral attitude, of wanting to care, arising out of the experience or memory of being cared for. This is the type of care that the classroom assistants demonstrate, as opposed to ethical care. Ethical care is about what one 'ought' to be rather than what one 'wants' to do. So whilst many teachers, and carers, care in that they pursue certain goals for students, they do not necessarily adopt a 'relational' sense of caring. It is such situations that Noddings and the classroom assistants are critical of. Such criticism was common in the classroom assistants' talk about teachers, and especially parents,

> *...we have a totally different relationship with the children than what teachers do.*
>
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

> *...No attachment with mum. Just is no connection. He needs a relationship at home...*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 28/9/12)

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This moral superiority over certain parents is also evident in the classroom assistants' talk about marriage, another key signifier of respectability (Skeggs, 1997, 2011). All the women in the study had been married and the majority still were, with the exception of Agnes, Leanne and Lucy, although the latter two had long-term partners (See Table 5.1). Given the average age of the women, it could be argued that they had been educated in a period when heterosexuality, marriage and family life were taken for granted and viewed as the norm. Marriage was seen in terms of a stable future and a signifier of respectability, responsibility and material security. Being 'left on the shelf' was not only viewed as a failure in terms of respectability, but also had shameful connotations. Within both schools, marriages of the younger teaching staff were always popular events and major topics of conversation enjoyed by the women. Nevertheless, entering marriage too early, for the wrong reasons was also frowned upon,

> *...you can see the path that she's gonnae take which is sad but, but her mum was brought up like that and it's just a circle...you know what's gonnae happen to her. She'll be pregnant.*
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Marriages were also seen as needing to last as broken relationships had adverse affects on children, be they relatively normal, *"she misses her dad"* (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 8/10/10), to the extreme, *"damage is done when they're taken away from their parents"*(Sunview, Fieldnotes: 8/4/11). Within marriage, certain types of behaviours, in both men and women, were unacceptable to the women. Being a, *"sleazy dad"* with, *"kids all over the place"* was not seen as respectable, how could, *"anyone could sleep with someone so sleazy?"* (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 25/2/11). Conversely, being a mother who *"churned out"* her children was no better (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10). Heterosexuality is also institutionalised, and recycled to pupils, through the classroom assistants' very palpable language of sexual stereotypes. As mentioned previously, girls are, *"lovely"*, *"cuddly"*, *"sweethearts"*, and boys are, *"characters"* who get into *"trouble"* and *"kick off"* (Coalside and Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10 - 25/2/10).

Pupils were not expected to display overt sexualised behaviour, and if they did, this was seen as troubling. In the talk about Alan[21], who was in local authority care after his foster parents failed to cope with his challenging behaviours, the classroom assistants were worried by stories of sexual allegations made against him by female care staff. Whilst these stories were never explicitly questioned, they did register some surprise,

> *But he's never been like that with us.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 1/7/11)

This, I would argue, reflects the classroom assistants' view of themselves as mother figures, rather than sexual subjects and bodies. Further, the women's reflections on Alan also support the importance of heterosexual marriage, family life, respectability, responsibility and security,

> *…in a normal family he would have been OK.*
>
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 27/5/11)

Ideas such as 'normal' are never explicitly defined, but again left unspoken with the belief that, in Bourdieuian terms, through sharing their habitus and doxa, others will recognise the implicit criteria. Families who shared the same habitus and doxa were constructed as normal,

> *I grew up wi' Ashleigh and her husband. Cause they are Sunview born and bred, the same.*
>
> (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Classroom assistants attempted to reproduce their habitus by sharing their own values,

> Jean: *[I'm] a stickler for good manners"*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 1/10/10)

> Jean: *[This is]a game that my mummy played with me.*
>
> (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 5/11/10)

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[21] See Chapter 7: *'Would You Trust Him Alone With Your Daughter?': Alan's Story*

> *Leanne: I treat him the way I would like ma child.*
>   (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

However, some families, who made choices to act in different ways and embodied different habitus and doxa, were seen as inferior and problematised:

> *… you can see the path that she's gonnae take, which is sad but, but her mum was brought up like that.*
>   (Heather, Interview 3/6/11)

Indeed this also happened in regards to colleagues, including myself,

> *I don't know what it is about her…she's come from a different sort of background…*
>   (Leanne, Interview 28/6/11)

> *Heather makes me some toast that I cut it into triangles. Leanne comments, "I couldn't eat it like that", to which Heather replies, "He's posh."[22]*
>   (Sunview Fieldnotes, 23/08/11)

These dichotomies of 'normal/abnormal', 'good/bad', 'responsible/irresponsible' and 'respectable/unrespectable' are generated and characterised by representational struggles often played out with condensed figurative forms, as evidenced in the classroom assistants' atrocity stories. So characters such as 'good' mothers and 'bad' mothers become over determined and constructed in excessive, distorted and caricatured ways. Such figures, however, are nearly always expressive of an underlying social crisis or anxiety. As argued earlier, for classroom assistants, this is often about boundary work. Sayer (2005) stated that this emotionally motivated boundary work is particularly strong in groups who are anxious about their position in relation to those 'above' and 'below'. This would account for the dual boundary work of classroom assistants. Focusing on anxiety from below, the bad mother figure is constructed in ways that attribute superior forms of value to classroom assistants themselves rather than the bad mothers that they are implicitly, or explicitly, differentiated from. For the classroom assistants, attributing a negative value to bad mothers is a mechanism for attributing a

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[22] Interestingly, Bourdieu believed that "the strongest and most indelible mark" on the young would probably be in food (1984: 56).

positive value to themselves. They are taking a position of judgement to attribute value, one that assigns the 'other', the bad mother, as immoral, irresponsible, lacking respectability and disgusting.

Disgust is a key here. Recent research has focused on this particular emotion as an important mechanism of class distinction. This is because one of the ways in which social class is emotionally mediated is through repeated expressions of disgust for those deemed to be of a lower social class. Disgust reactions are central to 'figurative forms' materialising, becoming embodied and being meaningful. So the figurative form of the bad mother is produced through disgust reactions as an intensely affective figure that embodies both historically familiar and contemporary anxieties. However, in reality these bad mothers are women who come from very similar social backgrounds to the classroom assistants themselves. But, as Bhabha (1996) commented, it is not always the dangerous other that threatens, but the proximate stranger who is not easily identifiable. Therefore these proximate strangers have to be made identifiable, and to the extent that nobody could fail to recognise them, or their lack of moral value. Hence, the bad mother is transformed, through the classroom assistants' talk of atrocity, into an easily recognisable figure.

Probyn (2000) argued that disgust was about being physically conscious of the Bourdieu's 'horror or visceral intolerance' of those who are just too close for comfort. This could be the *"stinking"* mother (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 3/6/11), or the child sent to school in a top so dirty it was *"black."* (Coalside, Fieldnotes: 15/10/10). Disgust, though, relies on public acknowledgement, and public recognition, which provides the collective reassurance that we are not alone in our judgement of the disgusting object. Disgust reactions seek "to include or draw others into its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability" (Ngai, 2005: 336). This collective feeling generates consensus, authorisation of standards, and maintains the symbolic order. As such it is reminiscent of Allen's (2001) views on atrocity stories and their part in how occupational difference is socially constituted in the workplace. Atrocity stories, based on disgust, function

to create a moral division of labour, that constructs social differences between groups. They position the 'other' in ways that achieve recognition of one's own worth and draw a moral distance from others by claiming respectable standards of taste for themselves. Hence, they perform a dual boundary-work function, in that they construct a boundary between in-groups and out-groups, whilst simultaneously constituting the in-group, or, in the words of Bourdieu (1984), "taste classifies and it classifies the classifier" (1984: 6).

However, this does not mean that wanting to be valued as respectable is about wanting to be middle class, for Skeggs (1997), this totally misses the point. One only has to look at the talk about Donald and his family[23] to see that the middle classes are not exempt from criticisms of mothering,

> *Leanne comments that Donald, "has a long day, 7.30am – 5.00pm at wrap-around care and school…Too long, he gets tired…*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

> *Lucy comments that the family live, "in a lovely house in Sunview…[but are] emotionless parents."*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 5/11/12)

These two quotations also show the 'moral euphemisms' (Skeggs, 2005) used by the classroom assistants as they rarely mention class directly in their talk. Rather, class is referred to through association, the *"long day"* and *"the lovely house."* This may be a result of the women themselves not actually identifying as working class themselves. Skeggs (1997) argued that this (dis)identification of class may be the case because White, working class women have never really had the potential for establishing positive value from their 'working classness'. Working class men, on the other hand, have always had the idealism of a history of hard, stout labour, based on the machismo of heavy industry, to provide their own positive value.

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[23] See Chapter 7: *'So Bad, But We Love Him': Donald's Story*

Coping with the Oppression of Respectability

But striving for respectability is not without serious concerns for White, working class women. Skeggs (2011), reflecting on her original work, now sees respectability as domestic ideology, in the sense that by constantly attempting to live up to the standards of others, White, working class women are giving consent to that which is not in their own interests, and that ultimately subordinates them. So through their actions of trying to claim some sort of value, of proving that they have worth against the standards of others, these women are actually authorising the value judgements of those others who define these standards of authority. Respectability then becomes a very powerful ideological practice in that it sustains class inequality and injustice. It is one of the key ways in which White, working class women are impelled to invest in the values, judgements and standards of others, which then leaves them feeling guilty, ashamed, inadequate and isolated. As such, respectability acts as an ideological form of self-persecution fundamental to self-governance. So although caring is something these women know and understand from their own contexts once in caring occupations, they are told that their performances and standards of caring are wrong. Hence, there is conflict over who is right and whose standards count. Importantly though, it is usually those with authority who define the standards, and such authority is usually linked to institutions. Absolutely central is a debate over morality, and recognising whose moral count. The result, according to Skeggs, is that by trying to invest in respectability, White, working class women ultimately get trapped by it.

In Skeggs' (1997, 2011) view, the key to this trap is judgement. Judgement is the link between these women doing subjectivity and being made subject. Judgement makes the women subject by literally putting them in their place. The classroom assistants then learn to judge themselves according to the standards of others. However, the irony here is that classroom assistants, by performing respectability, are also judging bad mothers by the standards of others, standards that they themselves feel persecuted by. Indeed, Cohen (1980) argued that it is those groups

most proximate to the working class that actually end up being monitored and policed by the working class, and that often receive the most punitive sanctions towards them. Ironically, respectability therefore becomes not simply about self-persecution, but the persecution of other similar women for not living up to the standards that they themselves cannot live up to.

The women are aware of their place, of how they are socially positioned and of attempts to represent them. This awareness constantly informs their responses. They operate with a dialogic form of recognition; they recognise the recognitions of others and their value judgements, whether real or imaginary. Recognition of how one is positioned is central to the processes of subjective construction. These recognitions enable the women to navigate themselves through classificatory systems and measure and evaluate themselves accordingly. However, the positions they occupy are rarely accommodated with comfort. They live their social location with unease. This tends to create a permanent state of anxiety in White, working class women as they always feel judged against someone else's standards, whether they actually are or not. This is a challenge that has to be lived daily and such intimate practices involve power affects that produce feelings of anger, injustice, irritation and resentment, as well as moments of comedy and humour, pleasure and love (Skeggs, 1997, 2011). This can be regarded as classroom assistants sharing 'ugly feelings' (Ngai, 2007). These are feelings of their powerlessness, such as resentment, envy and irritation, feelings towards those who made judgement about their value, but also expressions of an awareness of the structural inequalities to which they were subject.

The classroom assistants engage in a battle of trying to gain consent from teachers and school management for being 'proper'. In the daily reality of this struggle though, they are misrecognised as having no value. For Skeggs (1997, 2011) the result of this constant misrecognition is a state of perplexity. This perplexity can lead to these very feelings of anger, injustice, irritation and resentment. These emotions can be the result of issues such as, not being taken seriously by teachers

or school management, lack of communication, poor management, working conditions and contractual issues,

> *And [we] ask, "Are we doing this right? Is this right? Is this OK?" and we get comments like, "Well you can't really go wrong" or, "Whatever you do would be fine because you've got the bottom two groups."*
> (Cara, Interview 24/6/11)

> *The SMT are, "...not interested in our views, we are just sent away. Not very often that you get their full support."*
> (Morag, Fieldnotes: 26/11/10)

> *Leanne:*   *What am I doing?*
> *Principal Teacher:*   *Don't know.*
> *Leanne:*   *What am I doing tomorrow?*
> *Principal Teacher:*   *Don't know yet.*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 19/8/11)

> *If they can't take the time to tell you what you're doing, then what?*
> (Moira, Fieldnotes: 23/8/11)

> *Aileen:*   *Is this a meeting to tell us what is happening?*
> *Moira:*   *[Sarcastically] I doubt it*
> (Sunview, Fieldnotes: 24/6/11)

> *I'm fuming, absolutely fuming. How could staffing not be put in place for these three boys?*
> (Leanne, Fieldnotes: 19/8/11)

> *I'm gutted. It feels like the legs have been kicked from under you again.*
> (Agnes, Fieldnotes: 12/11/10)

> *Just the contracts being temporary all the time and there's no permanency. That's, that's frustrating.*
> (Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)

> *It's nice to know I have a job for part of next year.*
> (Heidi, Fieldnotes: 20/5/11)

Given this constant misrecognition, Skeggs claimed that the last thing White working class women will want to do is become involved in struggles over the misrecognition, as such struggles are always going to be futile. The women's (dis)identification of class may of course be a factor here and as a result the classroom assistants' lack of involvement with unionisation, their reluctance to openly challenge the authority of teachers, and their rejection of training as a

means of advancement all appear logical if understood through this lens. However, as Skeggs argued, White, working class women are not simply passive receptors, they realise when they are being thought of as inadequate and react to this. The classroom assistants are no exception to this,

> *It is a bit divisive it's...it's them and us, it's teaching staff and support staff...*
>
> <div align="right">(Heidi, Interview 24/6/11)</div>

> *They're buttering us up so we don't complain.*
>
> <div align="right">(Cara, Fieldnotes: 20/5/11)</div>

> *We'll never rise in status because we are classroom assistants.*
>
> <div align="right">(Cara, Interview 24/6/11)</div>

Despite these views, the women were still prepared to reorganise and cover for staff absences as best they could, work over breaks, miss lunch, take on crucial medical duties and buy resources out of their own pocket. These self sacrifices, the giving away of time and energy can be seen as a result of the relationality the women possess. These are examples of the use value White, working class women strive to accrue, and then disperse, rather than the interest in accumulating 'exchange' value. This relationality is crucial as it is how the women derive pleasure from their work despite constant misrecognition and lack of value.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing is that despite the perplexity, the anger, injustice, irritation and resentment, it is abundantly clear from the data that the classroom assistants love the work they do,

> *And you get satisfaction when you see their wee faces and, you know how proud they are of what they've done. It makes you feel proud as well…*
>
> <div align="right">(Ailsa, Interview 28/6/11)</div>

> *I love my job.*
>
> <div align="right">(Lucy, Interview 5/7/11)</div>

Summary

This chapter began with a synopsis of the study so far, reviewing the research questions, methodology and methods, theoretical framework, and then presenting the study's key findings. The chapter then began its analysis by reviewing the Marxist concept of alienation as a theoretical tool to explain classroom assistant identity. The chapter then used the neo-Marxist theory of Bourdieu, particularly field, habitus and cultural capital, to extend these Marxist arguments. Next the chapter considered gender as a useful device in explaining the work choices, attitudes and lived experiences of classroom assistants. Specifically, it questioned whether the role of the classroom assistant can be understood as a performance of 'emphasised femininity'. It was argued that classroom assistants performed a version of emphasised femininity grounded in heterosexual women's cooperation with the interests and desires of men. Such power inequalities also define a gendered order of work in which it is expected that women undertake the majority of care work. Finally, in this section, anti-feminist arguments based on Hakim's (2000) idea of preference theory, and an adaptive lifestyle, were ultimately rejected in favour of constraint critiques. These critiques argue that women's preferences are not necessarily true preferences but rather what is possible. In reality women's choices in their work-lifestyle commitments are almost always constrained by a variety of conflicting considerations and social circumstances. The chapter then addressed the contradictory and conflictual relations of gender and class, through Skeggs' (1997) notion of 'respectability'. Two ways in which respectability sustained class inequality and injustice were discussed. Firstly, respectability was discussed as an ideological form of self-persecution, and secondly, respectability was discussed as a means of monitoring and policing others. It was concluded that in trying to achieve respectability, the classroom assistants became trapped. By judging themselves according to the standards of others, classroom assistants lived in a constant state of perplexity resulting in feelings of anger, injustice, irritation and resentment. In addition, they also tended to punitively monitor other groups of similar women who also failed to live up to these standards. It was argued that these factors could explain why classroom assistants were complicit in their own oppression. Yet despite all this, the

classroom assistants loved their work. In the final chapter I will look at what can be learnt from this in terms of recommendations, reservations and reflections.

Chapter 9

Recommendations, Reservations and Reflections.

Introduction

This study, although based on a limited number of practitioners from only two schools in Scotland, and conducted at a particular moment in time, is not modest in its claims. Whilst it was never the intention of the study to (re)discover capitalism, patriarchy or gender, it did strive to shed light on the hegemonic forces that control these structures and show that these are not simply 'facts of nature', but features that can be challenged in order to instigate social change. Even though it is not possible to generalise from the findings, these do still illuminate details that are painted on a wider canvas. So the study should not be seen as being about this particular group of women in isolation, but rather as being about their experiences and interpretations and how these challenge more general hegemonic assumptions of what it is to be a White, working class woman in relation to class, gender and power. This study then was an attempt to challenge the complacency of previous research that made classroom assistants invisible, or as Thomas (1993) stated, an attempt to "speak to an audience on behalf of [my] subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice" (1993: 4). To ignore these voices would have amounted to yet another act of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977). Again, as in the previous chapter, given the nature of critical ethnography, rather than present any broad conclusions and recommendations, this chapter adopts greater reflexivity and open-endedness by presenting some recommendations, reservations and reflections in an attempt to encourage the reader to form alternative paradigms of interpretation.

Recommendations

As made clear earlier (See Chapter 4), this study is a critical ethnography and, as such, aims to fight familiarity by posing questions of social existence often ignored by other approaches (Thomas, 1993). My argument started with the

ontological argument that contemporary society is unjust and repressive for many (Carspecken, 1996: 7). Some social groups, for example, White, working class women, who make up the majority of classroom assistants, are disadvantaged on grounds of both social class and gender. Following Thomas, I saw my role as to describe, analyse and open to scrutiny the agendas, powers and assumptions that hinder, limit and restrict the experiences of classroom assistants. But as Marx argued, such description is not sufficient; the point is to attempt change. The goal of critical ethnography, in general, and this study in particular, is to utilise the knowledge produced for social change by exposing and dealing with social disadvantage. The difficulty lies in trying to place work of classroom assistants on the social policy agenda particularly at a time of severe budgetary constraints.

My study utilised qualitative methods, and whilst not directly concerned with pedagogic aspects, still has clear implications for future social policy making in the field of education. Here social policy is defined as a broader enterprise through which governments and other policy makers seek to produce change in social as well as other educational outcomes, rather than a more narrowly defined synonym for educational policy (Finch, 1984). Through its use of critical ethnography then, my study provided a theoretically grounded, critical account of the current consequences of social policy, and need to propose an alternative direction for social policy in the future.

Finch (1984, 1985) argued that, although much policy-orientated research uses qualitative methods, qualitative research also has an important part to play because of its power to influence decision-making at national, local government and school level. Due to the complexity and subtlety of social reality qualitative research can never simply provide 'the facts'. As a result, qualitative research on social policy will inevitably reflect the value position of the researcher. It is important that researchers are clear about their standpoint because of the danger that raw data "without interpretation could lead to conclusions far removed from any the researcher would support" (Finch, 1985: 120).

However, not all would agree. In their study of learning support assistants, O' Brien & Garner (2001a) argue that, "the slightest hint of the stain of 'academia' will corrupt the potency of the message…" (2001a: 6). Here then, the researcher has a choice to make, follow Finch, and attempt to engage with social policy makers in order to change the situation of those studied, or follow O' Brien & Garner and ignore social policy implications but retain the moral purity and intellectual integrity of the research. The compromise is what Finch (1985) refers to as the reformist stance. This involves attempting to engage directly in an effort to alleviate some of the worst features of the situation identified, but, importantly, trying to change the situation, not the participants. In reality this may err towards reform rather than revolution, involving small, rather than sweeping, changes, but "it is better to do something rather than do nothing" (Finch, 1985: 124). Additionally, if, like O' Brien & Garner, we are not prepared to engage with the social policy implications of our own work, then we leave the area wide open for others with no such qualms. Yet Finch recognises that by presenting one's own work in a form acceptable to social policy makers can sometimes mean doing 'violence' to one's own work.

Contributions to research

With this in mind, I will now outline what I believe this study contributes to research. This will be discussed under three different headings; contributions to practice, contributions to policy, and contributions to theory. It must be stated however that my study, at a certain level, like that of a substantial amount of research recently published in this field, replicates longstanding findings that have been available in the literature for 20 years or more (Giangreco, *et al*., 2014).

- *Contributions to practice*

It is time for leaders and managers in schools, local and national governments to seriously scrutinise the roles and practices of classroom assistants (Giangreco, *et al*., 2005). To do this appropriately we need to fully understand, and appreciate, the various problems classroom assistants face and the constraints they have to

work with. Their feedback and contribution should be valued and respected (Bourke and Carrington, 2007). Crucially, there needs to be an expansion of conversation between classroom assistants and teachers. Schools need to create dedicated liaison time, giving both groups time to meet and communicate. This would increase the preparedness of classroom assistants to meet the ever more challenging and complex needs of some pupils in mainstream education (O' Brien and Garner, 2001a, Stead, *et al*., 2007). However, to achieve this would require an audit of current practice, and a more strategic view of deployment. Here the whole school needs to be involved, under leadership of the Head Teacher (Russell, *et al*., 2014).

- *Contributions to policy*

This study, and others, have highlighted that the role of classroom assistant is plagued by confusion, ambiguity and lack of clarity (Giangreco, *et al*., 2014). It is clear then that leaders and managers in schools, local and national governments, need to consider the important role that classroom assistants play in school culture and practice (Bourke and Carrington, 2007). The roles of classroom assistants need to be clear, legislated, protected and reinforced (Blatchford, *et al.*, 2012, Russell, *et al*., 2014). The array of employment challenges negatively affecting job satisfaction must also be addressed (Giangreco, *et al*., 2014) and professional development redefined (Bourke and Carrington, 2007). If this is not attended to frustration and dissatisfaction, resulting from low morale, may lead to classroom assistants leaving the role (Rhodes, 2006), or worse, continuing to accept their position even as it worsens.

- *Contributions to theory*

Through the tool of critical ethnography, this study has provided a way for classroom assistants to talk about their lived experiences, giving valuable experiential insights through which the reader is able to reflect and articulate their meanings and understandings regarding their work. Understanding this talk in terms of a Bourdieuian account of class, and gender grounded in emphasised femininity, through the conduit of Skeggs' (1997) notion of 'respectability' has

explained how classroom assistants create and maintain a sense of integrity and commitment to their work. The study has also highlighted the shared interactional strategies that both stress what it is to be a competent member of such a group, and simultaneously, influence the social production of occupational boundaries. However, the essentially repressive nature of class and gender for White, working class women still needs to be addressed through further research. What is required in the area of classroom assistants, is research on the scale and scope of Blatchford's work on teaching assistants in England and Wales, culminating in Blatchford *et al.* (2012) and Russell *et al.* (2013). Yet, any reassessment of the impact of classroom assistants in Scotland needs to move beyond thoughts on maximising the effects on pupils' learning and behaviour, on teachers and teaching. What also needs to be considered, in tandem to their effectiveness, are the concerns highlighted regarding low pay, poor conditions and status (EOC, 2007). Without seriously addressing the latter, the former may have little prospect of success. The climate for such research might well be ripe. Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon states that Scottish education needs change. She is clear that, "those who say it [Scottish education] is good enough are wrong" (Sturgeon, 2015: online). What she advocates, is a substantial programme of work to build on the good in Scottish education, whilst addressing what is not good enough. Hopefully, classroom assistants will not be overlooked. Yet despite this new climate I do have serious reservations that I now want to consider.

Reservations

Before proceeding, it is absolutely crucial to state that the issues raised by this research cannot be addressed simply by giving attention to the supposed deficiencies of classroom assistants themselves. What has been argued previously should not be taken to mean, "if we just treated teacher assistants better, clarified their roles, and provided appropriate training and supervision, many problems would be solved" (Giangreco, 2013: 96). Finding individuals at fault, or 'victim-blaming', is well known in academic work on women. Hence, it needs to be stated in the strongest possible terms that classroom assistants are not at fault, or responsible, for existing problems within schools. That responsibility lies

collectively with the leaders and managers in schools, local and national governments, who are answerable for safeguarding appropriate education for all pupils. Any conclusions I draw should not be seen as further reinforcing bourgeois standards and assumptions regarding White, working class women that are deeply embedded in our cultural, social and political life. Instead, what I want to argue is that the problems faced by class assistants need to be understood in terms of the structures in which they occur, and the gendered world in which these are embedded. Therefore it is important to situate discussion in the context of the broader societal and political contexts that have shaped, and continue to shape, the work of classroom assistants.

Here I draw on the work of Davies (1995) from the realm of nursing, as this resonates with my work on classroom assistants. Davies argues that the female dominated world of care work, such as nursing, or classroom assistant, needs to be understood in regards of the gendering of social institutions, and dynamics of devaluation this produces. Our culture and organisations are not gender neutral, but strongly patriarchal and within patriarchal culture, oppression is a reality for women. As a result, the work of women is trivialised and the women belittled. Any proper analysis of care needs to recognise that the status of the nurse, or other care worker, depends on the status of women (Fletcher, 2007). The issues of classroom assistants then are a reflection of a broader societal devaluation of women and the work they do. For Davies, Western culture has always portrayed femininity as bound up with dependency, emotion, intimacy, and nurturing others. Davies maintains that whilst caring is defined as a 'natural' role of women these very qualities are feared and denied in masculinity, where they are repressed and treated with contempt. Caring "…reminds us of the very vulnerabilities and dependencies that are edited out of masculinity" (1995: 183). Whilst these fears of masculinity remain unacknowledged, any discussion of such matters in the 'rational' forum of a public space will remain repressed and denied.

These societal and political issues tend to confine and construct the realm of the classroom assistant and the identity of the individual classroom assistant. One result of this is that women in care work can come to feel oppressed (Fletcher,

2007). And as Freire (1970) pointed out, such oppressed groups can become marginalised, leading to self-hatred and low self-esteem. Fletcher argued that nurses often display behaviour seen in oppressed groups, and I would argue that the same is true of the classroom assistants in this study. If women in care work perceive their own prestige as low, that they are not appreciated, that they are victims and that they are subordinate, they are likely act out that self-image (Fletcher, 2007). Such behaviour can include criticism, sabotage, undermining, scapegoating and bickering. All of which are evident in the talk of the classroom assistants. However, in work on health, Salvage (1983) argued that in reality nurses are secretly flattered by the stereotypes, especially those that emphasise dedication and self-sacrifice. This too can be seen in the talk of the classroom assistants, via atrocity stories. But to simply argue that if nurses, or classroom assistants, enhance their professional self-image, the collective image of the profession will reflect that change is not enough (Buresh & Gordon, 2000). Change is tied to larger societal and political issues that cannot be solved merely by individual reflection. What needs to be understood are the societal and political dynamics of class and gender oppression that sustain the status quo.

To challenge this status quo it could be argued that society should value care work more, and give greater respect to those who do it. And as respect is usually reflected through the pay and conditions of a particular occupation, a first step would be to increase classroom assistants pay. At present pupil support assistant posts[24] are being advertised in Edinburgh City Council at £14,577 - £16,437 per annum. However, in many cases these posts are part-time (27.5, 20, 16.5 hours per week), and pro rata. When this is taken into consideration, the pay is less than the current living wage of £7.85 per hour. Such low pay puts classroom assistants in a subordinate position. Increasing pay in line with, or above, the living wage would occur alongside improvements to training, conditions and career structure. All would demonstrate increasing respect for classroom and assistants, and although not creating a seismic shift in the patriarchal class system, would at least be a beginning, with the hope of other change as a result. In all likelihood though,

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[24] Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) is Edinburgh City Council's current nomenclature for classroom assistant.

pay is not going to change significantly given the £12 billion austerity cuts of the present UK government. And the historical reality of such cuts is that women, and in particular poorer women, are the ones that are hit hardest (Women's Budget Group, 2015).

Changing the lot of classroom assistants will not be easy. However, what classroom assistants have to offer to education is too important not to engage in this process of change. We have responsibilities to classroom assistants, as well as to pupils and their parents, and to education in general to have the best classroom assistants we can.

Reflections

As an ethnographer, one must continually try to be aware of how their own presence, or 'self', may have shaped the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Ethnography demands a critical analysis of practice. However, this becomes an issue in that "we make and are made up of the phenomena we seek to understand [becomes] the immediate paradox of our enterprise" (Johnson 1975: 160). Whilst this self can be seen as a resource that constrains the temptation to generalise and simplify other people's lives, it can also be seen as a problem. Hence, it is not enough to just acknowledge that the self intrudes upon our research. Instead we need to locate ourselves in the study honestly and openly, and rather than trust that we provide a detached voice of authority, acknowledge that our observations have been filtered through our own experiences and emotions.

Certain emotions, for instance those of fear, anger, shame and guilt are common in the research process (Wolf, 1996). Such emotions cannot be ignored, an explanation of their roots need to be included into the study. But, Western culture's emotion-reason dichotomy privileges the rational and objective pursuit of knowledge devoid of emotional influence (Oakley, 1981). Hence, much academia does not acknowledge emotions as part of social research. This results in the division of the researcher's voice, and we only hear what is expected, the dispassionate voice of the academic observer. The search for an authentic academic voice rejects what should be valued; emotion (Reger, 2001). To go

beyond this academic voice the researcher need to engage in the process of reflexivity in an attempt to acknowledge how their social locations influence their perceptions and analysis (Taylor, 1998). My study was an attempt to give an audience to the genuine voice of classroom assistants, what comes next is an attempt to voice mine.

As I stated earlier (Chapter 1) the subject matter of this research was something that I was personally very close to. The study was also inspired and motivated by a strong personal sense of injustice. So in this section I reflect on the doubts, insecurities and difficulties I experienced throughout the research process. Such reflections can be thought of as 'confessional tales' (Van Maanen, 1988), accounts of what the research did to the researcher. In particular, I focus on a prominent feature of confessional tales that Van Maanen calls the "fables of fieldwork rapport" (1988: 73), that is, the researcher's empathy and involvement with participants.

If their accounts are to be trusted by readers, researchers are expected to like and respect the participants of their study, and for this to be mutual (Van Maanen, 1988: 80). Ethnography then is a methodology that always needs to keep a balance between distance and empathy, between outsider and insider. However, it is recognised that in confessional tales, the researcher is always close at hand with the express purpose of trying to establish an intimacy with readers. This is attempted by developing a personal character to convince readers of the human qualities of the researcher. This may be done in a modest unassuming style that is 'open' about personal bias and character flaws, building up a self-portrayal with which the reader can identify (Van Maanen, 1988). However, Madison (2012) also stated that critical ethnographers will use any resources, skills, and privileges available to them. Rapport then becomes a complex issue, with Ditton (quoted in Punch, 1994) seeing participant observation as, "inevitably unethical by virtue of being interactionally deceitful" (1994: 94). This point led MacLeod to state that he sometimes felt "like a manipulative exploitative bastard" (quoted in Gunzenhauser, 2004: 90).

Whilst not all ethnographers feel quite as strongly as this, with hindsight my own actions could be questioned here. One of the personal consequences of my research is the emotional struggle. I still hold lingering doubts and guilt over a sense of betrayal that still concerns me because these are women that I grew genuinely close to. But essentially, these women were the objects of my study, and, although I can justify it academically, the fact remains that I did not tell them the full truth about my intent or make them aware of my objectives. The self that I presented was not altogether genuine but one calculated to establish rapport. And it worked; they trusted me. This leaves a feeling of dishonesty, in that I abused my power and violated their privacy. During my post study process of personal reflection I referred back to my personal relationships with both the research and the researched, by re-reading my autobiography (See Chapter 1). If anything this made the sense of betrayal worse. These women, who had welcomed me for years, came from the same working class roots as me. These were women like my mother. These were women like my sister, a teaching assistant herself. Yet, like some "parasitic" observer" (Reger, 2001: 608), I used them, and their lives, for my own academic gain. This still feels like a betrayal of trust that they had placed in me, and despite the fact that Katz (1996) states that many researchers feel like this, comes as little consolation.

I was overawed with the total support I received from these women from the very start. They appeared to position me as an equal and a friend, which is remarkable given our differences in class, gender and work experience. From the very outset they were open and interested, nothing was too much trouble for them, they gave freely of their own time, and they shared confidences. These women displayed care, passion, wit, selflessness, and knowledge. I hope I have portrayed each of them and their experiences with truthfulness, honesty and integrity. Yet despite this, I am aware that the academic process itself dilutes and distorts, and, ultimately, may not capture their spontaneity, diversity and difference (Skeggs, 1997). Ironically, what may have been an issue here though is over rapport (Miller, 1952), the potential of the researcher to become over-engaged and too familiar with the participants. This may bring about an 'ethical hangover' (Lofland and Lofland, 1984: 157). Generally over rapport can lead to a loss of

distance and perspective that may impact detrimentally on the process of research. Negative consequences of over rapport can include bias arising and penetrating lines of enquiry to be dropped. By personally identifying with some members' perspectives it is possible to fail to treat these as problematic. Over rapport with one group can also lead to problems with social mobility in the field and impaired relationships with other groups. Given this, there are issues here, in my relationship with the women, which I need to confront. As mentioned previously, the sample was not a homogenous group and, at Sunview Primary in particular, power differentials did exist. By building a rapport with the most powerful group at Sunview Primary, Ailsa, Heather, Leanne and Lucy, as well as the most vocal, Cara and Lesley, I may have weakened my rapport with the others. For the majority of the other women, this may not have been a serious concern but for Heidi, the outsider and scapegoat of the women, this may have had a much more serious impact. To her I may have been seen as too close to the dominant group for her to be able to fully trust and open up to me.

To try and resolve some of these concerns, perhaps the best strategy is to return to Becker's (1967) influential paper. Becker argued that it was impossible to do research untainted by our personal and political views. As a result he saw it as inevitable that all research will take sides. The crucial question then becomes whose side are we on? In critical ethnography researchers are on the side of a subordinate group and as a result can often be accused of bias. Becker reasoned that this bias occurred because there exists a 'hierarchy of credibility' and researchers who refuse to abide by this hierarchy are routinely accused of 'disrespect for the entire established order' (Becker, 1967: 127). Bias on the grounds of having too much sympathy for those being studied, for not showing a balanced picture, for neglecting to ask certain questions, for producing a misrepresentation, or for censuring established powerful groups (Becker, 1967: 124-125). As classroom assistants are a subordinate group in a hierarchical relationship, accusations of bias may well be forthcoming. This made the final act of writing fieldwork difficult to confront (Johnson 1975), but ultimately, a

decision about writing had to be made, and my responsibility had be to the voices of the women I had studied.

At a personal level, the women in this study achieved the role of becoming my dialogic other (Skeggs, 1997), challenging me to confront my own experiences, feelings and views of class, gender and power in particular. They kept me grounded with constructive feedback, even if this was being told I was a 'fanny' on a regular basis by Heather. I hope they appreciate the influence they have had on me and on the study. As a direct result of my contact with these women, and despite my academic and career progress having moved me further from my working class roots, I was left with a feeling of being "more, not less, working class" (Hey, 1997: 148). Even though there is no chance of returning to my past, these women reawakened the psychic and affective nature of my dormant class-consciousness (Reay, 2005), and made me re-examine my position in relation to power, and, more importantly, made me want to do something about it. But after all, is this not the purpose of critical ethnography anyway?

In Thomas's (1993) words, this research was undertaken because I wanted to know what was going on. Answers were attempted through a critical ethnography and an ontological argument that classroom assistants are a subordinate and disadvantaged group. The goal of the study was to seek some sort of change if only in terms of 'changes in cognition'; new ways of seeing the classroom assistants' lived experiences as a first step to changing them, as well as to recognise our own position in these relations of power and do something about it. It was found that classroom assistants tolerated very insecure jobs with low pay and status. It was argued that they justified and reconciled themselves to this position by drawing on talk from a moral high ground associated with mothering and care. By doing this, they saw themselves as superior to both parents and teachers.

Central to this was Skeggs' (1997) analytical tool of 'respectability', the constant performance of trying to get it 'right' and be 'proper'. Skeggs' work, using

Bourdieu's metaphors of capital and space, explained how class was central to the lives of the classroom assistants. This centrality of class operated not only in structural and institutional ways, but also by way of exchange value, or the lack of it, which constrained the women's movements through social space. Although these women did not have access to the forms of capital that could be exchanged through education and employment into symbolic capital and economic reward, nevertheless, they did make the most of what they had in terms of use value by making investments in caring for others, although this was often at the expense of focusing on themselves. Yet to stop caring for others would involve potentially greater costs for them as so few alternatives exist for such women in the labour market. For most this was the only practical alternative to shop work or unemployment. The caring role of classroom assistant gave these women a 'local trading arena' within the school in which they were at least able to establish use value in the interests of, and benefit for, others (Skeggs, 1997). Respectability, as a result of caring, served to increase use value through claims to legitimacy both inside and outside school. It showed the women as worthy, bestowed value on what they did, and differentiated them from both parents and teachers. However, it also resulted in them being complicit in their own oppression by policing themselves, as well as others.

In addition, the emotional aspects of class, along with the imagined, sometimes real, dialogic other, lead to feelings of insecurity, doubt, indignation and resentment for the women. Consequently, they were never able to feel comfortable with themselves and were always convinced that others would find them wanting. As a result, the women constructed themselves as particular sorts of 'women', influenced by public views of what it means to be a White, working class woman, and played out through performances of emphasised femininity. The subjectivity of these women was dialogic in that it required knowledge of where they thought they should be, where they thought they could be, of that which they can conceive as plausible and how they were positioned. But whilst this limited what they thought they could be, these women did adopt many positive and creative devices through their talk, particularly the atrocity stories

that displayed pleasure and irreverence and engendered their identities with use values.

Skeggs' work, however useful, must be viewed through a wider lens. Depending on one's political standpoint we currently live under a system of 'late capitalism' or neoliberalism, two economic and political frameworks that share many of the same salient features. Late capitalism comes from the work of Marxist economist Mandel (1972). However, what Mandel called late capitalism many commentators now refer to as neoliberalism. French economists Dumenil and Levy (2013) argued that modern capitalism, or 'contemporary capitalism' as they refer to it, has different phases and takes different forms. For them neoliberalism is the latest and newest form of capitalism. Both late capitalism and neoliberalism are defined in part by the prominence of finance capitalism and speculation. Hence, we now see transnational corporations as the dominant form of business organisation, with globalised markets and labour, multinational flows of capital, and mass consumption. Both also feature the increasing commodification and industrialisation of ever more inclusive sectors of human life, the enormous growth of the services sector, and the crucial role of state expenditure in propping up an economic system marked by financial instability and long-term stagnation punctuated by speculative booms (Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2008).

What Mandel did not predict, and perhaps where late capitalism and neoliberalism differ, was the broad political shift to the right by political leaders such as Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s. Their rise was complemented by ideologies of the 'free market', which facilitated, and were accompanied by, major changes in the character of capitalism. These involved a new form of governmentality, according to which the state 'governs' citizens in indirect ways. This notion that the 'hidden hand' of the self-regulating market was a better guarantee of national, even global, growth and prosperity than state action became more and more popular. So rather than being controlled or regulated by them, individuals were encouraged to autonomously choose to be consumers and productive members of society. This involved putting into place incentive structures and penalty systems that

encouraged particular behaviours without forcing them (Miller and Rose, 2008). Neoliberalism also requires an individualist ideology that masks the function of social systems in order to legitimate inequality. Such an ideology is centred on the idea of personal responsibility (Rand, 2008) and the concept of the undeserving poor (Morris, 1994; Levitas, 1998; Fairclough, 2000). For Dumenil and Levy (2013) neoliberalism was never meant to improve the economy. In fact it was undertaken with indifference to the failures and contradictions of an economic system inevitably driven towards disaster. Instead, neoliberalism should be understood as a class strategy designed to redistribute wealth upward toward an increasingly narrow range of individuals, and deliberately restore the hegemony of the upper classes. Such social policies, that seek to discipline the poor and the working class, are reminiscent of Marx's (1867) critique of capitalism in that the logic of capital more or less necessarily leads to the squeezing or exploitation of labour with the effect of polarising the labour market.

This is clearly evident in the United Kingdom where we have witnessed occupational polarisation through the 1980s and 1990s (Goos and Manning, 2003; Oesch and Rodríguez Menés, 2010). More recently, The Resolution Foundation, an independent think tank aiming to improve living standards for low to middle income families in the United Kingdom, in collaboration with the London School of Economics, produced data showing how the polarisation of the United Kingdom labour market intensified during the financial crisis and recessions of 2008-2009 (Resolution Foundation, 2013), the result being that the United Kingdom now has a two-tier labour market. The report also revealed that low and high-skilled jobs have expanded their share of employment while middle-skilled roles have seen a relative decline since 2008. From 2008 to 2012, employment in the lowest-paid third of the United Kingdom economy grew by 190,000 while the highest-paid third saw employment grow by 140,000. In the same period, employment in the middle third of sectors fell by almost 170,000. Low skilled jobs in roughly the bottom fifth of the wage distribution have also increased their share of employment over this period. This result is particularly important because it runs against traditional labour market theory that anticipated that jobs

in developed economies would become higher skilled over time. Particularly relevant to this study, in the area of care and health work, employment rose by 314,000 from 2008 to 2012.

The report also contained findings about how the crisis has hit wages and employment. It classified jobs in the United Kingdom labour market on the basis of their task content and scored jobs on the basis of their 'routineness', that is, on the basis of whether they involve routine tasks (such as secretarial work) that could easily be automated, or non-routine tasks (such as care work) that are harder to automate. Jobs were grouped into three categories: 'routine' jobs that have a high routine-intensity, jobs with a 'middle routine-intensity'; and 'non-routine jobs' with a low routine-intensity, to show how real wages and employment have changed in each case since 2008. The data showed how routine jobs have seen the greatest decline, while non-routine jobs have seen stronger employment growth. Indeed, non-routine roles actually expanded in absolute terms throughout the downturn. Interestingly, real wages show the opposite trend, with non-routine jobs having seen a bigger squeeze on pay than routine jobs. This may be because employers have squeezed the pay of non-routine workers in an effort to minimise employment losses. In the case of routine workers, there may also be changes in composition of work, as lower paid routine workers lose their jobs, leaving a relatively better paid population in work. The findings suggest that, in the short-term, employers may have held on to non-routine workers during the downturn by squeezing their pay, while letting go of routine workers whose jobs are easier to automate.

All of this is interesting when one considers the position of classroom assistants in regard to that of other care workers. Classroom assistants with their low, pro-rated pay, the practice of calculating annual leave entitlement in hours, rather than days, which has a particularly negative effect on their salary, disqualification from entitlement to state benefits out with term time, paid leave having to be taken outside term time, and lack of promotion opportunities (SCER, 2005; SCER, 2006; EOC, 2007; Warhurst *et al.*, 2009), have a very insecure labour market position, particularly compared to teachers. Yet they still could be considered to

be in a relatively strong position in the labour market when compared to other types of care workers. In the wider care industry, which employs more than a million people, there is an increasingly insecure model of employment with workers often on zero-hours contracts. According to a recent two-year investigation into this sector by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) (2013), figures show that up to 220,000 care workers, in addition to job insecurity, were getting paid well below the minimum wage. The main reasons offered by employers for not paying the minimum wage included making (illegal) deductions such as uniform costs, not paying for time spent training or travelling between jobs, and incorrect hourly pay rates. Whilst such breaches of the law are common, the enforcement of the national minimum wage, puts the onus on workers to raise a complaint against their employer, something they are often unwilling to do. However, at the same time a survey of more than 2,500 workers by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), found that zero-hours workers are just as satisfied with their job as the average United Kingdom employee, and more likely to be happy with their work-life balance than other workers. It is difficult to reconcile the two.

This does not mean however that classroom assistants' job security is not without threat. The over supply of low skilled female workers, with a committed ethos of care, contributes to their low pay and status. Under neoliberalism, such groups of workers are viewed as 'soft targets'. The reality of this is clear across the Scottish nation. Recently, Edinburgh City Council has outlined £7.5 million of education cuts, including £1.05m from its additional support needs service budget that will result in classroom assistants losing their jobs (The Scotsman, 2013). Further south the Scottish Borders Council is facing an £11m reduction in its education budget in the in the next five years (BBC, 2013a), whilst in the west, Glasgow City Council announced a £71 million package of spending cuts to be carried out by 2014-15 (Glasgow City Council, 2013).

Overall it has been estimated that 35,000 Scottish local government jobs have been lost in recent years through 'voluntary' redundancies and a policy of not filling vacancies. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the

umbrella organisation for Scotland's 32 councils, and the Scottish government, on the back of a two year pay freeze, recently negotiated a pay increase of one percent for 2013-14 and a further one percent for 2014-15. In reality this is a de-facto pay cut given rapidly inflating living costs, and, in real terms, pay for local government employees has declined by 13 percent in the last three years (UNISON, 2013b).

Yet in the dark shadow cast by such cuts, approximately 1,200 pupil support assistants (PSA) from ten schools in the Labour controlled Glasgow City Council were involved in a series of 24-hour strikes that began in October 2013 and lasted over a 17 week period (UNISON, 2013c). The pupil support assistants, from schools for pupils with complex learning needs, and those with physical, visual and hearing impairment, were involved in a dispute about extra duties. These duties centred on new responsibilities for specialist healthcare tasks and the administration of medicine, duties the council expected to be carried out in addition to core duties of supporting pupil's education. UNISON argued that these new duties represented a significant extension of the pupil support assistants' role and responsibility, and were more akin to healthcare than education. In response Glasgow City Council argued that the monitoring and administration of care for pupils with asthma, diabetes, epilepsy and anaphylactic shock are 'low level tasks' (BBC, 2013b). In addition, some pupil support assistants were also being asked to deliver what the council described as 'higher level tasks', including blood glucose monitoring, injections, gastronomy tube/peg feeding, tracheostomy care, catheterisation and catheter care (BBC, 2013b). UNISON believed that it was wrong to expect the lowest graded workers to undertake these tasks. Pupil support assistants were, at the time, amongst the lowest paid public sector workers in Glasgow City Council, with a salary of £11,800, below the annual earnings of a full time worker on minimum wage, and well below that considered necessary for a single person to achieve a minimum acceptable standard of living (UNISON, 2013c). Whilst UNISON argued that these new roles and responsibilities should be assigned to professional healthcare workers, the council claimed that pupil support assistants were receiving proper training to carry out these medical procedures. Maureen McKenna, the Education Director of Glasgow City Council

threatened to dismiss those taking part in the strike action and re-engage them on new terms unless they accepted compromise proposals,

> "*If agreement cannot be reached, an option which may be considered by the council is to give notice to terminate your current contract and offer re-engagement on a new contract that incorporate this change. However, I must stress that this is an option that the council would only consider reluctantly.*"   (Quoted in The Herald, 2013)

The council also brought to bear a strong moral pressure that the action was depriving vulnerable children with additional support needs of access to education. However, prior to the proposed fifth day of industrial action in November, the council produced a proposal. This proposal stated that pupil support assistants on their current grade will now only have to supervise pupils who can self-administer asthma inhalers and prescribed medicine. A new post is to be created that will incorporate providing support to pupils with more complex medical conditions, which will see UNISON members receive an increase of £2,500. However, such tasks will not include any procedures that health professionals are trained to do. The council also gave a commitment to provide specialist training and to update its policies and procedures on the supervision and administration of medication (UNISON, 2014a, 2014b).

Whilst this local and limited action will not challenge the forces and capitalism, it should nevertheless be viewed with hope. Positively it may signal a change of cognition for these pupil support assistants and represent a real first step in thinking about alternatives to their present position of relative powerlessness. It could be argued that the pupil support assistants were acting on the realisation that dialogic, and real, others are not justified in their judgements. The pupil support assistants could be seen as transferring their energy away from defending perceived difference to investing it more effectively in collective action. We need to acknowledge this action, and its results, as a sign of promise and hope to inspire others. Perhaps Agnes, Aileen, Ailsa, Cara, Heather, Heidi, Janis, Jean, Leanne, Lesley, Lucy, Moira and Morag will, potentially, see "class as a basis for challenge not shame" (Skeggs, 1997: 167/8), but whatever their course of action

we should give these women our admiration, our support, and not least our respect.

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Appendix 1

Response from Local Authority

From: "███████████" <██████@█████████.gov.uk> 05/03/2009
              18:26:23
Subject: Doctoral research – request to undertake research within two
              ███████████ primary schools
To: **Kevin Wright**
Cc: "███████████" <██████@█████████n.gov.uk>
Attachments:

Hi Kevin

Just confirming our telephone discussion earlier today. Your request to undertake
research in two ██████████ schools has been agreed.

████████████

Principal Educational Psychologist

Appendix 2

Research Ethics Checklist

This code applies to all research carried out in the CHSS, whether by staff or students. The checklist should be completed by the Principal Investigator, leader of the research group, or supervisor of the student(s) involved. Those completing the checklist should ensure, wherever possible, that appropriate training and induction in research skills and ethics has been given to researchers involved prior to completion of the checklist, including reading the College's Code of Research Ethics
http://www.hss.ed.ac.uk/Research/documents/codeofresearchethicsJuly2005.doc
This is particularly important in the case of student research projects.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes', please give details of how this issue is being/will be addressed to ensure that ethical standards are maintained.

1 THE RESEARCHERS	
Your name and position	Kevin Wright Lecturer, Department of Educational Studies
Proposed title of research	How, and to what extent, are the understandings and interpretations of inclusion held and made by teaching staff in Scottish schools nuanced by the rhetoric of inclusion promoted by official policy and publications, post the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.
Funding body	Moray House School of Education University of Edinburgh
Time scale for research	3 Years
List those who will be involved in conducting the research, including names and positions (e.g. 'PhD student')	Kevin Wright
2 RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, RESEARCHERS	
Those named above need appropriate training to enable them to conduct the proposed research safely and in accordance with the ethical principles set out by the College	No
Researchers are likely to be sent or go to any areas where their safety may	No

be compromised	
Could researchers have any conflicts of interest?	**No**

3	RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, PARTICIPANTS
Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort?	**No**
Does the research involve any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures?	**No**
Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way?	**No**

4	DATA PROTECTION
Will any part of the research involve audio, film or video recording of individuals?	**Yes**
Will the research require collection of personal information from any persons without their direct consent?	**No**
How will the confidentiality of data, including the identity of participants (whether specifically recruited for the research or not) be ensured?	**Names of institutions & individuals changed**
Who will be entitled to have access to the raw data?	**KW**
How and where will the data be stored, in what format, and for how long?	**Secure computer to which only KW has access; pen drives used to transport data only; held for duration of EdD/4 years, whichever is the shorter**
What steps have been taken to ensure that only entitled persons will have access to the data?	**Secure passwords**
How will the data be disposed of?	**Hard copies shredded; overwriting files**
How will the results of the research be used?	**EdD thesis only**
What feedback of findings will be given to participants?	**Summary of findings presented to/discussed with participants towards**

	end of research
Is any information likely to be passed on to external companies or organisations in the course of the research?	**No**
Will the project involve the transfer of personal data to countries outside the European Economic Area?	**No**

5	**RESEARCH DESIGN**
The research involves living human subjects specifically recruited for this research project *If 'no', go to section 6*	**Yes**
How many participants will be involved in the study?	**Approximately 25, though this may change as the process evolves**
What criteria will be used in deciding on inclusion/exclusion of participants?	**Voluntary informed consent**
How will the sample be recruited?	**Permission sought from headteachers known to KW; selected staff in schools to be invited to participate**
Will the study involve groups or individuals who are in custody or care, such as students at school, self help groups, residents of nursing home?	**No**
Will there be a control group?	**No**
What information will be provided to participants prior to their consent? (e.g. information leaflet, briefing session)	**Leaflet explaining the aims and research methods; informal discussion with individuals regarding the nature of informed consent; form to be completed by participants**
Participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please tick to confirm that participants will be advised of their rights.	☑
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent? (e.g. covert	**No**

observation of people in non-public places)	
Where consent is obtained, what steps will be taken to ensure that a written record is maintained?	**Consent forms to be retained by KW**
In the case of participants whose first language is not English, what arrangements are being made to ensure informed consent?	**N/A**
Will participants receive any financial or other benefit from their participation?	**No**
Are any of the participants likely to be particularly vulnerable, such as elderly or disabled people, adults with incapacity, your own students, members of ethnic minorities, or in a professional or client relationship with the researcher?	**No**
Will any of the participants be under 16 years of age?	**No**
Do the researchers named above need to be cleared through the Disclosure/Enhanced Disclosure procedures?	**No**
Will any of the participants be interviewed in situations which will compromise their ability to give informed consent, such as in prison, residential care, or the care of the local authority?	**No**
6 EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL BODIES	
Is the research proposal subject to scrutiny by any external body concerned with ethical approval?	**No**

Appendix 3

Informed Consent Letter (Overview)

Kevin Wright, Doctoral Student, The University of Edinburgh
kevin.wright@ed.ac.uk   Tel: 0131 651 6676

INTRODUCTION

My name is Kevin Wright and I am a lecturer in Primary Education at Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh. Prior to this I was a teacher in ████████ for 12 years, latterly involved in working with children with Additional Support Needs (ASN). This interest in ASN has led me to undertake doctoral research in this area. My interests lie in analysing government policy documents that define ASN and inclusion and comparing this to the interests of staff, which may not always be the same. In order to do this I would like to observe and interview a range of support staff in a primary school as it these staff that are on the frontline of implementing inclusion in Scottish classrooms.

WHAT WILL THIS INVOLVE?

There will be two major data collection activities. Firstly, I will observe support staff as they go about their daily duties. Secondly, I will interview support staff about their perceptions of their roles and wider issues. These interviews will be both group and individual and will last up to an hour. All information obtained will remain confidential and feedback of study's findings will be available.

WHAT IS 'INFORMED CONSENT'?

It is important that anyone participating in research gives his or her 'informed consent': this involves a written confirmation that you understand what the research is about, and that you are participating willingly. It is also an important principle that informed consent can be withdrawn at any time. This means that if you wish to end an interview, or you would like us to stop observing your class, you can simply ask us without needing to give a reason. If you already feel you are able to give your informed consent, please complete the declaration below. If you would like more information, please feel free to speak to me further.

✂………………………………………………………………………………...............
.
Name:

I agree to participate in this doctoral research. I have been provided with enough information to make an informed decision, and I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time without having to give a reason.

Signature:
Date:

Appendix 4

Informed Consent Letter (Interviews)

23 August 2011

Kevin Wright, Doctoral Student, The University of Edinburgh
kevin.wright@ed.ac.uk   Tel: 0131 651 6676 / 0780 9632778

INTRODUCTION

My name is Kevin Wright and I am a lecturer in Primary Education at Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh. Prior to this I was a teacher in ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ for 12 years, latterly involved in working with children with Additional Support Needs (ASN). This interest in ASN has led me to undertake doctoral research in this area. My interests lie in the role of support staff (Classroom Assistants, Auxiliaries, Nursery Nurses, etc.) that work with pupils with ASN. In order to do this I would like to interview a range of such staff in the primary setting as it these staff that are on the frontline of implementing inclusion in Scottish classrooms.

WHAT WILL THIS INVOLVE?

I would like to interview support staff about their perceptions of their roles and wider issues. These interviews will last between 30 minutes and an hour. All information obtained will remain confidential and feedback of study's findings will be available.

FURTHER INFORMATION?

If anyone wants to discuss my research I would be more than happy to do this. The research is purely for my PhD and there are no other agendas in play. Once again can I stress that all individuals, and the school, will be anonymised and that all information obtained will remain confidential.

If you would like more information, please feel free to speak to me further.

Thank you in anticipation for your support.

Kevin Wright

Appendix 5

Interview Schedule (Individual)

How did you come to this role?
        Background
        Previous experience
        View of role

What does the role entail?
        Training
        Preparation
        Support
        What are the needs of the pupils you are dealing with

What are the rewards of the role?
        Satisfactions
        Pupils
        Relationships

What are the frustrations of the role?
        Time
        Training
        Relationships
        School 'politics'
        Parents
        Policy
        Change

How important are relationships to the role?
        With whom
        How
        Why
        What goes wrong
        What could be improved

How do you think the role is viewed?
        By SMT
        By teachers
        By parents
        By pupils
        By others

What is your overall feeling about the role?
        Honestly

Appendix 6

Interview Schedule (Pairs)

Has the role changed?
        Significant others
        New knowledge
        Inclusion
        Policy
        HT

Have the pupils changed?
        Diversity
        Challenge
        Number
        Range of needs
        Behaviour
        Family
        Diagnosis

Does change affect you role?
        What types
        In what way +ve –ve
        Change in govt
        Change in LA advice/policy
        Change in school staff/management

What would you change about the role to improve it?
        Training
        Time
        Liaison
        Preparation
        Respect

Appendix 7

Job Description (Classroom Assistant)

███████████ COUNCIL
Job Outline

Post Title: Classroom Assistant
Service: ███████████████
Location: ███████ Primary School
Immediate Supervisor: Head Teacher

Purpose of the Job
To work as a member of the School Team in order to effectively promote children's development across the curriculum.

Major Tasks
1.To contribute to the effective organisation and use of resources
· Organising and maintaining materials and resources
· Preparing classroom materials and displays
· Maintaining and cataloguing collections of resources
· Providing relevant information to teachers' records and report on pupils' progress
2. To support the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom
· supporting children's play activities
· playing games and engaging in practical activities which develop knowledge and skills
· supporting literacy and numeracy development
3. To contribute to the care and welfare of pupils
· Building good relationships with pupils and encouraging good standards of behaviour
· Supporting care and welfare e.g. first aid
· Supervising non-teaching areas e.g. corridors, playgrounds, dining hall, and other school premises
· Supervising classes during "wet playtimes"
4. To support the needs of pupils in effectively accessing the curriculum
· Developing good teamwork with the class teachers and other staff
· Preparing the classroom for aspects of the day's work
· Providing appropriate praise and encouragement to pupils during tasks
· Providing support to pupils in their classroom learning e.g. use of computers

Supervisory Responsibility
None

Relevant Qualifications
A PDA qualification is desirable

Skills/Experience Required
Must be literate and numerate.

Demonstrate good communication skills.
Good skills using computers and other technologies.

Ability to work flexibly as part of a team.

Ability to respond to the individual and group needs of the children in a range of situations.

Enthusiastic, cheerful personality with an interest in working with children.

Must be able to form effective relationships with pupils, staff and parents.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Post Title   Classroom Assistant

Service Area   ███████████

Workplace   ████████ Primary School

Immediate Supervisor Head Teacher

Attributes	Essential	Desirable
Education & Training	Literacy and Numeracy Qualifications	PDA Qualification Have worked with children to support their literacy development in a one to one or group situation Have experience of supporting children with motor skills programmes as set out by a professional.
Previous Experience (Paid & Voluntary Work)	Experience of working with children	Experience of working with children within a school setting.
Knowledge/ Skills /Competencies	Awareness of safety factors. Knowledge of ICT. Ability to develop appropriate learning experiences as directed by the class teacher.	First Aid. Confidence using internet, simple video cameras, digital cameras, microphones, photocopiers and photo printers. A particular skill or interest in art, music, fitness or other relevant area.

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Personal Qualities	Ability to work flexibly as part of a team. Ability to respond to the individual and group needs of the children in a range of situations. Enthusiastic, cheerful personality with an interest in working with children. Must be able to form effective relationships with pupils, staff and parents.	Ability to adapt to change at short notice

Appendix 8

Job Description (Auxiliary)

███████████ COUNCIL
Job Outline

Post Title: Additional Support Needs Auxiliary
Service: ████████████ - Education

It is the philosophy of ██████████ Council that all children and young people have an entitlement to be valued as individuals and be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential within the educational system and the wider community.
In order to achieve this, auxiliary support may be provided for pupils who have additional support needs. We are currently recruiting Additional Support Needs (ASN) Auxiliaries to work with individuals or small groups of children and young people as required on a casual basis. The support given by ASN Auxiliaries should help the child or young person to develop maximum independence and enable access to the curriculum in as unobtrusive a way as possible.

Most additional support needs will be met within the normal classroom or pre-school setting. However, some schools have enhanced provision in specialised bases to support individuals with more severe and/or complex long-term learning and/or medical needs.

Purpose of the Job
To work with individuals and small groups of pupils both in the classroom and in out-of-class activities.

Major Tasks

1. To provide support for pupils to achieve targets (all areas of the curriculum) as set by the class teacher
2. To assist pupils to carry out Individual Educational Plans developed in conjunction with teachers and therapists
3. To contribute to annual review procedures for children
4. To work flexibly as a member of a team of support for children
5. To supervise pupils in both in-class and out- of- class activities
6. To attend to the personal care needs of pupils
7. To carry out first aid as required
8. To accompany pupils on educational visits
9. To assist with preparation of classroom materials
10. Other duties that may be determined from time to time, under the direction of teaching staff

Responsibility for Staff
None

Relevant Qualifications
Good standard of literacy and numeracy

Skills/Experience Required

1. Basic first aid training or knowledge is essential.
2. Previous relevant experience of working with/caring for children who have additional support needs is essential
3. Understanding of the importance of confidentiality
4. Ability to manage own time efficiently
5. Ability to work as part of a team
6. Calm disposition

████████████ COUNCIL
Person Specification

Post Title: Additional Support Needs Auxiliary (Supply)
Service: ████████████ – Education

Attributes	Essential	Desirable
Education & Training	Good standard of literacy and numeracy	Qualification/Training in working with children with additional support needs
Previous Experience (Paid & Voluntary Work)	Previous experience in working with, or caring for, children who have additional support needs. Basic First Aid training and/or a good knowledge of first aid	Nursing/care experience Previous experience of attending to the personal care needs of individual pupils. Previous experience in working with children or young people who have severe/complex needs
Knowledge/ Skills /Competencies	Good communication skills Ability to work under pressure Ability to manage time efficiently Enthusiasm and willingness to be part of a team	Computer Skills
Personal Qualities	Ability to develop and maintain good relationships with staff/pupils/parents Ability to maintain confidentiality Ability to be flexible in a variety of situations Calm disposition	

	Flexible approach to the job	