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Resilience and loss in work identities: a narrative analysis of some retired teachers' work-life histories.

John Kirk,
Senior Research Fellow,
john.kirk@londonmet.ac.uk

Christine Wall,
Senior Research Fellow,
c.wall@londonmet.ac.uk

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.

Working Lives Research Institute
London Metropolitan University
31 Jewry Street
LONDON EC3N 2EY
Telephone +44 (0) 0207 320 3042
Email: workinglives@londonmet.ac.uk
www.workinglives.org

Abstract
The article examines the importance of 'emotional labour' in the constitution of the 'teacherly self.' Deriving from a research project on work and social identity, the article explores the ways teachers negotiate the radical changes in the profession in recent years, and uses the notion of 'teacher resilience' to explore the ways teachers have reacted to the effects of neo-liberal reforms to education; reforms that have powerfully impacted on the more child-centred ways of working in the classroom and school environment. Using narrative analysis of the work-life histories of these retired teachers, recorded using oral history methodology, we examine structures of feeling that turn on notions of emotional commitment, resilience and loss in relation to the occupational identity of teachers.

This paper emerges from a wider project concerned with examining the relationship between work, identity and social action in three occupational groups, as part of the ESRC funded Identities programme[1]. Using historical and comparative analysis the experiences of three cohorts of workers from banking, railway work and teaching are explored with regard to intergenerational changes and gender differences within and between workers, and their relationship to identity formation, reproduction and change. For this paper, we focus on a cohort of male and female retired teachers, both primary and secondary, ranging in age from fifty-eight to seventy-eight. All of these teachers experienced the structural changes imposed on their profession in the late 1980s with the implementation of the national curriculum, and associated introduction of testing, inspections and league tables started by the Thatcher government and continued more recently by New Labour. Using narrative analysis of the work-life histories of these retired teachers, recorded using oral history methodology, we examine the emerging themes of emotional commitment, resilience and loss in relation to the occupational identity of teachers.

Firstly, we need to situate our research in relation to earlier sociological investigations of teacher identity using similar methodologies. One of the most substantial pieces of research is MacLure's work on teacher identity, published in 1993, which was based on a research project conducted with serving teachers which ran from 1987 to 1990. Central to that project, in terms of methodology, was a set of semi-structured interviews – 69 in all – with teachers in both the primary and secondary sector. These interviews took place in outer London, East Anglia and the industrial north, and sampled teachers from both rural and inner city schools. The particular historical context was significant. MacLure states that

> at that time – as now – the teaching profession was in an embattled state …New contracts and conditions of service had been imposed by the government, following long months of industrial action. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and Records of Achievement had all recently been introduced. By the end of the study the National Curriculum, assessment and local management of schools had also become law and added to teachers' current concerns (1993: 312).

MacLure's project assessed the impact of such policy changes on the working lives of teachers, and she cites media stories highlighting their detrimental effects in such

[1] Does Work Still Shape Social Identity and Action? ESRC RES 148-25-0038

terms as ‘teacher burn-out’, ‘innovation overload’ and ‘de-professionalisation’ (1993: 313). Her study addresses these developments through a series of interviews with teachers – what we will call for our purposes exploring ‘work-life histories.’

MacLure describes this approach as the ‘biographical attitude’, a methodology which increasingly privileges ‘informal, person-oriented genres such as biography, autobiography, life history, narrative and anecdote’ for making sense of social change and for shedding light on people’s hopes, fears, opinions and beliefs (1993:313). She suggests such an approach ‘lends virtue and validity to the research enterprise. By striving to remain faithful to subjects’ own values and experiences, or letting them speak in their ‘own’ voices, researchers can appeal against the charge of interpretive ‘theft’ of other people’s subjectivity’ (1993: 314). Of course, this rosy outcome will depend on how the researcher then interprets and employs those ‘voices’. MacLure suggests that ‘since (auto)biography tends to be a narrative genre, we may feel constrained to make the life plot ‘interesting’, according to some quasi-literary criteria’ (1993: 313). Of course, imposing a structure of some kind is intrinsic to the interview by its very nature – the interviewer formulates a set of questions and thus shapes response. There is already a set of assumptions at play here – how a life “unfolds” – which might spill over into the analysis of the work-life histories. To some extent this is what Bourdieu meant when he talked about degrees of ‘intrusion’ common to the interview situation (1991: 608). At some level the very construction of a set of questions that facilitates enquiry inevitably, in an important sense, pre-determines responses. In the formulation of interview questions we bring into play a structure: we start at the beginning and work through to some sense of an ending. Yet the process of recollection, of composure, of a work-life history can take its own course, too, as respondents engage in dialogical processes with cultural and social determinants that are not only the product of the interview situation but which are part of the wider socio-cultural milieu, both within the working environment and beyond it. We will return to this point later on.

MacLure argues that identity should be regarded as “a continuing site of struggle … [and] should not be seen as a stable entity – something that people have – but as something that they use, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which they operate. In other words, identity is a form of argument” (1993:317). Therefore claiming identity, she contends, is “also inescapably moral: identity claims are inevitably bound up with justifications of conduct and belief”(1993: 318). Rejecting ‘the idea of an essential or ‘substantial’ self …’ MacLure prefers ‘the notion of identity as a set of discursive practices’ (1993: 318). Thus, there is a denial of a ‘core’ identity, what we might call here a “teacherly-self”, that might be ‘ common to … all or most of the project teachers’, and instead the research ‘looked at how identity was claimed, talked about and otherwise used by the teachers for particular discursive purposes … exploring the categories which people chose in order to explain themselves, and how these categories were used in the construction of identities’ (1993: 317). So while MacLure points to the significance of context these contexts ‘were not predictive in any simple way of individual teachers’ attitudes, expectations or practice’ (1993: 318). To some extent, this process undermines the view of a stable teacher identity, one in which the private self and public persona are indistinguishable (see Wood and Jeffrey; 2002), a view accentuated by perceptions of the teacher as committed public servant with a clearly defined career trajectory and place within the wider community, producing what we might call a relatively homogenous structure of feeling marked by affinities and affiliations with each other and with a wider public based on a relationship of trust. MacLure wants to suggest a far more explicitly poststructuralist view of identity than the one implied here, seeing identity as shifting, fluid and discursively produced, the product of altering discourses around what it is to be a teacher.

Woods and Jefferey's (2002) later research both confirms and contradicts this position. They identify two significant contexts for their findings. First, like MacLure, they flag up the importance of organisational, institutional and structural changes within the workplace from around the mid-1980s. Secondly, and at a more macro level, they consider this as inevitably bound up, too, with the deep and profound changes perceived to have occurred in the western world over the past two decades and which have impacted on the fabric of everyday life in a range of ways. Here, they follow Giddens's (1991) arguments. Giddens points to a global shift in the nature of western societies whereby social relations become disembedded from local contexts – through emerging globalisation – leading to 'their rearticulation across infinite tracks of time-space' (Giddens in Woods and Jeffreys, 2002: 88). This leads to 'ontological insecurity', and, we would add, epistemological doubt. In other words, there emerges a disorientation with regard to everyday understanding of the life-world and our place within it, compounded by a sense that such changes cannot be significantly influenced or controlled by workers and citizens, and this structure of feeling is encapsulated in Ulrich Beck's notion of the 'risk society' (1992). Jurgen Habermas would define this as a disjuncture between system and life-world (1987), and we might also conceptualise this development, using Raymond Williams's categories to describe experience, as an increasing tension between practical consciousness and fixed forms (1977). Following MacLure's analysis, they regard the profound structural changes in education as key to understanding the altering self-perception detected in the teachers they speak to in the mid-1990s. The effects of the deep structural changes described above result in a new stress on 'economic rationalism, an emphasis on marketability, on efficiency … the growth in management systems and audit accountability and an attack on moral systems, such as child-centredness' (2002: 90), which revise education's priorities and purpose and thereby affect teachers' self-identity and positioning in the field. Consequently, teachers – often in mid-career – have had to re-think once stable identities, and re-orientate themselves around the new needs and demands of an increasingly bureaucratised and commodified education sector.

Neither MacLure nor Woods and Jeffery use Raymond Williams's formulation of 'structure of feeling' as a framework to explore the shifts in teacher identities described in their work, but here, in our exploration of the work-life histories of retired teachers who have lived and worked through the profound socio-economic, political and cultural changes of the late twentieth century we suggest that Williams's ideas are particularly apposite. Wood and Jeffreys largely concur with other commentators (Nias, 1988) that teachers once enjoyed a stable sense of self, one in which, as suggested above, their personal and public identity coincided, and which in Salaman's (1974) definition describes a clear occupational identity. Forming the core of this – and here Wood and Jeffreys are talking chiefly about primary teachers, though such observations are equally pertinent with regard to secondary education – was a practice of teaching which was overridingly child-centred and holistic, dependent upon a great expense of "emotional labour" with the notion of 'trust at its centre': trust as a key feature of work relationships with fellow teachers, with pupils and with parents (2002: 93). This represented a humanistic approach to teaching, definable by key qualities and concerns: vocationalism, commitment, recognition and respect. These are not only emotional categories felt and experienced, but constitute a structure of feeling with important moral and ethical dimensions to which we will return.

The impact of new policy making meant a radical reassessment of what the teacher was about – a cut into notions of what we call the "teacherly-self". The marketisation of learning, the introduction of the National Curriculum, and the use of inspection and

league tables began to erode the principle of child-centredness in the name of accountability and results (Wood and Jeffreys, 2002: 92). Teachers came to view this outcome as a growing disregard and disrespect for professional judgement leading to a loss of trust. Thus the established ethos of teaching is undermined – new policy initiatives from central government expose the teacher and chip away at their identity, and this is marked by a new emphasis on how they are valued and this emphasis falls on 'competencies, such as subject expertise, co-ordination, collaboration, management and supervision' (Wood and Jeffreys, 2002: 95). That structure of feeling –what Raymond Williams would call evidence of a 'practical consciousness' – which constituted the "teacherly-self" is forced into conflict with new, "official" forms which profoundly contradict established ways of "going on." What in fact seems to emerge is a widening alienation of the worker from the "product" – in this instance, the children. This leads to a project of re-assessment, retrenchment, or outright rejection or abandonment by teachers, as they engage with the newly prescribed role, classed by Wood and Jeffreys, as an 'assigned identity' (2002: 96). The insistent emphasis on results, on quantitative measurement of teacher ability, leads almost to a sense of persecution, too. Wood and Jeffreys quotes one of their interviewee's responses to this new dispensation: 'every [news]paper you open tells you you're not good enough, that we're responsible for society's ills' (2002: 97). There thus emerges a strong sense of loss in many of the comments recorded by Woods and Jeffreys, as teachers strive to adjust and come to terms with change. This feeling of loss, or failure, derives from an erosion of their autonomy in the workplace, triggering doubt about their own abilities, as well as a 'feeling of de-personalisation in a commodified world' (2002: 97). For some teachers this loss turns into a sense of failure and an inability to combine the new 'assigned' social identity with their core identity/teacherly-self. Woods and Carlyle (2002) have documented what they refer to as 'identity passages' of teachers under acute stress as they move through the 'traumatic separation from the old identity and the structures and cultures that sustained it' (2002:170). This experience is somewhat akin to that described by Giddens above: a sense of disembeddedness in relation to the life world, or lived experience. What we witness, then, is the disruption of that narrative of the self out of which identity emerges and is shaped over time. This sense of loss or disturbance felt by workers is not uncommon in other areas of our research, and we have certainly come across similar sentiments, or structures of feeling, in our work-life histories with workers from other sectors. Our research has attempted to think about how the notion of narrative operates in this context, and before we move on to examine some of the material it is necessary to say something about our understanding of this. We will also provide an explanation of an important concept used throughout this paper: the notion of structure of feeling.

"Composing" the self

We suggest that deep personal and emotional investment characterises the teaching profession. This idea of 'emotional labour,' referred to earlier, embodies this notion. Asking teachers to talk about their working lives, asking them to recollect and, in the process, organise a range of feelings, experiences and sentiments which shape, or have shaped, a working life is to elicit emotional responses. In approaching the work-life histories we employ the concept of composure, developed by the oral historian Alistair Thompson. Composure concerns narrative structure, highlighting the form a narrative takes, and we take this notion of narrative as significant for understanding how people make sense of their lives (see also Sennett, 2000).

Composure describes the process of remembering, though the term has wider connotations. Indeed, the idea of composure implies notions of the self as an ongoing project, constituting a metaphor for how people see their own lives and give them shape and meaning to themselves and for, or in response to, others.

Composing the self is not only a way of imagining, or re-imagining, the past, but of making sense of the present and situating oneself within it. Thompson argues that to compose or construct memory is invariably to 'use the public language and meanings of our culture.' (in Perks and Thompson, 1997: 300) This idea brings together two aspects with regard to identity and its articulation. First, 'we compose memories [or ourselves] which help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which gives us a feeling of composure' (1997: 301). This may involve repressing painful memories, or re-orientating them to fit better the present understanding of one's life and where one stands. It may even involve confronting those painful memories and "managing" them – which gives this concept a psychoanalytical twist. It may involve, too, the art of forgetting. Then secondly 'we seek composure', and through this 'an alignment of our past, present and future lives.' (1997: 301) But the key theoretical connection and the link between these two sense of the term, 'is that the apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public. Our memories are risky and painful if they do not conform with the public norms of versions of the past' (1997: 301). We are therefore, in this view, always composing ourselves in an intersubjective – that is, dialogic – relationship with what are perceived to be dominant narrative modes, legitimated by mainstream culture. This clearly refers to what we were discussing earlier – the possible emergence of a disjuncture between system and life-world, practical consciousness and official consciousness.

Thompson's formulations imply a set of codes and conventions already available within a culture for speaking about significant aspects of experience, in particular modes, in particular contexts, in particular times. Yet we may witness an inevitable tension between what might be viewed as hegemonic ways of seeing and understanding, and structures of feeling that are, in Williams's terminology, either residual, alternative or oppositional. The subject, in the very process of remembering, is composing the self and using the range of conventions and forms available within the culture for shaping experience. Moreover, in the act of composure – as suggested above - lies possible challenges to dominant forms and practices, hegemonic processes of societal incorporation into prevailing norms. What is important for Thompson, though, is that composure is never fully achieved, so that the work of composure does not produce in very many instances some neat narrative closure, a coherent and predictable pattern signified by a beginning-middle-end. (see also Sennett, 2000 and Bourdieu, 1991). Thompson suggests an open-endedness, an un-finishedness, characterises the memory-texts, or self-inscriptions, he analyses – so instead we will always come across tension, contradiction, blockage.

Aligned to this, we have found Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling useful, too. In many ways Williams's concept conflicts with the poststructuralist approach favoured by MacLure which appears to reject the notion of lived experience for discursive practice. While Williams, for instance, may accept the post-structuralist view that experience cannot emerge pristine and uncontaminated by ideology, he still insists that we need not see all experience as ideological, or accept that the subject is merely an ideological illusion, a product of a set of discursive practices, or scripts. Ideology, for Williams, *does* contain – in the sense of shape, limit – experience; but there still occurs the life-process, involving an effort after meaning, in the telling of stories in the widest sense of the notion. This suggests the intersubjective context in which experience and meaning coalesce: a dialogic process, where meanings are embedded at a fundamental level in modes of address and language use within specific cultural and historical contexts. Thus Williams asserts that 'a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world.' (1977, 21) In *Marxism and Literature*, he argues that signs are 'living evidence of a continuing social process, into which individuals are born and within which they are shaped, but to which they then actively contribute, in a continuing process. This is at

once their socialisation and their individuation.' (1977: 37) 'What we have', according to this understanding, 'is a grasping of reality through language, which as practical consciousness is saturated by and saturates all social activity, including productive activity.' (1077: 37)

But this must be seen, too, in the context of hegemony. Hegemony, for Williams, is a condition of practical consciousness (though not a fully determining effect on practical consciousness) so that 'the whole process of living – not only … political and economic activity', is shaped by hegemonic forces, 'to such an extent that 'the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense' (1977, 109). Williams sees hegemony as 'a whole body of practices and expectations' (1977: 109), and is more than simple indoctrination or manipulation. It affects 'our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meaning and values' (1977: 109). Williams points to the tensions inherent in lived experience, in which practical consciousness engages with hegemonic acts or forms, so that 'practical consciousness is always more than an handling of fixed forms … There is a frequent tension between received interpretation and practical experience', and here a tension emerges as 'unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison not yet come, often not even coming' (1977: 130). But the potential remains, so that alternative, or oppositional, perceptions may hold within them different ways of seeing.

What we see then is what Williams calls fixed forms – for instance, the newly emerged ideology MacLure, Woods and Jeffrey see as being imposed on teachers – becomes locked in tension within the complexity of practical experience (1977, 130), which is viewed as 'specifically affective elements of consciousness … not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelated continuity'. (1977, 132) Here, "feeling" exists within a framework, or structure, articulated as social *and* personal, the result of intersubjective social relations and processes, and in this sense there is something resolutely dialogic bound up with the concept of structure of feeling. Often this is a condition of pre-emergence, however, 'hovering at the very edge of semantic availability' (1977, 133), constituting practical consciousness which differs from 'official consciousness' (fixed forms) in that it is 'being lived, and not only what is thought is being lived' (1977, 131). Williams denotes this as 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become a fully articulate and defined exchange' (1977, 131).

This stress on feeling is also significant in thinking about the concept of "emotional labour" distinguishing the "teacherly-self," thus the concept of structure of feeling emphasises the affective elements constitutive of understanding. Moreover, structures of feeling are complex and variable; Williams defines this variability within a framework he terms dominant, emergent and residual, and we will use this formulation as a way of analysing generational responses that disclose significant changes but also important continuities. Thus it is that structure of feeling becomes a mediating term to define the continuing interaction between the individual and the social, and through such processes social change is registered and occurs; it is shaped by actors as it, in turn, shapes them.

"Emotional labour" as structure of feeling

Whereas Woods and Carlyle (2002) explain the 'self-renewal' of individual teachers in response to the stress of imposed structural and cultural change whereby 'a new personal identity is constructed, mostly through relocating and modifying the teacher

role' we would argue that the teachers we interviewed demonstrated considerable resilience in maintaining their personal identities as teachers (or teacherly-selves). This resilience derives from the continuity of a residual, historical structure of feeling that determines the notion of a teacherly-self as embodying the characteristics of caring, vocation and child-centredness. These personal characteristics were enshrined in educational policy with the publication of the Plowden Report in 1967, famous for the opening sentence of chapter 2, *'At the heart of the educational process lies the child'*. The Plowden Report, in relation to primary schooling, can be seen as part of a post-war consensus, developed by both educational practitioners and academics, on the most effective way to educate young children.[2] This consensus began to be eroded by political intervention during the 1970s (Rhodes Boyson's series of *Black Papers*) cumulating in the 1992 Report, *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools,* which dismantled most of the earlier framework for teaching set out in the Plowden Report. However, it is evident from our oral history interviews that the earlier structure of feeling continued to form the identities of many teachers despite the traumatic changes in the language, culture, and the way in which they were now instructed to go about their work, at both primary and secondary level.

This resilience can be partly explained by the importance of 'emotional labour' in teaching and how such emotions become situated in the language and behaviours used by the respondents. Zembylas (2004) has also stressed the importance of emotional labour, suggesting – a view constitutive also of Williams's notion of structure of feeling – that emotion acts as an vital mode of cognition which helps encode experience often within value-laden utterances where meaning becomes embedded in tropes and intonations which illuminates experience. Though much discussion of emotional labour has been couched in negative terms (the notion of the 'management of emotion' for purposes of exploitation, in Hochshild (1983) classic formulation; see also Rose (1996)), it is possible to argue that in the context of teachers' working lives, this is a resource that can be used with far more ambiguous, and positive, effects, as a way of resisting the potentially alienating effects the demand for 'emotional labour' from workers in service industries exerts (Isenbarger and Zembylas:2006).

In relation to this, and referring to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Zembylas (2004) highlights the importance of metaphors for making sense of experience and meaning. In particular, he argues that 'emotion metaphors indicate how someone feels about events, objects or people in his or her life' (301-2), and this links to our theme of emotional labour and associated concerns around senses of loss and failure. In the context here of the way retired teachers regard their working lives emotion metaphors offer important insights. Embedded in the utterance, and as product of wider socio-cultural mechanisms, metaphorical meaning can often go unnoticed, but such tropes reveal social relations and modes of cognition constitutive of the structures of feeling we will be examining in the following pages.

Narrating the "teacherly-self."

First, we will explore the story of P. who composes her work-life history in a way which reflects that sense of loss and failure of the "teacherly-self," under the pressures of the restructuring of education outlined above. Although experiencing a

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[2] We do recognise that there were some misgivings at the time regarding Plowden's strictures, and these are mapped out by Ken Jones in *Education in Britain* (1994), but he also argues there that there existed enough of a consensus around the report to take 'the ideas developed by progressive educators … to the height of their influence' (84), within the education and particularly concerning teacher training.

long career in education, her work-life history is overwhelmingly composed of recollections centred on her final years. P. is a retired teacher in her late 60s. She entered the teaching profession in 1963, as a maths teacher in a comprehensive school, one of the first to come on stream. She recalls that "it was a new school and, um, lots of new people coming in, people who wanted to teach in comprehensive schools …" Describing the experience as "a nice introduction to teaching", P. stayed at that school until her children were born and she took an eight year break from the profession, keen to return because, she told us, "I have never done anything else other than teach." Her return to teaching found her accepting a position in a pupil referral unit, teaching children excluded, or long-term absent, from school for a range of reasons – the term used at the time, she remembers with disdain, was "schoolphobics … the education officers would be picking them up or if it was middle-class parents they would be knocking on the education officer's door." This was to begin a period of considerable achievement in her working life alongside a demoralising struggle, finally leading to her early retirement from teaching.

What Wood and Jeffrey describe as 'assigned identities' are ideological impositions, the result of social relations within particular contexts of interaction. In the context here of radical restructuring, these teachers are asked to take up roles/identities contrary to the ones defining them for the bulk of their careers. As we will see a range of responses emerge, but we would argue that constitutive of the notion of emotional labour in this context is a propensity toward resistance to the instrumentalising of the profession among our respondents. Thus notions of struggle mark work-life histories significantly. P. is no exception to this. Building the referral unit became central to her work, and she remarks that "we were very, very successful and what we needed was more room …" yet despite the success, and the clear need, funding issues meant that "we begged and borrowed everything." The metaphors here reflect the tenacity needed to secure even relatively basic equipment. The notion of "begging and borrowing" perhaps more powerfully suggests the marginalized nature of the undertaking, but also the commitment of those involved, a commitment which embodies notions of emotional labour. Embodiment comes through also in a different sense in the following comment. Reflecting on working with "difficult" children P. was constantly asking herself:

> P. …what am I going to do now? How far can I go? How much can I push this child and, you know, what's happening at home? Although the kids… We were… It was very close. We were all very close to these children.
>
> IV So you must have felt very committed to the children.
> P. Completely.

Her "closeness" to the children reflects an emotional tie that binds them both figuratively and literally. This emotional tie manifests itself in caring for the young people in her unit. In the following passage P. reiterates the main points that made up the ideology of education implicit in the comprehensive system where she started her working life in the 1960s and the child-centred ideology of the Plowden Committee, demonstrating a seamless continuity between ideology and practical consciousness.

> And it was only by, by creating a very sort of, um, nurturing, um, primary school set-up in a sense that you could get these kids because the classroom was full of their paintings and articles and very much like a primary school classroom would be because that's the only room we ever had. So we made it a nice room. Um, because this is what these kids needed. They needed…

> In the, in the early days… Well, you know, I did it all the way through but particularly the phobic kids, they needed this space where they felt, ah, totally secure, safe, understood and, relaxed and then when you starting untying all those knots, then they'd learn. They won't learn otherwise.

Concerned for the child's well-being both in the educational context and at home, she is constantly assessing how progress can be maintained, and this is coded in metaphors of momentum: how "far" can she go, how much can she "push" the child on. But her actions are always shaped by encounters with external bureaucracy – the anonymous "Them" P. often refers to, in opposition to the "We" of herself and her fellow teachers in the unit – and thus the work-life history is composed dialogically reflecting the nature of such social relations. Her working life becomes increasingly more stressful.

> IV You kept working through what sounds like quite difficult conditions.
> P. Very. Very. I mean, because I knew… Because it went right back to my own experience at school, although I had a happy home background. I was just, you know, a little mouse, really, in a big school. But it… I just knew what it felt like. Or, no, I didn't know what it felt like but I, I had a sense of what it must have felt like, um, but those, the kids that I dealt with had the most horrible things happen to them. So I had really no idea but, you know, I was… I, I'd had a sense of what was going on and… But with, with this colleague's support, she gave us ammunition as well to fight our corner to say, no, we cannot have these two very, very different groups of very needy students together but that battle we lost because the money was coming with the excluded students and there was a lot of publicity and there was a lot of pressure from everyone to get these kids. We didn't have enough room, there wasn't enough sports. You know, it just was awful. So in the end what we did was, or what I said was, okay, they're not all coming together, I'm going to have part-time education for all of them. One lot would come in the morning, one lot come in the afternoon …

Empathy, clearly, is the dominant form of emotional labour expressed opening remarks. But further on metaphors of conflict underline the experience of struggle. P. speaks of needing "ammunition … to fight our corner", even though, in the end, the "battle" was lost, and then a deep sense of frustration, and failure begins to emerge. Arguably a sense of failure is felt more strongly the more deeply emotional labour is involved in workplace interactions. After P. left, the pain remained. Asked if she ever went back, she replies:

> P. I haven't, can't bear to go back – but the whole of that area now is, is a London Transport garage. So they extended… I don't know if you know. And the, the garage is on the corner and next to it, before the shops, was a building that was the child guidance centre and the careers office at different times. And that was our building and they knocked it down. So we had… So, what does that say about…?

She still feels a sense of ownership – "that was our building" – though the breaks and hesitations of her response indicate the emotional nature of her feelings.

B, born in 1942, went into teaching in 1966 and experienced the turmoil of the introduction of comprehensive education in her early posts. The first school was a hastily amalgamated former grammar and secondary modern, which was "complete chaos, absolute chaos". Working in this school for two and a half years was an "overwhelming experience' because it was 'a difficult school and a very difficult

situation to be in, and people were not really very happy, basically". B remembers this experience vividly in the following passage.

> And it was fairly horrendous really, because of the streaming, I mean the bottom streams… And they were just written off, those kids were written off really, by, I think by the hierarchy, and the Head was very, very weak, very, very weak. I mean he, he was, he just hid and hid in his room, that was my perception of him. I went to him with real problems like, you know, the kids are crawling on the floor looking up my skirt, sort of thing, he said, don't worry Mrs.V, you're doing a wonderful job, and just sort of pushed me back into the classroom. So it was that sort of setup.

But later, a new Head of Department arrived who had a clear philosophy of education and comprehensive education in particular which she found very helpful, so that by the time she left,

> the department was a good place to be actually. And I got to really like the kids, I have to say, and by the time I left there I really, I really liked them. I mean, we'd invite them here and take them out to Hampstead Heath and things like that, and…
>
> IV So you brought them home?
> B Yes, yes, and do that sort of thing with them, which I didn't really do so much as I got older. You know, when you're young you do, you do things, don't you? And, I mean, take them into town and take them to shows and things, and saw quite a different side to them, you know…

There seems to be a dilution, or, rather, an intermeshing, of the teacherly-self and the social self here, which echoes Salaman's definition of an occupational identity, which we referred to earlier. She left teaching for seven years to have her children and returned in the late 1970s.and continued working in secondary schools until the early 1990s when she took early retirement because of the increasing pressures imposed on teachers.

> Well I, I got to the stage where I hadn't, I wasn't, I wasn't a career teacher. I wasn't actually, I didn't want to take on the sort of responsibilities that would get me out of the classroom, partly because I didn't, either Head of Year or Head of Department, I didn't see, I didn't actually particularly want either of those jobs, so I stayed pretty much a classroom teacher which meant, with the advent of the National Curriculum I had an increasing workload. Increasing, increasing, increasing workload. It wasn't just a question of preparing lessons, teaching lessons, marking work; it was also a question of a huge amount of paperwork as well, in addition to all that. So the job sort of increased by about 50% I would say, over the next, from the time that the National Curriculum started to come in until, until I left. And I found myself, I didn't deal with that very well, I didn't, I don't think I dealt with that very well.

In remembering this stressful period in her working life B's description of her suddenly, insecure identity as a teacher is expressed through repetition of what she knew she was not - "*Well I, I got to the stage where I hadn't, I wasn't, I wasn't a career teacher. I wasn't actually…*" rather than being able to articulate what sort of teacher she actually was. Repetition is used again to quantify the enormity of her teaching load after the introduction of the National Curriculum; "*I had an increasing workload. Increasing, increasing, increasing workload,* and again in describing her sense of failure in managing it; *I didn't deal with that very well, I didn't, I don't think I*

dealt with that very well". The emotions aroused in remembering this period of her life are apparent, to such an extent to *compose* her recollection very nearly breaks down altogether. She goes on:.

> ….I just felt that I wasn't having any sort of other life, you know. I was working almost every evening for a couple of hours, and then several hours on Sunday, and [clears throat] you know, it was too much, it was too much. And I can remember one, one evening, I think it was probably near Christmas, December, so you know when things have got a bit ragged [clears throat], and coming down with one of those huge folders that we were issued with, you know, [unclear] National Curriculum, and saying, almost in tears, to my husband and my daughter, I've got to assess these children, got to write159 targets, how can I do it, you know? And there it was, all these programmes of studies and, it was just, it was absolutely ludicrous. It was ludicrous, and I think I just couldn't see a way through it, and I think a lot of people were in the same boat actually, but either they were younger so they had to, or they were quicker or something, you know. I think that the thing was that, you know, whenever you, any younger person coming into the profession arrives at a certain point and just takes onboard that, but if you've been through endless changes, it's terribly wearying. I think it did drive a lot of teachers out of the profession, [clears throat] I think it just wore me down, really. I think that was the thing. So I, I managed to negotiate an early retirement in 1996 when I was 53…

Experience here seems to be tipping into the absurd, a condition beyond her control and reflected in the rhetoric of 'siege' and 'nightmare'. But B's story does not end in failure. She returns to teaching for another five years to a school where the ideals of her initial years in comprehensive teaching in the 1960s are again being put into practice by a Head whose 'philosophy about children was quite wonderful, you know, about valuing every child, and actually putting it into effect … when I first went there it was just wonderful to see a school, a comprehensive school, serving a community, doing what it should be doing so well…' These last five years provided a reprise to B's work history, here the structure of feeling of the post-war years – a sense of optimism and belief in the futures of the children being taught, and in the validity of her own identity as a teacher were regained to the extent that B can talk positively of her own daughter's decision to become a primary school teacher.

> I mean she's a little bit like me in that she's not a career teacher I don't think, she had done other things and found them wanting, which I did too, and she, she actually loves children. I mean I, to me the most important thing is that you've got to, you've got to like children. If you don't like children, forget it, you know, it's not your subject that's the most important thing, it really isn't. And I always, I always got a kick out of the kids.

Here B's control and composure over her story returns in a clear endorsement of the sense of a teacherly-self expressed as an emotional commitment to the children and sense of vocation - the resilient and enduring qualities of a teacher.

The teaching profession is highly gender-segregated with women making up 54% of secondary teachers, 85% of primary school teachers and 78% of special needs teachers (Labour Force Survey 2005). Although both the teachers quoted above are women, and made explicit their emotional commitment to the children they taught, this is not a gendered aspect of the teacherly-self or the structure of feeling that makes up the social identity of a teacher, as the following extracts from the work history of P a retired male teacher in a LEA residential school, reveal.

P. trained as a teacher in the mid-1960s and then went to work in a residential school for 'maladjusted' children of both sexes run as a therapeutic community with lessons in the mornings and activities in the afternoons. P started out there as a young man and lived nearby. He described his work as 'difficult. But it was also rewarding as well.' The school was run by a charismatic Head with strong ideological opinions on child development, it had close links with both the Tavistock Clinic in London and also with AS Neill's Summerhill School in Leiston and as such was part of the English progressive educational movement. Every day started with a whole school meeting. As P put it:

> There was a very strong structure. The Headmaster knew how he wanted the structure to be and he knew how, how he wanted the school to run, because he thought that would be the best thing, but there was a children's meeting every morning and the staff and children sat around in a circle and it could last for an hour. Um, yes, there was our Chairman and questions and complaints and discussions and it gave him a chance to air, well, therapeutic insights into some of the discussions and complaints going on. You know, like, um, someone stole this from me and with discussion… I mean, it was both about, um, reparation and finding out what was going on. It was, it was obviously a way of keeping control of what was going on; no subcultures were being allowed to develop. But at the same time it enabled him to talk about wants and needs and not having this and, you know, stresses and strains. Plus, when, plus, very much more personal things, you know, upsets and tears and distresses, and all the various things that a group of kids, disturbed kids throw up, you know; sexuality, possessions, running away, not eating, eating, fighting, aggression, all the stuff would come out as daily complaints or questions.

P worked there for the whole of his adult life and eventually became Deputy Head but by this time the "old" school that P had joined had virtually disappeared in the face of educational policy changes made throughout the 1980s and 90s that made no allowance for a therapeutic model of education designed for children with special needs.

> By this time I don't think it was successful. It'd become a school with beds and it was really difficult because we were all struggling with what we now knew we had to be teaching, subject to inspection. Um, we'd, we'd lost all the old skills, the old Head had gone, the old staff had gone. We'd lost all the discursive skills, the therapeutic things were all banned. Whole lots of little, um, little responses and controls on behaviour became very difficult. There was a time when out of control children, you know, it came, it became a, a huge legal debate as to whether you could actually, physically touch, constrain or even comfort the child, and that still rambles on… And I remember one night on night duty, um, a child unable to sleep, you know, sometimes if a child is bent on a bit of trouble or totally disturbed in the night, one thing was to say, look, just go and sit in the boot room, Johnny, just cool down there and, um, your friends can get to sleep, and you know, I'll come and get you later on, okay? In other words it's a bit of a cooler, yes. So, I took this chap down to the boot room. This was all quite normal, I mean, you know, you had to do something. And, this is when we were talk, we were all talking about not touching, or only touching a child if there was not another adult witness, etc, etc. Normally, I would've, sort of, said, no, I would've put my arms round him and held him, constrained him, said, no you can't do that [bash his head against the wall], it's not good, if you're really feeling cross I'm going to have to hold you because it's not safe to do things like that. So, I

> didn't, and I said, look, son, I just hope you don't do that, and he did do it. He was a particularly disturbed big boy, and he did do it, and I thought to myself, oh God, I'd rather get into trouble holding a child than taking him to hospital with a cut head. Luckily, he wasn't injured, and that's when I said to myself, well, whatever the outcome of this discussion is, um, when necessary I will hold a child. And towards the end all my job was just to sit in the corridor leading down to the school block and, um, I, I simply became a, a fireman, you know, put out fires. You know, if someone got out of control in class I had to go and bring them out in whatever way, way I could and help bring them down.

For P. the entire structure of feeling, the cultural and ideological frameworks, that had supported his identity as a teacher had disappeared. P, although a senior member of staff was not only "putting out fires" but also "doing night-time duties and evening duties and all the other pastoral stuff, the newer teachers weren't doing that." P. described these new members of staff as:

> Well, younger, highly trained, very clever teachers, very good, who knew much more about education and the subject matter and recording and predicting than ever I did. Um, and they were great, and they had some really good educational ideas, and I used to share lessons with them and stuff like that, and learnt from them. Um, but they still needed, um, me outside to come and help contain an out of control kid, yes.

P. went on to describe how living through the changes demoralised him, in particular his sense of failure at being unable to understand or adapt to the introduction of lesson-plans, the national Curriculum and frequent assessments and inspections. He described the last four years as "desperately uncomfortable and difficult' and the final decision to close down the school as 'badly handled". Towards the end of the interview P slipped back into describing the type of day he had been used to in the past:

> Instead of having that meeting till, till the mid-morning, the children meeting till mid-morning when, you know, living together values, spiritual values even, not, not, nothing obvious, caring values were discussed, and plans made for the day, and then mid-morning to lunch time was strongly classroom, and teachers devised whatever they wanted to do, you know, within, and at the end of each half term wrote, wrote a vague half, half a page report of what they'd done, you know. I mean, I used to go through the Oxford Illustrated Children's, um, Encyclopaedia. I'd take something from A, acorn, we'd draw an acorn, we'd talk about it [laughing], or C, a crane, we used to make models of cranes. That was my favourite. You know, as simplistic as that. But it contained writing and sums, and obviously you had to do some sums and some spelling. Um, where was I, *I lost my thread* [italics added by authors]…[pause]
> Yes, and then, yes, that's right, then that was the classroom, and then the afternoon was activities. Then it was teatime and play and, um, the kids were given lots of time for themselves. They were given extra help and time for themselves to get their heads together.

P's emotional investment in this particular school was absolute, he was unable to adapt to the new 'assigned identity' of teacher which was imposed externally and never returned to teaching after the closure of his school. His story is one of loss and as he put "and what I can't estimate is how more difficult it was for me personally, for personal reasons," in comparison to other teachers who were able to ride out these changes and continue teaching in a different setting, but these reasons were not

revealed in his narrative. P was unable to continue speaking about the past – "I lost my thread" – and here a metaphor suggesting *stitching together* sees his attempt at *composure* nearly stall altogether, and the interview ended abruptly. P was unable to call on any reserves to maintain his resilience in the face of such a massive onslaught on his identity as a teacher when his specialised skills, knowledge and experience were rendered redundant. He now works as a part-time carer.

Conclusion

In a later discussion of life-histories as a method, MacLure (2003) considers the threat of the analyst's role as potentially 'stifling the voice of the subject' (119), so that the encounter might be seen to diminish interviewees and sustain 'the power and pre-eminence of the analyst' (119). In education research she suggests that there has been a rigorous attempt to resolve this by finding modes through which the "authentic" voice of the teacher-subject – or "teacherly-self" – can be heard. Yet she notes the continuance of two contradictory processes in the research method, reflecting a dualism marked by a deep tension, one which oscillates between a desire 'to intervene, analyse, interpret, or to let the narratives "stand" on their own terms' (120). The analyst shifts between these two points in an attempt to address the problems posed by life-histories: the distortion of data caused by bias, selective memory, nostalgia, all of which compromise the "authentic" voice. Some kind of intervention by the analyst forestalls this, and it is this act which MacLure finds questionable – and more questionable still is the assumption underlying the act: the search for presence in the "authentic voice."

She encodes this predisposition under the sign of 'mastery'; a metaphysics of presence and plenitude (122-3), a mode of understanding subjectivity which she had been critical of in her earlier work (1993). Thus even an interview method in which the researcher diminishes his/her presence through techniques designed merely to facilitate communication and not "filter" it, remains compromised by an in-built assumption that there is an essence in the first place – that "teacherly-self" to which we have referred – which it is the researcher's task to disclose. She goes on to foreground some alternative perspectives. She suggests the researcher focus instead on the range of discursive practices out of which the self is 'fabricated': the metaphor emphasising the multiple weaves, threads and meshes constitutive of identity (127). But MacLure overstates the case, one which insists on the view that at any moment the *texts* – the fabric – of a life are disentangling and reforming anew, so that ascribing, or even aspiring, to some stable identity is a chimera (almost a kind of false consciousness, in fact, which suggests an alienation from some core sense of being which MacLure refuses in the first place). Thus the "true" method for the researcher is the one that 'resists the temptation for a "one-way reading" and try and be responsible to the shifts and ambiguities of identity' (128-9).

We have used the term 'composure' to suggests some of these processes, without taking MacLure's poststructuralist view that identity is 'always a matter of copies, imitations and forgeries … is always deferred … never absolutely "there"' (131). 'Composure,' too, suggests an un-finishedness – but here the self is the product of a dialectical relationship between the engagements of lived experience and the *presence* of hegemonic forms, a negotiation the inevitable product of social relations and cultural practices articulated in the dialogic encounter, and we think that this idea helps us to understand both the private and the public nature of work-life testimonies and opens up important themes touching on work and identity. This is made manifest in the very "fabric" (to use MacLure's metaphor) of the testimony, though fabric here does not constitute so much the meshing of diverse discourses, but refers to the constitutive social relationships and interactions which pattern the language of the

interview itself. Furthermore, social relations cannot be so easily reduced to a set of discursive practices, as much postructuralist positions attempt to do, although they may be made intelligible through discourse in the end. Thus we have employed the concept of emotional labour to foreground structures of feeling which turn around emotions of failure and loss. Such feelings lie within the very nature of the utterance itself used to address change and continuity in a working life – thus reflecting Volosinov's understanding of the utterance engaging with the altering *evaluative purview* of the actor. Thus, 'new aspects of existence, once they are drawn into the sphere of social interest, once they make contact with … human emotion, do not co-exist peacefully with other elements of existence previously drawn in, but engage them in struggle, re-evaluate them, and bring about a change in their position within the unity of the evaluative purview. This dialectical generative process is reflected in the generation of semantic properties in language. A new significance emanates from an old one, and does so with its help, but this happens so that the new significance can enter into contradiction with the old one and restructure it' (1973: 106). Experience lies at the very heart of language in this conception, expressing structures of feeling which the technique of oral history as method powerfully reveals.

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