Care Matters in Higher Education: A Narrative Inquiry with a Community of Educators in a Technological University

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This is a story about care in higher education, documenting a group of colleagues in a Technological University, as we engaged in a narrative inquiry. It explores how we might sustain educators who care and our care-based pedagogies: asking, how can we keep care at the centre of what we do and who we are?

Care is embedded in relationships, and it is in relation that we see care in the storied accounts in this thesis. Our collegial approach and our 'climate of care' encourages us to teach in a care-centred way. Our supportive professional relationships provide an essential space for each other and for care. It is these 'pockets of care' within our institutions, that enable us to sustain care.

As this inquiry attests, we are increasingly negatively affected by neoliberalism in our institutions. The troubling dismantling of our climate of care is revealed as our inquiry unfolds. This research makes care work in the academy more visible and offers the possibility that it may therefore become more valued by our institutions (and less easy to dismiss). Our stories suggest that re-centralising care into our concept of higher education can potentially be a powerful corrective to neoliberalism. Our pedagogies and our way of working together can be viewed as a form of resistance or refusal. This focusses on the agency we have as educators and is a means of giving us hope to keep caring.

In this inquiry, care is demonstrated as an ontological commitment to our students and our colleagues. Care is not an individual pursuit, it is an understanding of the interconnectedness of self and others, and personal and social concerns. We care together, and the stories contained here, speak of care as a collective process. Drawing on the resonances across my participants accounts, I conceptualise presence as the cornerstone of a care-centred pedagogy. With mutual respect at its core, we are present to our students, both emotionally and cognitively, responding competently to their learning needs.

This inquiry offers a cautionary tale to institutions; that care is fragile and can be easily lost, if not valued and recognised as an essential element of third-level education. Care matters.

Chapter 1: Education and Care

For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

(O'Donoghue, 2008)

Introduction

This is a story about care in higher education. I have been a lecturer for 21 years, and care deeply about my students and my teaching. I work with a group of academics who have adopted a collegial and collaborative culture that is not typical in the university. I feel a strong emotional commitment to my colleagues; I care about them and feel cared for by them. I want to inquire into how it is that we enact care in our practice, locating us within the institutional and broader policy contexts that shape our subjectivities and pedagogies. I wish to amplify our way of being with each other and with our students. It feels that the space for care in academia is slowly diminishing. Institutional mergers, departmental restructuring, standardised systems; the language and principles of the market are encroaching on our ability to keep caring. I worry if care can continue to survive in an inclement climate. I want to explore how we might sustain educators who care and care-based pedagogies. How can we keep care at the centre of what we do and who we are?

This thesis seeks to bring you, the reader, on a journey as we explore care in our institution. It does not follow the traditional structure of a dissertation. Literature is woven throughout and used as a lens to understand our lived experiences as educators. We start here in chapter 1 with our narrative beginnings, locating our team and the issue I wish to explore. The second chapter offers a guide to the methodology I adopted. Chapters three and four present the stories of my colleagues gathered as we engaged throughout this inquiry. In chapter five, I re-engage with care scholarship to provide a theoretical framework within which to understand the construct and concept of care, whilst also discussing the broader landscape within which we live and teach. Chapter six documents the collective distillation of our experience of care in the institution. Chapter seven proceeds to amplify areas of significant learning for me as a result of this inquiry. Finally,

chapter eight, where I discuss the overall implications for my pedagogy and practice, completes our journey (for now).

This chapter, our 'narrative beginnings', introduces my participants and the motivations for undertaking this study (Caine and Clandinin, 2013). We begin our story by meeting the team in Ballylacken[1]. Throughout several institutional iterations, we have worked together and created what Nel Noddings calls "a climate of care" (2012b, p. 777). Although care is not usually positioned as central to our role as academics, it is fundamental to how my colleagues work and teach. Joan Tronto (2013) tells us that care is complicated. It is also complex (Mariskind, 2014) and ambivalent (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). I have conflicting feelings about whether I can continue to be an educator who cares. This inquiry will provide me with the space to reflect on this complexity and hopefully reconfirm my commitment to a care-centred pedagogy. Care theorists have focused attention on the invisible and undervalued labour that sustains our social institutions. Discussing my feelings of tiredness, I highlight the time and energy caring takes. This inquiry might help us better understand the forces that can deplete educators who care. I will briefly explain the methodology that I have adopted and provide signposts for how I will explore care, as it is embodied by my colleagues in their pedagogy and practice. I hope to carry out research that might nurture and sustain that which I wish to articulate and make visible.

A Community of Care

I began teaching in Ballylacken in September 2000, as did Pat, Leo, Helen, and Deirdre. Eamonn and Claire had joined the institute the previous year. Various colleagues have come and gone from the team, but this core group have remained. In recent years, Nora, Emer and Yvonne have become permanent members of staff. We work together in a shared office on the Ballylacken campus of Central Institute[2]. My colleagues are present in all aspects of this inquiry; from the early conversations in the canteen when I tentatively suggested I would like to focus on our team in my research. They are here when I think about the values that will guide this inquiry. They are ever-

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1   Pseudonym
2   Pseudonym

present when I practice an ethic of care as I navigate our research relationships. Even before I ever engaged with them formally as part of this inquiry they have been by my side, as mentors, colleagues, and friends. We have worked together for many years, and I feel that there is something precious between us that I want to articulate and highlight. This team embodies a relational ontology (Noddings 2012; Palmer *et al.*, 2010; Tronto, 1993). This is a view of human beings as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations (Gilligan, 1982). It is fundamental to how we teach and care for each other. We have created a soft corner, in a sometimes, hard institution.

Our college, Central Institute, is a multi-campus Institute of Technology (IoT), on the cusp of being designated a Technological University. It is this moment in time that I wish my inquiry to capture; this place, this institutional context, this group of people who have created a culture of working together and teaching that I believe is vital to make visible. We are a community of like-minded professionals, placing students at the centre of our pedagogy and our collegiality at the core of what we do and who we are. Yvonna Lincoln writes: "Community is a place where people care for each other" (2000, p. 249). Sara Ahmed (2017) suggests that communities of care are created through practices of self-care and care for others. I use this definition of community to describe the participants of this inquiry. We are a community because we care for each other.

I am curious to explore our pedagogical approaches, influenced perhaps by our student cohort, are there values that guide our teaching which would resonate with all of us? We have always had a high percentage of mature students on the Ballylacken campus. Tom Collins and his colleagues acknowledge the role of institutes of technology (IoT) in "opening new pathways" and "widening access to higher education from excluded and non-traditional learners" (2020, p. 9). In general, higher proportions of students from under-represented groups progress to IoTs than universities (Collins *et al.*, 2020; HEA, 2018a). These students may need more care and more support to navigate their journey in third-level education (Felten and Lambert, 2020; Motta and Bennett, 2018). I wonder if there is something common to all our approaches, something fundamental to how we view our students and interact with them. I hope that by slowing down I might step out of the busyness of teaching to reflect on some of the deeper issues of my practice and that of my colleagues. I also feel that my colleagues have something to teach us about how we can nurture and maintain relationship-rich pedagogies in the university.

Carelessness in Higher Education

Care is usually not positioned as fundamental to how we teach at third level and has received little attention in higher education pedagogy (Anderson *et al.*, 2019). The relational is not seen as central to our role as lecturers (Lynch, 2010; O'Brien, 2014). By the time students reach us in the university, we have adopted a very care-less view of their educational needs. Kathleen Lynch (2010) contends that this culture of carelessness is, in effect, a hidden doxa in higher education. But as recent research has highlighted, care has a key role in higher education; in good teaching and learning (National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2019); in post-graduate research supervision (Hawkins, 2019); and in student experience (Anderson *et al.*, 2019). Yet it is still often disregarded as an aspect of university teaching. Collins *et al.* (2020), in reviewing the workload allocation of lecturers in Institutes of Technology, speaks about the 'spare capacity' of staff. Each of our team teach between 16-18 hours of classes per week. This team's 'spare capacity' could be accounted for in our relational practice, in our pedagogies, in supervision relationships, in formal student mentoring and informal pastoral care, and in the time we spend on our collegiality and collaboration. I hope that this inquiry might shine a light on the energy and resources that it takes to enact care in our institution. I worry if we can sustain our little community of care, within the larger institutional forces that encircle us. I want to give us heart -to help focus on how we can continue to support each other.

There is a lack of theorizing about care, such that it is typically rendered invisible and devalued in the academy (Lynch, 2010). Lynch *et al.* (2007) argue that care is generally not viewed as a goal of education. Care is only recognised in education when we are training professionals, doctors, nurses, social care workers, early childhood educators or teachers. But even in care-centric programmes like these, care may not be valued or made explicit. As Maeve O'Brien contends, "the care frame needs to be more explicitly articulated as inalienable to all dimensions" of initial teacher education (2014, p. 2). In my experience too, as a lecturer in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and in Social Care departments, we have never critically interrogated the concept of care and it is not positioned as a central tenet of our pedagogy. I hope that this inquiry will offer the space for us to reflect on the centrality of care in our practice and provide the theoretical scaffolding with which to validate our approach.

The Ballylacken Team

My colleagues in Ballylacken care; about each other and our students. We know all our students' names. The office is always busy; students knock on the door as they call in regularly to meet with us. There is a tiny storage room off the main office that has hosted many caring conversations with students who are struggling or need some extra support. Last year when we returned to the office after the summer holidays, the entrance was filled with bags of gifts from our students. We hold regular check-ins with each class group, subsequently meeting as a team to discuss any issues arising. There is a deep level of respect for our students. It is not a 'survival of the fittest' model of academia. There is a felt sense of supporting all students; many of whom are coming from less advantaged backgrounds and are the first to go to college in their families and who might need extra support to navigate third level.

As well as stacks of books piled high on everyone's desk, there are boxes of games, giant Jenga blocks, puppets, arts, and crafts materials. It is not unusual to see Pat, Emer or Nora heading off to class with a game, art materials or some type of prop that they will use in their teaching. The office is noisy – many conversations start as someone is passing by. The photocopier has been the site of copious philosophical and pedagogical conversations. Over the years we have participated in many CPD events together. We have organised conferences on various themes; as well as being generative events in themselves, they also cemented the team. At the start of the academic term, we would gather and have a ritual; last year we each lit a candle and dropped a wish into a well we constructed with wooden blocks. It is fun too, there is a sense of conviviality and comradeship that comes from working together for many years.

Our team are all born and raised in Ireland. We are not a diverse team, either ethnically, racially, or socio-economically. We are all employed on permanent contracts in our college. Alison Courtois and Theresa O'Keefe's (2015, 2019) work documents some of the experiences of precarity in higher education and how this affects how and who cares in universities. Dowie-Chin and Schroeder (2020) caution us against the colour blindness of care theory, which does not acknowledge women of colour and minorities who often

carry more of the care burden. This study does not speak for lecturers of colour or ethnic minorities, or those on precarious contracts. Their experience will be different.

I invite you to embrace the stories and experiences in this inquiry for their contextuality, partiality and subjectivity (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). Caine *et al.* (2013) argue that by paying attention;

> *to the relational in-between spaces…possibilities arise to discover new*
> *ways of knowing and understanding, and also for profound change.*
>
> <div align="right">(Caine et al., 2013, p. 580)</div>

As we attend to our lived experience, the personal becomes foregrounded in relation to social, cultural, and institutional discourses (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). In this way I hope that we might build "a broader sense of care" in higher education (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1239). This is only our story, but in sharing this, we might tell a story that resonates with broader narratives/discourses. In amplifying a different way of talking about lecturing in higher education I hope to be part of a larger movement that values a care-based approach. I hope this inquiry will help me to locate allies, those who place relationships at the core of university teaching. I am drawn to the idea of re-storying, of reshaping a narrative. I want to "amplify" different voices and stories (Riessman, 2008, p. 223). Sometimes just speaking and naming something can be a political act. Thinking in terms of Stephen Ball's (2016) concept of 'refusing' the dominant ideology, I wish to highlight a different way of being in the university.

The Challenge to Care

In Ballylacken, we have generally smaller numbers of students in our classrooms, and this allows the space to care. I know my students' names and I form connections with them. I email if I have not seen a student in class for a while. I give assignment extensions if more time is needed due to personal circumstances. I do not use PowerPoint, rarely resorting to what Freire (1970) critiqued as 'banking-style' lecturing. I usually have a mix of theory input, group discussion, and reflection in my classes. I am passionate about my subject area and love it when my students are engaged in their learning. I always start class with a check-in and spend time contracting with the groups I teach. I encourage

classmates to form connections among themselves, by creating opportunities for group work and group assignments. My classes are lively affairs, I use lots of discussion and group work to co-create knowledge with my students. I hope to enable a learning climate which makes it possible for my students to flourish during their time in university, and to feel cared for.

My own experience of education was that care was slowly squeezed out as I progressed through second-level education. By the time I reached university, I did not feel in any way cared for. I never had a sense of connection to any of my lecturers. I wrote verbose essays, completed exams adequately, and attended lectures sporadically; that was enough to achieve a good degree in my alma mater. I had little engagement with academics. I would doubt that any lecturer knew my name; I did not look for or expect care from them. Academia suited me, it endorsed the intellect and encouraged a disconnect from the body (hooks, 1994). I feel my formal education has been in educating the mind. I could be falling apart, but once I could write a scholarly essay, that was all that was required. Privileging the intellect like this is what Nel Noddings (1992, p. 12) terms a "deadly notion"; it is a narrow view of what it means to be human. In the university, there is little attention given to the relational, caring self, which is central to education and indeed to human existence, according to Noddings (1984, 2005). Relationality and forming connections with our students are not valued and the cognitive is generally given primacy over the affective.

I wish to provide my students with an educational experience which values the affective as well as the cognitive. I am interested in the holistic growth of my students and also seek to encourage them to engage deeply with their learning. I understand my teaching as an intellectual, embodied, and emotional practice (Anderson *et al.,* 2019; Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994; Noddings, 1992). I hope I create opportunities for my students to "feel deeply and experience themselves within their education" (Barbezat and Bush, 2013, p. 3). Luigina Mortari (2016) draws attention to the etymological roots of education, *educare*; suggesting 'to educate' is to nourish, care for, instruct and form. Mortari's (*ibid.*) point extends education to include forming the subjectivities of our students, not simply filling their heads with facts. As the push for standardised content and assessment pervades the department I teach in, it is becoming very difficult to find the space to care for or 'form' our students.

For many years in our college, we have designed our modules around delivering named and specified learning outcomes to students. This year our department adopted a homogenised 'book of assessments' across all the campuses of Central Institute. Previously, we had autonomy in how we assessed our students' learning which allowed for flexibility in terms of responding to different abilities and composition of our student groups. Now we must teach not only standard learning outcomes but also deliver standard assessments. This means there is no tailoring to specific group needs, and no sense of agency in how and what we teach and assess. I find it very dispiriting. It undermines my professionalism and I feel depressed at the restrictions that it is placing on my practice. It is taking creativity and innovation out of the assessment process, as we seek to have 'standards' across all campuses. I realise that there are 'standardised' systems and discourses around us that can, at times, mean that it is challenging to care.

Systems can constrain a care-centred pedagogy but for some academics "being and being caring, is a tenuous position to occupy" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 4). I imagine every academic wants to think that they care. But the issue is in how they perceive their role as lecturers. Many of my colleagues in the wider institute would typify their role as covering content and imparting *their* knowledge. They might not think that our students are collaborators in knowledge generation. They would not necessarily value the relational aspect of university teaching (Lynch, 2010). Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that our role is to encourage students to become more rational; more autonomous; more independent. We can become blind to the complexities of our student's relational realities as we seek to privilege the intellect and autonomy in this manner. We can see evidence of this narrative in late submission policies that punish students if they are 1 second late completing an assignment. The student is expected to submit on time, regardless of what is going on in their lives. I have witnessed these policies being adopted in my department and yet felt powerless to contradict or counter this powerful 'student autonomy' narrative. I hope that this inquiry will give me the language and the confidence to counter these care-less systems and discourses. I believe that care matters. I hope that my doctoral journey might provide me with a deeper understanding of care and enable me to be an advocate for care in the academy.

The Toll Care Takes

This September, as another academic term rolled around, I joined a group of final-year students for a module that I will be teaching. We started with a 'getting to know you' check-in and chat. The students remind me that I have not taught them since first year and we discuss their studies over the last three years. I ask what they remember from the module I taught. I await the answer, imagining (hoping) that they can recall something useful from our time together. Niamh[3] answers, "what I most remember is the coconut tart". She recalls that I brought in cakes for the class just before the Christmas break. I had completely forgotten this gesture of care. I can hardly recognise that person who might have the time and capacity to bake a cake for her students. It feels like Niamh is describing someone else.

I feel a sense of wanting to disconnect and perhaps, even care less. I know this is due to the demands of my role, coupled with my care commitments at home. As Kathleen Lynch *et al.* (2015) point out, academia works best for those who are care-free, for those who can benefit from Joan Tronto's "privileged irresponsibility" (1993, p. 121). A few years ago, I took on the role of Programme Coordinator (PC) for a new degree programme in our Institute. The programme coordinator is a mercurial role. I was responsible for organising induction, course boards, assessment schedules and course promotion. Student support is also a large part of the role. The programme coordinator can be viewed as a bridge between the systems of the college and our students. It is difficult to quantify the time needed for it and categorise the tasks you are responsible for. There is no job description and no explicit payment or resourcing of the role; it is invisible.

Care theorists have drawn attention to the unseen labour of women, which is often the cornerstone of our social institutions. O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) term this labour, "the housework of the university" – mentorship, pastoral care, and undergraduate teaching. Neal and Espinoza have highlighted what they call "the devious nature of hidden labour" (2022, p. 2). They introduce the concept of "gendered labour" (*ibid*, p. 3) – the invisible, thankless work, often carried out by women, i.e., housework or family task management. Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues also contend that women do the "housework of the

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3   Pseudonym

organisation" through their social skills (Lynch *et al.*, 2015, p. 197). I previously naively described the PC role as doing the 'housework' of the programme. This is reminiscent of Federici's position that "by denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone" (1975, p. 3). The institution can neglect care because we take on the care 'as an act of love'. Care work is generally less recognised and less prestigious within the university (O'Brien, 2014). Although invisible, it was essential to create a caring environment for our students. I carried out this 'devious' work because I felt that it is vital for the students, in terms of mitigating some of the uncaring systems of a faceless institution.

This work is part of what Motta and Bennett (2018, p. 642) term "reflexive emotional labour" outside of the classroom, work which is often valued less than what is represented as the "important and essential labour of teaching". Arlie Hochschild describes emotional labour as "the management of feeling […] sold for a wage" (2012, p. 7). Emotional labour is the regulation of our emotions for the sake of facilitating a more positive emotional state in another person to create "the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place" (Hochschild, 2012, p.7). I see it as my role to create a safe and encouraging learning environment for my students. I also carry out this type of emotional management when I have to teach and work in ways that are at odds with my values or in an institution that does not value the care work of its educators. Neal and Espinoza suggest that "performing emotional labour results in burnout, depression, and detachment" (2022, p. 6). This helps us understand why we might have ambivalent feelings about care. It is so tiring, doing this care work and for it not to be valued by our institutions (Lynch *et al.*, 2009; O'Brien, 2014). Hochschild (2012, p. xi) also contends that as care is not valued by the metrics of success, it can create more stress for those who engage in the emotional labour of caring; this idea resonated strongly for me in terms of my stress levels at the moment.

As I reflect on the emotional labour involved in relational teaching, I am reminded of a dark winter evening last year. As I journeyed home from Central Institute after a cross-campus Programme Coordinator meeting, I remember feeling overwhelmed. I was exhausted. I felt I could not continue to teach full-time, undertake doctoral studies and remain as Programme Coordinator. Early the next morning I rang my Head of Department (HoD) and resigned from this role. This was a very difficult decision. I felt like I was

letting down my HoD, my students, and myself. I felt responsible for my students and the success of the programme. But bodies can become depleted by institutional requirements, as Sara Ahmed (2017) reminds us. And my body was tired and needed to care a little less. Ahmed tells us that feeling exhausted can be a signal of just what we are up against in our institutions. I hope that this inquiry might shed a light on some of the institutional forces that can drain educators who value care. I hope too that it will replenish my reservoirs of care.

Part of the impetus for this research was wanting to connect with the passion that I had felt in my early years in teaching. I fear drifting/becoming adrift from my values, my students, and my colleagues. The last couple of years has been bruising. Something has changed in my work environment that I can barely articulate but sense and feel in my soul. Sometimes lately, it seems like I am just delivering content, merely teaching to the assessments. I feel that I am in danger of elevating compliance over care in my classroom, falling into what Ailwood and Ford (2021, p. 158) describe as the "sticky net" of accountability, regulation, and outcomes-based education. I have lost my way in terms of what kind of subjectivities I am forming, what Gloria Dall'Alba (2012) describes as the ontological basis of our work in higher education. This inquiry offers me an opportunity to unsettle truths in my everyday practice as an educator (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). I am not sure I have inspired my students for a long time. I hope that by articulating what a care-centred pedagogy looks like, it might help me focus on my values and what brought me to teaching in the first place; that desire to care, nurture, guide, and help someone become.

'Wondering Alongside'

In searching for a methodological home for my study I encountered the work of education researchers Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000). I am researching care and relationships, and relationships are the context, process, and focus of a Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative Inquiry espouses care in research and the values and commitments of the approach resonated strongly with me. I am hoping that this approach will help me understand how knowledge about care and teaching in higher education is narratively composed, embodied in a person, and expressed in practice (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I begin this inquiry with "a sense of a search" and a curiosity about my

everyday experiences and those of my colleagues in Ballylacken (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

Stories are used as way of getting close to our lived experience so that we can, "by slowing down our lives, pause and look to see the narrative structures that characterize ours' and others' lives" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 51). I see myself as a collaborator, conducting an inquiry with my colleagues, rather than carrying out research on participants (Noddings, 2007; Palmer, 2007). Narrative Inquiry emphasises the power of stories, of telling our story, and also of owning our position in our research endeavours. My participants are "people living storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 145) and I am complicit in the world I study. I hope that you will get a layered sense of me as we travel through the research, a "nested set of stories" – mine and my participants (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 144). As Shaw suggests, I hope that I engage the reader "with some level of intimacy" (2017, p. 217). I will continue to trace who and where I am in relation to my colleagues/participants as our inquiry progresses.

In this chapter, I have located myself, the setting, the protagonists, and the central concern of our story. Introducing my colleagues/participants, who work in the Ballylacken office, I described our way of working together and our pedagogical approach. Tracing the centrality of care to how this team works, I discuss the challenges for educators who continue to care. I touch on some of the systems and discourses that can constrain a care-centred pedagogy. I wonder if 'climates of care' can survive as our academic institutions adopt systems and processes that continue to constrict care. Drawing on care theory, I outline the emotional labour involved in care, and how this invisible care work sustains our institutions. From my own experience, I outline the energy that it takes to do this work and also reflect on whether it is sustainable. I will revisit these motivations throughout the inquiry as my perceptions shift and my understanding grows (Clandinin and Caine, 2013). Making visible these justifications can enable you to become aware of how this work relates to your own understanding of the world, your subjectivity, and your epistemic frameworks. It is also an "important element" in the work of a narrative inquirer (Clandinin and Caine, 2013, p. 174). This inquiry emerges more from a wonder or curiosity, rather than a defined research problem or question; I hope to invoke a sense of "wondering alongside" us as I reflect on our lived experiences of care in higher education (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 14).

Laurel Richardson (2002) asserts that writing is a process of discovery. She tells us that writing can reveal our epistemological assumptions and help us critique and change hegemonic scripts within the academy *and* ourselves. It can also connect and form community and ultimately nurture our emergent selves. Ronald Pelias exhorts us to: "Write for your own cure" (2019, p. 152). I write for my own care. This is how I imagine the doctoral journey, as a process of care. It has created a space to pause, ponder and process, and hopefully re-energise me (and my practice). Agreeing with Caine *et al.*, I see myself as "always in the process of becoming" (2013, p. 176). Jean Clandinin and Janice Huber (2010) suggest that the researcher's life and whom they are becoming is also under study in a Narrative Inquiry. I am an emerging researcher. I am evolving as a teacher. I am exploring my caring and emotional self in my professional practice. John O'Donoghue's (2008) quotation at the start of this chapter suggests that a beginning was quietly germinating, waiting until I was ready to emerge. Thus, the outcome of a Narrative Inquiry is not only a dissertation but also potentially, the self. Education, in this sense, is a practice of care, and a process of learning to become.

A brief overview of the protagonists of our story

Ballylacken	A small, rural campus, part of the larger multi-campus Central Institute, on the cusp of merging with another Institute of Technology and becoming a Technological University.
Leo	One of the original members of our team, Leo and I joined Ballylacken at the same time. His whole career has been in education. He plans to retire soon.
Yvonne	The most recent appointment to Ballylacken campus. Yvonne worked as a Social Care professional before moving into higher education.
Deirdre	Joined Ballylacken in 2000, coming from a Community Development background. Deirdre has a strong commitment to social justice and development issues.
Helen	Helen started work in Ballylacken in September 2000. Her interests are in Social Policy and Youth work.
Nora	Nora joined the team in 2019. Her background is in Social Care practice and Social Work.
Claire	Claire joined Ballylacken in 1999, she and Eamonn were the original members of the Institute. Accompanying one more intake of first years will see her to retirement.
Eamonn	Eamonn has spent a long career in education, in secondary and subsequently third level education. He started working in Ballylacken in 1999.
*Emer	Emer worked in Early Education and Care before joining Ballylacken. She does not appear in Chapter 3 or 4, but she was part of many inquiry conversations and features in Chapter 6, in the account of our group gathering.
*Pat	Pat joined Ballylacken in 2000. He has a deep commitment to social justice and praxis. Pat does not appear in Chapter 3 or 4, but he was part of many inquiry conversations and features explicitly in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 2: A Narrative Inquirer Emerges (Eventually)

The canteen is buzzing with chatter and laughter. I sit with a group of my colleagues in the Ballylacken canteen on the first day of the new term. There is an air of excitement as the canteen fills up after the months of summer stillness. I am eager to chat about my impending doctoral journey. Eamonn asks if I know what I will be researching. The story of us, I reply.

[Field Text: Research Journal, September 2018]

Introduction

As I thought about documenting 'the story of us' I knew that this inquiry had to be deeply relational; how I enacted my research had to mirror how I teach and work with my colleagues. My engagement with my colleagues/participants had to embody a caring ethos. These initial thoughts directed me towards Narrative Inquiry. According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), Narrative Inquiry values subjective and situated knowledge, rather than definitive answers; it favours research that is specific, rather than generalisable; and it advocates for a shift from an objectivist stance to one that acknowledges the value of the relationship between researcher and participant. I cannot simply "subtract" myself from the inquiry relationships, as I live and work in this landscape with my colleagues (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 4). Although I knew all of this on a cognitive level, I found the process of writing into this position hugely challenging. I often fell into writing in a detached, disembodied voice, seeking to write myself out of the story at many junctures. But this story is inextricably part of me; this thesis documents my journey too, as I lived and learned with my colleagues in Ballylacken throughout our inquiry.

In this chapter, I write about how I engaged with my colleagues to understand and articulate our care-centred practices and pedagogies. In Narrative Inquiry relationships are centrally positioned as ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Relationships are core to all aspects of this inquiry. Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, I detail the journey from field texts to interim texts, and from interim texts to final research texts. I discuss Jean Clandinin's (2013) twelve touchstones of Narrative Inquiry, which she

suggests can provide validity and rigour to our research endeavours. I also address ethics and reflexivity in relational research. Viewing care as a philosophy for how I live and work, I adopt a care-infused methodology to carry out my research. This echoes Clandinin and Connelly's declaration that Narrative Inquiry is "a way of life" (2000, p. 78). I hope that I have created the conditions that I wished to inquire into, enacting what I sought to explore.

'In the Midst'

Narrative Inquiry has many forms, but I draw heavily on the work of Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (Clandinin, 2006, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 1998, 2000; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, 2006). Jean Clandinin (2013, p. 203) describes the narrative inquirer as "in the midst": I am in the midst of my life, the lives of my colleagues, and the larger context of living and working together, in a relational world, in a higher education institute in Ireland. Parker Palmer (2010) tells us;

> *We can know a relational reality only by being in relation to it-not keeping*
> *our distance, as in the objectivist mythology.*
>
> (Palmer, 2010, p. 28)

I engaged collaboratively with my participants at all stages of the research, "understanding inquiry as a negotiated research process" (Caine *et al.*, 2013, p. 576). I did not seek to 'mine' their experiences for truth but to be a fellow 'traveller' as we co-constructed meaning together (Kvale, 2007).

Narrative Inquiry resonates deeply not only with my values but also with my ontological and epistemological commitments. According to Caine *et al.* (2013), it is important to be clear on our commitments about knowledge and the nature of reality when using the term 'Narrative Inquiry'. There are different strands in Narrative Inquiry; "realist, postmodern and constructionist" (Riessman and Speedy, 2007, p. 429). My ontological and epistemological stance positions me within a social constructivist strand of Narrative Inquiry. A social constructivist framework views "knowledge and knower as interdependent and embedded within history, context, culture, language, experience, and understandings" (Etherington, 2007, p. 600). I view narratives as socially constructed

rather than as a representation of reality, with a single meaning (Esin *et al.*, 2013). Kim Etherington advises that when we view the world and its grand narratives as socially constructed, we can begin to deconstruct fixed beliefs, and "invite other ways of thinking" (2005, p. 21).

During our research discussion last autumn, Helen reflected on the trajectory of our conversation;

> **Helen***: As a process…it made me feel old! I felt that idea of reflecting back over 20 years. I'm sure there are loads I've left out in that 20 years. So, it made me think about just how much you forget. Just how much of, I suppose, who we are and how we are right now comes out of all of that experience.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Conversation, October 2020]

I am not searching for an objective, universal truth; agreeing with Donna Haraway (1988) who argues for;

> *Epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.*
>
> (Haraway, 1988, p. 589)

Helen shows us how we are situated knowers, "we are products of our time and situations" (Noddings, 2007, p. 130) and also how "narration is the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities, and realities" (Chase, 2011, p. 422). The stories here tell of the care and carelessness that we experienced in our institution over the course of this inquiry. They capture moments in a moment of time.

Twelve Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry

According to Clandinin (2013), there are twelve touchstones that a quality Narrative Inquiry must meet and that researchers can use to judge the validity and rigour of their study. I was guided by these touchstones, they provided welcome way markers on my journey through this inquiry. The first two are: narrative beginnings and explaining justifications (the personal, practical, and social motivations for the inquiry as addressed in Chapter 1). I will discuss the other ten touchstones in the remainder of this chapter: attending to temporality, sociality, and place; having a commitment to understanding lives in motion; negotiating entry to the field; moving from field to field texts; moving from field texts to interim and final research texts; being in the midst; recognising and fulfilling relational responsibilities; negotiating relationships; interacting with relational response communities; and attending to multiple audiences. Clandinin (2013) suggests that narrative inquirers must attend to these touchstones if they are to engage in research that is sound in its ethical and methodological components.

Lives in Motion

I have documented this inquiry as it unfolded over two years, it is not static or happening in an ahistorical context. Narrative Inquiry attends to three commonplaces; temporal, personal and social, and place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). It pays attention to both the temporal nature of the research *and* the researcher's experience. The social commonplace details the relational nature of both the experiences of the participants and the researcher. The inquirer pays attention to the internal conditions (for example, emotions) that shape participants' ways of framing experience and how those conditions may have been shaped by larger narratives (for example, culture). I focus too on my relationships with my colleagues. These relationships preceded the inquiry and will last long beyond the inquiry. My experience in this team and my institution shapes how it is I approach this inquiry and ultimately, what will be foregrounded and focussed on.

Claire's reflections in our research conversation, echo the three-dimensional inquiry space;

> *Claire: I'm conscious that we're reflecting at a particular time. This is a particular space and a particular thing. So, if you had been doing this reflection this time last year, would it have been different? And it probably would have been very different, for a whole lot of reasons, but especially because we would have imagined that life would continue on as it had… The second thing from my point of view, is I'm not starting out in teaching anymore. I'm at the other end of it. I have been in Ballylacken since just after John [her youngest child] was born. He's 22 this Christmas. He was only six months old when I joined. So, it's been all of their lifetimes. So that's probably influenced whatever I think about things as well.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Conversation, October 2020]

As Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) suggests, our identities are intimately linked with our experiences in a place. I am interested in the impact and importance of Ballylacken on our identities as educators. Claire measures her professional career in terms of her children's lifetime. She also reflects that this inquiry is very much a product of this particular moment in our history and experience in the world. Narrative research "looks backwards and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 140). This inquiry looks back to our formation in Ballylacken and looks forward towards our emerging position as a Technological University. It looks within to understand how our subjectivities are moulded by the contexts we work in, and outward towards the broader policy and social contexts of our professional lives as we enact a care-centred pedagogy in higher education.

Research Timeline

The first meeting to discuss our research took place in June 2020, just before the summer break. We reconvened in September 2020 for a group conversation. We discussed how we might engage together throughout this process, and I outlined the on-going nature of consent in a narrative inquiry. I then met with Leo, Yvonne, Deirdre, Helen, Nora, Claire and Eamonn over October and November 2020, for our one-to-one inquiry conversations.

I transcribed all conversations and sent back to each participant between November and February 2021. I made any changes requested and sent back to each participant again. I emailed everyone a copy of the re-storied account and I met either online or in person to discuss these.

Over that Spring until early Summer of 2021, I storied our initial conversations, developing and negotiating our interim research texts (chapters 3 and 4). After negotiating these narrative accounts, I then sent chapters 3 and 4 to all my participants. From Autumn 2021 to mid-April 2022, I immersed myself in the scholarship of care literature, aiming to further make meaning of our research encounters and subsequent re-storying. This distillation is documented in chapter 5. In May 2022, our team gathered to have our collective discussion, outlined in chapter 6. This chapter was sent to all participants, and I reengaged with Eamonn, Helen and Nora around the storying of our collective experience.

Over the summer months of 2022, I composed two further research texts, (chapter 7 and 8) and added in the Postscript for each participants' story. Chapter 7 aims to make visible the narrative threads across our storied accounts. Chapter 8 documents and seeks to capture my feeling of hope as our inquiry is coming to an end. Finally, in September 2022, I had compiled a full draft of the research and sent this to each participant, again checking that everyone was comfortable with how our stories and experiences had been depicted. I felt nervous as I pressed 'send' on the email with the attachment of my final draft to my participants. I hoped that everyone would feel heard and represented and that no major changes might be requested at this late stage. But I had made a commitment to keep going back, and this was the final piece to ensure that I had honoured that obligation. Narrative inquiry is a negotiated research process, and with that, comes a promise to weave together the storied accounts and narrative resonances of our inquiry.

In June 2023, as I prepared to submit my completed thesis, I added a postscript to my own story in chapter 8.

Entering the Inquiry Field

I have created a timeframe above, although I understand that a Narrative Inquiry does not complete at a set time as such (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Our story did not begin on this date either. Narrative inquirers view themselves as coming alongside participants as our stories and "social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). So, in this sense, I came alongside these stories in the summer of 2020. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) use the term 'field text' rather than data. Field texts refer to co-compositions between researchers and participants as they inquire alongside each other into experience (Caine *et al.,* 2013). The field texts in this study include; research conversations, my research journal, emails to and from colleagues, personal vignettes, policy documents[4], and field notes after team meetings or incidents that have occurred over two years, which all combine to capture our experience. Each of these field texts is important for interpreting field experiences, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

A week after receiving ethical approval for the inquiry in March 2020, I was attending class at Maynooth University. We had just come back after lunch for an afternoon session when the imperceptible ping of phones could be heard around the room. There was a palpable sense of unease. I checked my phone. The Taoiseach had just announced that schools and education facilities would close the next day due to the health emergency posed by the Coronavirus. My mind was racing. I could not focus on the session. I heard nothing of what the facilitator was saying. During the break I tried to ring home, the network was down. It had an almost 'end of the world' feeling. Images of zombies, wandering neighbourhoods decimated by the plague, ran through my head. Questions about the subtleties of doctoral research deserted me as I focussed on getting home and figuring out how this would all impact me, my family, my students, and my research.

On March 12th, 2020, the Irish government announced a two-week closure of all education institutes. This was subsequently extended into the summer of 2020. The Coronavirus accelerated exponentially in our communities and became part of our collective experience and collective trauma. In higher education, we immediately pivoted

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4   See Appendix 2, p. 191.

to teaching online, grappling with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and technology, while trying to stay connected with our students. It was not clear at first whether we could meet in person for our inquiry but, when the government announced a further strict lockdown in October 2020, I knew that all our interactions for a substantial part of the inquiry would be online. Clandinin and Huber describe being in the field as living alongside our participants, "settling into the temporal unfolding of lives" (2010, p. 438). Within a Narrative Inquiry, the term 'field' term refers to where experience takes place; I did not enter the field, I was already in the field, but now this was a fully online space.

Initially, I struggled with the inquiry happening in a virtual world. It seemed difficult to marry a Narrative Inquiry, the idea of being immersed with participants, in the midst, with the distance of online meetings. My whole imagining of how the inquiry might proceed was disrupted (as was the world of my participants) as we all adjusted to the new normal of social distancing and Covid-19 restrictions. So, I feel I missed much of the intimate detail that I had hoped to document as I lived and worked alongside my colleagues in the office in Ballylacken. Clandinin and Connelly write that Narrative Inquiry is about "close contact, daily conversations, frequent meetings and working alongside" participants (2000, p. 129). All the incidental meetings by the photocopier, the chats before and after meetings, the coffees, the philosophical musings in the canteen, and the lunchtime walks, were gone. We met regularly online, for what we called virtual 'caring coffees', but this did not replace the sense of shared connection we had when we worked in close proximity together. It was a fragmented, uncertain, anxious time, where we were told to stay apart, to stay well. This was deeply at odds with the subject of my inquiry, the importance of interdependence, connection, and care. Eventually, I had to adjust to the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic and life at that time, so I decided to engage online with each of my participants during the autumn of 2020.

Leaning-in to Lived Experience

The nine people sharing an office in Ballylacken agreed to be part of the inquiry with me. We initially met online as a group where we discussed the proposed study. I detailed the unfolding, emerging nature of a Narrative Inquiry and the notion of ongoing consent. We had a generative group conversation, sending me off on my research journey with a strong sense of group support and engagement. In the autumn of 2020, I began to have scheduled

research conversations online with Leo, Yvonne, Deirdre, and Helen. As the winter drew in, I met with Nora, Claire and Eamonn. Pat and Emer are not represented in the early research conversations; they engaged in later conversations, and our group discussions.

The purpose of our conversations was to get a sense of my colleagues' lived experience as caring educators. I was worried that these conversations would not be the same as if we had met in person. And they were not. But because our relationships were already established and secure, we moved quite fluidly to meeting in a virtual space. Also, we were all spending 16-18 hours a week teaching online, with many meetings online too, we had become very accustomed to digital spaces over that period. Ronald Pelias (2019, p. 144) exhorts us to metaphorically "lean in" to the emotional experience and empathise with people. I noticed during these interactions that I was leaning in towards the laptop, literally trying to bridge the virtual gap and connect with my participants. Rosanne Beuthin writes that narrative interviewing involves as much "connection, authenticity, and compassion as possible" (2015, p. 127). Because of our shared history, we connected on a virtual platform with ease. I chatted with everyone for a few minutes before I turned on the record function on the computer. At the end, I turned off the recording too, and we debriefed before we finished. Beuthin (2015) details carrying out research in person, with the tape recorder on the table between her and her participants. She felt the recorder was a distraction and that it influenced what was being co-constructed. I did not feel this technological distraction; online, the recording function happens almost outside of your awareness.

Lobe *et al.* (2020) suggests that to ensure successful online interviews, a set of instructions should be sent to participants, requesting minimising disturbing factors, such as other applications open or social media, silencing phones, etc. I did not follow their advice; I trusted my participants would be present to our conversation and they were. Sara Ahmed (2021, p. 12) wonders about the effect of carrying out research online in our homes: "What does it mean to be at home when you tell the story?". There were of course some interruptions, as we all grappled with working from home and our care commitments. Everyone tried to carve out a quiet space. Leo moved from his kitchen table to his favourite chair in his sitting room "to get comfy". Yvonne and Helen met me in their walk-in wardrobes – an intimate space that minimised the chance of interruptions. I was privileged to meet people in their sitting rooms, spare rooms, kitchens, walk-in

wardrobes, and bedrooms. Moving to this online space, evened out some of "the unseen cloak of power we wear" as researchers (Buethin, 2015, p. 128). In the intimate spaces of their homes, my colleagues felt comfortable and at ease – power was balanced out.

I positioned these initial encounters as 'reflective conversations' rather than interviews. I am very much present in these conversations; it was a dialogue, influenced by narrative perspectives on interviewing as a two-way conversation, to which I actively contribute (Riessman, 2008). I follow threads from earlier conversations or bring up something that occurs to me as the person is speaking. When Nora is describing an element of her practice, I remind her of an incident that happened a few years ago with a group she was teaching. This prompts her to discuss a key area I was interested in exploring with her. In the interviews, I tried to get a balance between giving space to my participant to speak and articulate their experience, whilst also holding the idea that we were co-creating this conversation. I was influenced by Marjorie Orellana's (2019, p. 93) suggestion that we are "not aiming to secure the data" or "get something" from the conversation but should aim to enter "into communion" with our participants. I tried to enter the space contemplatively so that I could navigate the balance between my own story and reactions and my participants' stories.

I focused on being present in our encounters, as Riessman (2008) describes being emotionally attentive, engaging, and listening. And navigating the balance between listening and when to contribute to our conversation. Eamonn and I discuss how the process felt for him;

> **CA:** *I was quite excited and almost a bit emotional even as I thought it, about us having the conversation this morning. I look forward to having that and that we can have the space together, I think is lovely.*
> **Eamonn:** *Absolutely. And likewise. If you were never doing research, it's a conversation that I'd still love to have. And we've had lots of these little, smaller conversations over the years that have been informal, that had been very much in this space anyway. So, it seems very organic, natural.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Conversation, November 2020]

Riessman (2008) emphasises the importance of reciprocity, equalizing power imbalances, and creating equality as much as possible during the narrative interview process. This was a balance – understanding that the teller of the story leads the way, to let the conversation go where it is going, without over-directing, but at the same time, not pretending that we were just having a chat. I did have an agenda, but I think in the end, I just wanted to connect, to be present. I was missing this interaction so much due to the isolation of Covid-19 restrictions. So, as I moved through the process of meeting all my colleagues, I noticed an easing, a sense of acceptance and connection in the here and now of this virtual space. I felt I was an active participant in co-creating these conversations, allowing myself "to follow all threads of the story as it unfolds, to be genuinely curious and to ask, engage, be spontaneous, and to give up control in the interview" (Buethin, 2015, p. 128). In our conversations there was an "in depth probing" but it was carried out "in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 109). There was an ease and energy around our conversations that is built on a foundation of trust and care earned over many years of working together.

I asked Deirdre at the end of our conversation– how did this feel?

> **Deirdre:** *It was lovely CA; it was like therapy! I like talking anyway and being an extrovert, things come into my head in conversation, so I loved it. It felt empowering. I felt you were listening. I liked the way you don't have set questions and you let us flow. It's a conversation.*
>
> [Field Text, Research Conversation, October 2020]

My conversation with Claire was much more challenging. She posed questions that I reflected on for weeks afterwards around my position in the research.

> **Claire**: *I feel sometimes that maybe there's a sense of you wanting to find this care and maybe it's not there in the same way as Nel Noddings speaks about it and perhaps there is. There's always a tension between the researcher finding what they wanted to find or not and authentically holding with the other person's perspective. I know your process is also about coming back and forward with it, so that will be good.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Conversation, October 2020]

Days after our conversation I am still ruminating on Claire's comment as I reflect in my research journal;

> *Am I finding what I am looking for? Was I hoping to say, here is my definitive guide to being a caring educator? Claire seems to infer that I might be shaping what emerges from my research. I am influenced by Nel Noddings' conception of a pedagogy of care. However, as I write now, I feel that I am seeking to understand how each of us, in our own way, embody care, not to produce a template for a pedagogy of care.*
> *I have what the French call 'esprit d'escalier', a retort thought of too late: Of course, I am influencing the research; it is hubristic to imagine otherwise. She cautions me to listen to my participants' perspectives, this has challenged me to reflect on my role as a researcher. I feel this is a core aspect of how I am carrying out care-full research; to be fully present with participants and open to what emerges.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Journal, November 2020]

As I read this field note I can see the struggle I am having, at times I think that I may have lost my way, I do not know if I am listening to my participants' perspective. I know that I cannot bracket off my subjectivity as a listener, and I tried to stay alert to where my concerns might override what my participants share and how this might influence the strands and threads of meaning that I subsequently explore in my research text. I am "part of the storied landscapes" of my participants (Clandinin, 2013, p. 82). Being part of the story complicates writing the story. This was not a simple process. Sometimes the tangles are very difficult to untangle. Ultimately my sense-making is mediated through my subjectivity, and the relationships that are at the core of this inquiry. By going back continually to my participants I had the opportunity to check at all stages whether I was re-presenting them as they would want to be and that I honored their perspective, experiences, and voice in this process.

Crafting Stories of Care

I approached the transcription process as an opportunity to make sense of our research encounters. I did not approach it as a technical task to be achieved, understanding it more as an opportunity for building a connection and familiarity with my participants' lived experience. As Sara Ahmed details her own transcription work, I too listened "slowly and carefully to each person's words" (2021, p. 11). I paid attention to what was said, to tones, and to emotional responses and kept a record of my thoughts and questions as I transcribed. I sent each transcript back for comment to my participants. Clandinin and Huber (2010, p. 11-12) suggest moving from field texts to interim research texts, which are viewed as part of a process of sense-making, and begin to answer questions of "meaning, significance and purpose" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 121). Interim research texts are narrative accounts of experiences from the field; they are a way of retelling and reliving experiences through the continued involvement of participants in the co-construction of their stories (Clandinin, 2013).

Analysis in Narrative Inquiry is viewed as a process of meaning making or re-storying, that is, retelling participants' stories of their experience to articulate broader significance (Caine *et al.*, 2013; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). Analysis does not just happen through the coding of transcripts; it can take place at any time, sometimes within the research conversation itself, during transcription, in conversation with my colleagues and in supervision, in my research journal, and during each iteration of the chapters in this thesis. Clandinin and Connelly tell us: "What is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship" (2000, p. 95). 'Analysis' in this sense is a fluid, emergent, co-created and ongoing process. Kim Etherington (2007) suggests that when viewed through the lens of relational inquiry, data gathering and analysis, can be viewed as a more harmonious and organic process.

Following Riessman (2008) I viewed our conversations as a collaborative exchange in which we jointly constructed the story and meanings, and from which a detailed account is generated. I carefully listened and re-listened to our conversations. Listening, more so than re-reading, so as not to reduce a living, embodied experience, to mere words on a page. It was a process of tuning in to my participants, being present to their experiences and their stories. I took notes as I listened, allowing me to pay attention to the nuances

and tones. I reread the reflections I had noted down prior to and immediately after we met. I was influenced by Kim Etherington's book, *Trauma, the Body and Transformation*, where she respectfully allows each person to tell their own story and resists the urge to use extracts of stories "to validate a previously held theory" (2003, p. 179). Caring research entails honouring each of my participants' unique experience, not 'splicing and slicing' the transcripts, extracting data as evidence of themes. In the subsequent writing and crafting of the story of each of our encounters, I amplified some areas and moved others into the background. Over a period of months from February to the summer of 2021 I visited and revisited these emerging storied accounts. This process was an instinctive and creative form of analysis.

It was important to me that I honoured my participants' voice and experience by creating a separate 'story' for each person. I have termed these compositions 'storied accounts' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 134). I spent a significant amount of time crafting these stories. Ron Pelias tells us that the "essay reports what was learned, argues for a point of view" whereas a story can "show someone coming to a new understanding" (2019, p. 66). I sought to present a new narrative that weaved my participants' voices and my voice, alongside the meanings I had discerned in our conversations. For me, composing these stories became a way of giving meaning to experience (Bruner, 1987).

In my first iteration of the 'storied account', I realised that I had edited out everything that I had said in the conversations. Again, I had inadvertently adopted the "view from nowhere" that Haraway (1988) critiques. The second iteration is a better representation of our conversation; a dialogic space that is created in relation to each other. It is a storied account, rather than an actual representation of the research conversation. I am visible in the conversation; it is evident where I prompt or steer the conversation. You can see that I am not an unbiased observer, my story interacts with my participants. In making my presence transparent, it illustrates how this might impact on my meaning making. I am owning my subjectivity by highlighting it; not trying to claim some omniscient state of objectivity. I wanted to send back a living document that honours my participants and make them feel heard and met by me. I crafted the story, as Ron Pelias (2019, p. 144) advises, "from a position of care" rather than some objective, detached position.

In my second iteration I drew on Kim Etherington's work. I was guided by her outline of what constitutes a "good" research story (2003, p. 196). Good research stories must;

- *Contribute to learning and demonstrate understanding.*
- *Open up creative, new ways of thinking.*
- *Resonate, emotionally and intellectually.*
- *Sustain the reader's interest, and*
- *Something happens to change how the main character thinks or feels.*

(Etherington, 2004, p. 83)

Extending Etherington's list, I added;
- Does this account capture the essence of the other's person's experience?
- Does it make my presence as a listener and as an interpreter visible?
- Does it show what was happening for me at the time and also capture my voice afterwards as I write?
- Will my reader have a reflexive sense of how I am learning, growing changing as an interviewer, with echoes of the other conversations?

I imagine these storied accounts as almost creating a sense of "eavesdropping, catching snippets and echoes of conversation" as described by McCormack *et al.* (2020, p. 73). I wanted to give my participants something tangible, a story that articulates and amplified their practices and pedagogies. I am hoping to transmit knowledge and understanding through "the crafty, coded vehicle" that is story (Paula Meehan, as cited in McCormack, 2009, p. 26). I view these stories more as offering "lessons for further conversations rather than undebatable conclusions" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 744). Finally, the stories were composed, and sent to everyone inviting comment and asking to meet again to discuss my interpretive accounts. Influenced by Clandinin and Connelly, I asked my participants to consider: "Is this you? Do you see yourself here?" (2000, p. 148).

Hi Eamonn,

This seems timely to send on to you as it might frame some of our conversation on Thursday. I am attaching a very draft version of my interpretative re-storying our conversation. This story (and others) would appear in the final thesis as a section (almost like a Findings chapter but I am not following a traditional structure.) I would love to get your thoughts on this when time allows. Is it a good representation of our dialogue? Are you happy with everything that is in it? Is this the character you want to be when read by others?

If you wish to amend/delete anything, that is no problem at all. I loved listening and re-listening to our conversation - I hope too that you enjoy this interpretation. Your input is rich in observation and insight and will form a key part of our inquiry.

Thank you,

CA

Hi CA

I've read your transcript in preparation for tomorrow! Wow ... is all I can say ... can't wait to talk about it. Reading it has made me feel very affirmed and proud - but also really intrigued by your wonderful methodology and weaving of the narrative with your own reflections and literature...so natural, organic, and rich in texture.

Talk tomorrow,

Eamonn

[Field Text, Emails to and from Eamonn, May 2021]

I met with everyone to discuss their reactions to the story I had sent. We clarified questions I had and sought to make meaning/interpret the conversation in a co-created process. This was part of a negotiated process, checking that they were comfortable with how I had represented them in the interim research text. I made changes and sent back the stories again to each participant, going "back-and-forth" as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 138). Meanings thus emerged in our interactions, in the nexus of self and other (Pelias, 2019, p. 21). I was deeply respectful of the conversations that I gathered and documented. I did not want to "interpret" somebody else's story and re-

present my version as some kind of 'truth'. I worked in a collaborative way, at each step of the process checking back with my participants to ensure they were still on the journey with me and agree with where we are going.

According to Clandinin and Huber, the process of bringing back our interim research texts "to further engage in negotiation with participants around unfolding threads of experience is central to composing research texts" (2010, p. 12). Going back to my participants was a crucial aspect of my meaning-making, whilst also honouring our ongoing respectful and caring relationships.

Composing Research Texts

In my research conversation with Claire, I feel that I am naive about the process of composing research texts. I tell her that I like the term 'entanglement'. I may like the *idea* of being entangled but in reality, this is a very difficult part of the process for me.

> **Claire:** *I'm conscious that you have lots of voices you're hearing as well, which will be interesting to see and a challenge to you too; to hear all those voices separately and entangled together….I don't how you're going to write this doctorate at the end of the day. There's a real challenge to you as a researcher. I don't know how many conversations you're going to need to have to distil it in such a way. Or that role of you as a researcher, separate from the research. I know that that's not where you're positioning yourself. I'll be interested in how that goes.*
> **CA:** *You used the word entanglement earlier, which I quite liked because for me I'm hoping entanglement will be okay.*
> [Field Text: Research Conversation, November 2020]

Molly Andrews and her colleagues remark that narrative data "can easily seem overwhelming: susceptible to endless interpretation, by turns inconsequential and deeply meaningful" (2013, p. 1). Looking back at my research journal I can only see what Emily Carr (cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 104) calls "scraps of nothingness". For many months I am overwhelmed and stuck. I cannot see how to progress from the individual storied accounts I have, from field texts and from books full of field notes of

'scraps of nothingness' to the research text. The gravitational force to pronounce generalisations from the inquiry was substantial. Finally, I attempt to scan the transcripts for themes. I write up and submit an excerpt of these themes to my supervisor. Through journaling and the supervision process, I become aware that I had fallen into the trap of mimicking "positivist science in modes of data reduction" (Riessman and Quinney, 2005, p. 398). After reflection I can see that I have lost my way, generalisations and thematic analysis are not congruent with my inquiry methodology. I was deflated.

I was swamped in the complexity of the field, losing sight of what I was studying. Part of the difficulty is being 'in the midst' of the inquiry. I am researching the inquiry but also, I am living in the inquiry, and it is on-going. I am working alongside my participants, co-experiencing the story of the inquiry, and impacting on the stories of the participants, as they are impacting on me, as I live alongside them throughout the study (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). I was finding it difficult to get a perspective. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk about the difficulty in moving away from the close daily contact to begin to write research texts. They describe false starts, being filled with doubt, finding the texts lifeless and lacking in spirit, and varying attempts at finding ways that work (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, pp. 134-135). They also allude to the difficulty in naming the phenomena we are studying –it almost takes until you are at the end to do this. Phenomena shifts depending on how we frame their contexts and our position. Somethings are foregrounded, some recede into the background.

Positioning the Work and Envisaging an Audience

Finally, I realise that I need to figure out how to compose this research text, honouring the original intention of the inquiry, whilst also finding a way to bear witness to what has happened to our team in the period of our inquiry. I needed to engage my reader and create narrative coherence, giving a sense of the "rhythms and sequences" of our inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 97). As I moved to composing research texts, I began to think about voice, the audience, and the form of this dissertation. I experimented with the balance between too vivid a voice, where I might overshadow my participants, and too subtle a presence, which is a deception, as if I am not there (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 148). This was a process finding the right register for my voice in the research text: will it be authoritative, supportive, or interactive? (Chase, 2005). Clandinin and

Huber (2010, p. 13) urge us not to use an "overly dominant research signature" which would "write over the voice of the participants". I also attempted to find a way to let the scholarship lie quietly within the inquiry, rather than being the principal focus of the text.

I asked myself: What is the significance of this study? How does our inquiry connect with larger social and theoretical contexts? What scholarly conversations do I want this inquiry to be part of? How will I convey a sense of moving back and forth, being in the field, the field texts, interim texts, research texts, and the situatedness of the inquiry within place? Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us that composing research texts is a process of looking for patterns; narrative threads; tensions. I try to "narratively code" the field texts, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131) for example, focusing on characters that appear in the text, places, story lines that connect, gaps or silences, tensions that emerge. Finally, I was not reducing stories of experience to themes, I searched for resonances across narrative accounts; what Jean Clandinin (2013) terms *narrative threads*.

As we reached the end of the academic term of 2022, I invited all my colleagues to join me to discuss some of these 'unfolding threads' and attempt to feedback what I have learned as a result of our inquiry. I positioned this gathering as a way to collaboratively make meaning as I was reaching the end point of being 'in the field'. This group gathering was an important aspect of the inquiry; I facilitated the group to collectively discuss their experience of care in higher education. After this session, I wrote and sent each participant a draft of chapter six which documented our discussions from the day. Pat, Yvonne, Claire, Emer and Deirdre all emailed to say that they were happy with how I had represented the morning. Eamonn, Nora and Helen engaged with me further, with Eamonn suggesting some amendments (which I made). Bringing the group back together helped me get a sense of perspective and provided me with the opportunity to check if my narrative threads resonated with the group. This gathering was a collaborative, engaging, and powerful way to represent this team's lived experience of care, honouring the relationality that lies at the heart of Narrative Inquiry.

Reflexivity and Relational Response Communities

Kim Etherington advises that we need to pay attention to "the inner story that we tell ourselves as we listen" (2005, p. 29). I am woven into the fabric of this inquiry; who I am, the relationships I have developed with my colleagues, our shared experiences impact on all aspects of the inquiry. In order to trace my presence, I kept a reflective journal, which formed a crucial aspect of my own critical reflexivity in the inquiry process. I attempted to interrogate my assumptions and my positionality as the inquiry proceeded. I reflected on how and when I write myself into and out of stories, and how I created the narrative threads of this inquiry (Clandinin, 2013).

Etherington (2005) proceeds to describe reflexivity as;

> *a dynamic process of interaction within and between ourselves and our participants, and the data that informs decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages.*
>
> (Etherington, 2005, p. 36)

The 'back and forth' with my participants was part of a deep commitment to reflexivity. I attended regular group supervision throughout my doctoral studies as well as taking part in a monthly peer support group. All these fora helped me navigate the complexity of being 'in the midst' of the inquiry process. These fora, or "relational response communities", as Jean Clandinin (2013) terms them, consisted of people I valued and trusted "to provide responsive, and responsible, dialogue" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 210). These groups were crucially important for me as I navigated this inquiry.

Ethics and Care in Research

Ethics in Narrative Inquiry is a commitment to values and principles, rather than a set of rules. It is more like being guided by a compass than a GPS. I have developed a contextual ethical approach through; reflexivity; peer support; formal group supervision; and individual supervision, all of which supported my teasing out of ethical dilemmas. My approach to ethics is to foreground the relational, recognising we are embedded in webs of mutual and interdependent relationships (Gilligan, 1982). According to Ruthellen

Josselson (2007), the inherent ethics of Narrative Inquiry is the researcher's reflexivity. I journaled and reflected on my own bias and position within the inquiry. I also consulted with my participants on an ongoing basis. I sought advice and guidance from my peers and my thesis supervisor. I reflected on the importance of capturing 'otherness' with appropriate empathy. Josselson (2007) urges us to think about the power we have as researchers to tell the story of the other. I was guided by how I would want to be represented myself; that is with respect, empathy, compassion, and a non-judgemental attitude.

The essence of ethics in research is free consent, confidentiality of the material gathered and protection from harm for participants (Josselson, 2007). Following Josselson, I agree that ethics "...is not a matter of abstractly correct behavior but of responsibility in human relationship" (2007, p. 538). It is about responsibility to "the dignity, privacy and well-being" of participants (*ibid*, p. 538). All material gathered was anonymized and the codes kept in a secure location, separate from the research material. My participants were given the option to choose a pseudonym to designate themselves. When the inquiry was completed all personally identifiable data was irreversibly anonymised. In line with institutional ethical guidelines, I will destroy all research materials in seven years.

Time was spent on the contracting stage of our research encounter. I emphasized that at all times the participant is the owner of their story, and at any time can decide not to be presented in the research. I agree with Ruthellen Josselson (1996) that the freedom to withdraw from my inquiry at any stage must be absolute. The idea of informed consent is not straight forward in a Narrative Inquiry as one never can be sure where the story will go. Josselson (1996, p. 538) goes as far as to call 'informed consent' oxymoronic. I viewed "consent as an ongoing process" (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010, p. 59). I first discussed consent with my participants when we met to talk about my inquiry as a group. Each participant then filled out a consent form (see appendix), but at various junctures in the research process, I returned again to check for consent. I agreed that if a participant had an issue with what is presented in the drafts that I sent to them, I would respect that and rescind any information they wish. Ethics in Narrative Inquiry is about developing "an ethical attitude". According to Jean Clandinin, ethics in Narrative Inquiry is about "about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices" (2006, p. 52). I hope I achieved this through the ongoing engagement with my participants.

Clandinin (2006) emphasises responsive and responsible ways that we must adopt to engage with people in a Narrative Inquiry. Completed transcripts were sent to each participant, encouraging them to read and respond with feedback. If there was anything that they were uncomfortable about, they could amend or delete as they wished. I then emailed the finished storied account of our conversation, again, inviting comments. I met with everyone, either on Zoom or in person (outside, in adherence with the Covid-19 restrictions at the time). This was an informal conversation; I did not record them, though I wrote up reflections after each one. I wanted to have a relaxed atmosphere to discuss the storied account I sent and to make sure that everyone felt comfortable about how they (or anyone else) were represented. Deirdre suggested anonymising the Institute to a greater extent than I had done. Claire wanted to chat through how she was appeared in the story, but in the end, did not want me to change anything. I think this part of the process was important as it allowed the relational to be upmost in the research. I met my participants for cups of tea, an early morning breakfast, a river walk, and when it was not possible to meet in person, Zoom calls. I checked for consent as I moved from the interim texts to the research texts by emailing all the material and also during our group process meeting in June 2022. I also negotiated consent when I used material based on an interaction with any of my participants or where they featured in a story that I was telling. For example, I had written a personal vignette after a meeting where I referred to Helen and Deirdre. I sent this piece back to check if they were comfortable with what I had written. This process was deeply relational, respectful, and negotiated at every step. At all times my priority was on the relationship between myself and my participants and on this being a generative, collaborative approach to inquiry and to crafting our individual and collective stories.

I imagine that tensions may emerge in the inquiry process as I move to represent my inquiry to a larger audience (Clandinin, 2006, p. 48). Josselson (2007) writes that the ethics of publication is 'shaded'. She suggests consulting participants again if the researcher is publishing material (as opposed to including in a PhD). When publishing an article based on my inquiry, I would check for consent from my participants, which I included in my ethics application. I will always respect the dignity of the participant and be mindful of the sensitivities of exposing them in published articles. Consent is an

ongoing process of engagement with my participants and does not end when the formal phase of the inquiry ends (Josselson, 2007).

I have a sense that my participants trust me but with that trust comes responsibility. I have to be careful in navigating the sensitivities involved when others (or our Institute) appear in the research. I must also pay attention to those who are unwitting characters in the texts. We are a small community where people can be easily identified. In the end if I think it will cause harm, I will not publish material. While composing the research texts and envisaging a wider audience for my work I encountered two dilemmas. One is where the Institute appears in the study, often in a less than positive light. I have anonymized the Institute – but it is possible to identify it, especially if I refer to specific circumstances we underwent over the past few years. I do not want to harm my institute in this process. How do I discuss what are major concerns that have emerged in the research while not damaging or discrediting my Institute? I decided to leave out some overtly identifying information and "blur" my institution and our geography, as Clandinin *et al.* suggest (2010, p. 86). But the Institute perhaps still remains identifiable, so the dilemma is not resolved easily.

My second dilemma was the unwitting characters that appear in the research. Agreeing with Chase (1996), I discovered that what was most sensitive in texts is what participants said about others. So, for instance, Tom[5], a former Head of Department, (HoD), is mentioned in nearly all interviews. It is all positive, so I feel comfortable in depicting him. However, another person is mentioned in a very negative light. I do not want to identify this person in any way. Although my participants have given permission to repeat what was said, there is a balance between representing what participants are saying versus not causing harm to any individual. I feel that I am responsible for the ethical dilemmas of the research (Josselson, 2007). So, in this instance, I choose to anonymise and depersonalise this character, generally shading their appearance in our story.

Ultimately, I must be steered by what Noddings (1984) calls the fidelity to relationships and an ethic of care. My ethical responsibility is to care for my research

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5   Pseudonym

relationships (Shaw, 2017, p. 215). In the ethics of care, we think "with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation" (Noddings, 1984, p. 24).

As Geoff Taggart (2014) argues;

> *care ethics also calls upon us to be responsive, affective, and flexible in particular ethical situations…engaging the heart as well as the head.*
>
> (Taggart, 2014, p. 175)

Care is a methodological component and commitment of my research. I am researching care; therefore, I feel I must exemplify the ethics of care in my endeavour. The path of care is not always straightforward as I am finding out as I experience and live with, and in, the research. It is easy to espouse values, it is far more difficult to enact them.

Becoming a Narrative Inquirer

From the beginning of my doctoral studies, I really struggled with finding in my voice. We were required to write a reflective piece about how we came to our research topic. When I revisited my paper recently, I see that it is filled with academic literature first, my experience always comes in a pale second. This is something that I grappled with at many times in the research, concerns Kim Etherington (2004) discusses too: what aspects of my own story is 'worthy' to reveal – whose knowledge counts? McCormack *et al.* suggest that it is not possible to research narratively "without explicitly honouring our selves as substantially present in how we write, think and research" (2020, p. 75). Even though I agree with this on a cognitive level, at many stages of the writing process, I realised that I had written out the 'I'. On reflection, I was attempting to not write the I, but of course *I* was always there. Agreeing with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) I did not find it easy to inject that 'I'. Ron Pelias gives sage advice to; "deploy myself, my experiences, as a means for understanding how one might make sense of and change the world" (2019, p. 25). When might I call myself forward? This has been a constant struggle, as I can see across the pages of my research journal.

> *If I 'deploy' myself, what might I detonate?*
>
> [Field note: Research Journal, January 2021]

Journaling is a space for puzzling out but also a space for struggle. I can see from my research journal the tension between my wish to focus on relationality and subjectivity and what I am conditioned to think research *should* be, that is rational, valid, and objective. I chose Narrative Inquiry as it challenges positivist understandings of subjectivity and research methodologies (O' Grady *et al.*, 2018). Though I still found that I was continually 'bumping up' against my own preconceived ideas about research. I found it difficult to recognize that my own experience is valid 'research material'. Grace O'Grady (2018) also speaks of the difficulty of 'inhabiting' the philosophical position she wishes to adopt in her research.

David McCormack and colleagues (2020) also tell us that;

> *it really is quite hard work to speak, and maybe more so, to listen, against dominant ways of knowing.*
>
> (McCormack *et al.*, 2020, p. 82)

It was really difficult for me to think and write against dominant ways of doing research. I never imagined how much I would be challenged as part of this research. I understood a dissertation to be a highly abstract, intellectual process. Ironic then, that I choose to undertake a Narrative Inquiry, an approach that seeks to foreground the relational, lived experience and emotions. Drawing on Carol Rodgers' (2020, p. 1) definition of presence as "the experience of bringing one's whole self to full attention" I have had to become more 'wide awake' to myself. This approach required me to be fully present, both cognitively and emotionally, to the inquiry process. I find myself in the realm of what Ronald Pelias names "creative qualitative researchers" (2019, p. 1). Those researchers who attempt to "evoke the emotional and intellectual complexity of their subjects" while also deploying their "vulnerable, relational and reflexive selves" as well as their embodied and ethical sensibilities (Pelias, 2019, p. 1). This is where I locate myself now as an emergent researcher, though not always straightforwardly or comfortably. Deborah Ceglowski, (2002) reminds us that researchers are often pulled by different research paradigms. I have often found myself stretched in dissonant directions as I sought to navigate this inquiry.

Becoming the researcher I desire to become has been a significant part of the learning for me. Clandinin *et al.* (2010, p. 83) suggest too that we pay attention to *tensions* as a key "methodological strategy". Jean Clandinin (2006) advocates being intentionally present to tensions or knots in our research. Narrative Inquiry is also the study of experience that acknowledges "the embodiment of the person in the world" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). I allowed tensions felt by me and also expressed in the stories of my participants to surface. Resisting the impulse to 'smooth over' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin *et al.*, 2010) my embodied reactions; I began to pay attention to times that I supressed tears, had a knot in my stomach, a sore back, an allergic reaction. I attempt to enquire into these 'knots' and decipher somatic clues. I conceptualise these bodily tensions as bumping up against the dominant paradigm of research. I am trying to unlearn the dominant, more cognitive approach to academic work and give primacy to lived experience, to emotionality, to subjectivity. I see myself "always in the process of becoming" (Clandinin and Caine, 2013, p. 176). I feel that I have more fully inhabited the role of a narrative inquirer as our inquiry progressed; it was a slow process for me, but I hope I got there in the end.

Chapter 3: Stories of Care: Encounters with Leo, Yvonne, Deirdre and Helen

Introduction

I had imagined meeting all my colleagues as a group in person in early September 2020 to 'enter the field' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). However, the Covid-19 pandemic was on-going and there was a lot of uncertainty about whether we would back on campus or still Emergency Remote Teaching. Either way, from the start of term, many of the team were working from home and not coming into the office everyday as we would have done prior to the pandemic. At the end of the first week back, we all met online to discuss our inquiry. We discussed the nature of the inquiry and how we might proceed. A generative conversation entailed around collaborative and co-constructed research. I also explained the ongoing nature of consent in a Narrative Inquiry. I wanted to be sure that my colleagues all felt at ease with sharing their experiences, whilst also being assured that I would constantly check back with them over the course of the inquiry. Finally, our inquiry had begun!

Then nothing happened. September passed me by in a blur. I was very uncertain about how to proceed now that we were not in close daily proximity. I used the time to read and think about how I might engage online now with my colleagues. I did a couple of trial runs on Zoom with my doctoral colleagues. I wanted to practice being fully present, emotionally, and cognitively, in our conversations. I was also teasing out how our encounter would be a co-created conversation, not a one-sided research interview. I emailed everyone in late September to ask them to meet me online for a reflective conversation about their lived experience of care in higher education.

My first conversation was with Leo, I then met Yvonne, Deirdre, and Helen over the course of two weeks in October. In the spring of 2021, I re-storied these encounters and sent them back to each of my colleagues. We have subsequently had many over and back conversations which I hope to convey in these final storied accounts. This chapter and chapter 4 are narrative accounts of our experiences from the field, they are a way of retelling and reliving experiences, with the continued involvement of participants in the

co-construction of their stories (Clandinin, 2013). These storied accounts also position our inquiry narratively, within the three commonplaces: personal and social, temporality, and place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In the Summer of 2022, I added the postscripts as I was completing the final research text.

The narratives are offered chronologically to give a sense of time unfolding and also show the threads that moved in and between my research participants. This section also contains my preliminary interpretations of the field texts. It contains field texts drawn from my research journal, emails, and field notes. I lived and worked alongside my colleagues during this inquiry, and so my voice and experience are contained in the midst of these narratives. I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that it is important that we tell of who we are in the field. As they suggest, interim texts reflect upon the meaning and social significance of the field texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It is also the beginning of the gathering of some of the narrative threads of our inquiry. Jean Clandinin tells us that narrative threads are "resonances and echoes that reverberate across the accounts" (2013, p. 132). I am not looking for generalisations in these accounts but am beginning to pay attention to the things that connect across our stories. Tuning into these echoes, I will bring these threads into conversation with my colleagues, and with the scholarly community that I wish to draw on, in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Meeting Leo: 'Teach from the Heart!'

Leo is a lively and energetic *bon viveur* who, he tells me, "wears his heart on his sleeve". He has a passion for his family and his copious friendships, for amateur dramatics, for his teaching, and for life. I co-facilitated a workshop with him a couple of years ago. While we were waiting for the students to arrive, and I was occupied looking over my notes for the session, Leo walked around the room and chatted to each student as they arrived. I remember thinking at the time I was too busy to do this. When I think back on this, I see that Leo was doing what he most values, making connections with the students. It was a simple gesture, but he was telling them powerfully, it matters to me that you turn up. You matter. And he was congruently building relationships as a way of getting the students to connect with him and what he wanted to teach that day.

He is contemplating retiring at the end of this academic year. I feel so sad about this. He is such a big presence in the office every morning, always willing to go for a coffee and have a chat. The office will be duller when he leaves. I am so glad to get to meet with Leo like this and I want to capture some of his wisdom as he reflects on his long career. I look forward to our conversation, as colleagues, we have always had an affable relationship. We begin this inquiry in the midst of our ongoing relationship, working together for over 20 years in the same department. We are also in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Leo has to finish by 4 so that he can get to the hairdressers before the country goes into a Level 5 lockdown. There is an uneasy feeling that we need to 'batten down the hatches' over the next few months to weather the next wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Just after we connect online, Leo moves into a more comfortable chair; there is an immediate rapport, being in his house, in his living room like this (albeit virtually). He remarks passionately, after teaching for over 40 years;

> *Leo: I've had a great career and I still love the job. It was always that labour of love for me…For me, the classroom is where my heart actually is. That's what I've always tried to do, I think intuitively, I've always tried to teach from the heart. I don't always get it right, and I certainly don't know if I'm always as successful as I'd like to think I would be. I just get such a buzz out of working with a group of people and trying to stimulate their thinking and get them engaging with ideas and thoughts and emotions.*

Leo is the embodiment of passionate energy and enthusiasm for teaching. He vigorously rejects the post-enlightenment cognitive/affective divide.

> *Leo: I am very passionate about my subject. I can't teach something I don't care about. I have to feel it. I have to believe it. It has to come from in here [pointing to the heart space]. It's not good enough just to come from up there [pointing to the head].*
> *CA: That's the key, isn't it? In terms of real change in learning, is moving it from the head to the heart piece, to feeling it, to believing it. I don't know [in a wondering tone] how can we do that with our students.*

My rhetorical question displays my curiosity in how I can engage the head, hand, and heart of our students. Leo makes it seem almost effortless. He intuitively teaches from the heart space.

Leo details how a particular construct of teacher identity initially shaped his early practice as a secondary teacher.

> **Leo:** *It was about authority, and I was the boss. I was in charge, and I was supposed to know everything.*

Through experience, reflection, and ongoing continuous professional development (CPD), he fundamentally shifts his perspective.

> **Leo:** *Teaching became much more about relationships, not about content or curricula or about the syllabus. You suddenly realize you're dealing with human beings with lots of stuff happening…I became much more conscious of their needs. That teaching was not about me at all. That teaching was actually about them. It was the caring side of teaching and the vocational side of teaching that's always appealed to me.*

This was no superficial tweak to his pedagogy. This movement aligned with who he truly is. His ontology and philosophy for life are expressed through his pedagogy.

> **Leo:** *It's the only place I can teach from because that's where it is for me. My passion for life, my passion for human beings, my passion for wanting people to be happy and content in their life, all stems from that same place. I've tried to do that in every part of my life. So, it's more than just an educational rationale for me. It's a way of life. It's a statement of intent.*

As our conversation weaves along, Leo maps out his career through significant or "transformative moments". For 8 years he taught on a teacher training programme. He describes this experience as the best years of his professional life.

Leo: I just felt totally at home. I felt I was teaching the kind of stuff that made sense to me. I was trying to really create teachers who had that real relational sense. That for them teaching was about empathy, it was really about that philosophy of care. Our mantra when sending them on teaching practice was 'whatever you teach the student is not the important thing, it's how you treat them that really counts'.

Teaching is a Relational Process

We discuss Leo's fundamental belief in the necessity of a pedagogic relationship in order for the students to learn.

Leo: I start with getting to know them. When I get to know them, I say 'well okay, let's see would you like to learn something'? With me, it has to start with that relational dynamic. At the heart of it is students who want to learn something and respect you enough and have a relationship with you, then they're very likely to want to learn with you.
One of the things I really tried to do in my classroom is to bring a lot of empathy and a lot of listening. When an issue comes up, I'm always really interested in hearing what students have to say about something.
CA: It's just trying to make them feel cared for. I think letting each person know, it matters to me that you turn up.
Leo: I mean, how often have you learned from anybody that you didn't really care about? How many times have you been in a classroom situation where you've had a sense this guy didn't connect with you? You weren't that interested in them and you've no memory of it. ... That old cliché that students don't care what you know until they know that you care. I actually think that's very true.
CA: You've engaged their hearts and then their minds can come in then because they're open.
Leo: I also try to work pretty hard to build relationships with them outside of class too. I know we have smaller numbers, but to me, that's important. If I meet them in the corridor, I'd often stop and just have a chat, I'd make

the time to stop and do that. I think that's always important. It builds

relationships by showing an interest in other people's lives.

I ask Leo what practices he uses in the classroom to engage the hearts and minds of his students. Embodying learning activities, space for reflection and one-to-one connection, all feature in his 'teach from the heart' repertoire. He is present to the students and their learning, feeling if they are not engaging or connecting in class.

> **Leo:** *If I go into a class and I feel they're not with me, I'll just stop and say,*
> *'let's play a game' or I'd say, 'let's just reflect for five minutes or let's take*
> *a short break'. I'm always trying to make sure that they're on track with me*
> *rather than whether I'm on track with them.*
> *Drama is a very powerful educational medium too. I think it gives people a*
> *chance to really explore concepts and ideas at a very abstract level that*
> *they might not necessarily be able to even write about. In role play,*
> *because they're embodying it, they certainly see it from a different angle,*
> *and they engage with different points of view. They can really touch on*
> *emotions and touch on ideas that they might not necessarily do in an*
> *academic text. I find it a very powerful force that way. I think one of the*
> *things we do as a team is, we build a lot of reflective time into our students'*
> *learning. It's a very fundamental part of our pedagogy. I think the other*
> *thing we do very well is we create time for conversations, for one-to-one*
> *engagement. And I think one of the things that teaching from the heart does*
> *is recognize the importance of that.*

Small Pebbles/ Large Impacts

I ask Leo what legacy he would like to leave as he contemplates retiring next semester. He leans forward and asks animatedly: "Have I told you my Billy Elliot story?" Leo is excited to recount an experience from his early days as a secondary school teacher in Shanmoss[6]. He taught drama and introduced plays to the rural vocational school. He

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6   Anonymised

fondly remembers one particular student who loved drama, telling me "she had to be in every play!"

> *Leo: About four years ago I met her father at a function here in*
> *Ballylacken and he said: 'Come over here, I want to tell you something. Do*
> *you remember, you started all the drama, and she went to your class?*
> *[Dramatic pause]. Well, her eldest son is now one of the Billy Elliotts in*
> *the West End. That all started in Shanmoss.' A small pebble started in a*
> *very small school in rural Ireland, translated to a child being on the*
> *professional stage in the West End.*
> *CA: It's a powerful image, the pebble. I'm just thinking of when you think*
> *of your career, a whole beach filled with pebbles. [My voice is wavering, I*
> *feel a strong wave of emotion, I supress my tears].*
> *Leo: In teaching you never know the impact you have on people. You could*
> *have a real influence on somebody you taught in college and 20 years later*
> *you might bump into them, and they might say something like 'that really*
> *made a difference'.*

I am inspired by Leo's passion and wish to garner some nuggets of hope from our conversation.

> *CA: Do you have any sense of a vision for what higher education is going*
> *to look like? What do you hope for those left behind?*
> *Leo: Oh, that's a good one! Well, I have the negative vision and I have the*
> *positive one. There's part of me that worries that policymakers might see*
> *this [online teaching] as a natural progression for education. That worries*
> *me because I don't care what anyone says, even online, it's very hard to*
> *sustain/keep the heart at the centre of what you do. You get the content*
> *done and you can engage in the assessment, but I'm not so sure the heart*
> *is, or that you have the opportunity to connect, really. It's very difficult to*
> *bring that kind of emotionality to the process. I think if we lose that, then I*
> *think we lose something very valuable in education.*
> *Then, if I have a good day, I'd say maybe people will come to realize that*
> *this online stuff is not doing what it's supposed to do, and they will revert*

back to something far more traditional and get back to some basic stuff.
Get back to the real truth about education. Get back to real analysis,
discussion, discourse. Get back to the Socratic notion of real critical
thinking and critical evaluation.

Leo proceeds to outline a philosophy for change – small ripples, creating systemic changes.

Leo: Thomas Kuhn makes the case that every revolution starts with a tiny
drop; a pebble in an ocean. He said it doesn't happen with a big bang.
That single little pebble, it seems to me, sparked off something very
interesting. I think great things often start with small beginnings.
Kavanagh says in Epic that 'the Iliad started from such a local row'.
CA: So, we're going to have a local row, which is going to lead to a
revolution…But actually, the revolution this time though might be around
the heart.
Leo: Sometimes I think that's where the core of education is really, it's in
the heart.
CA: I'm curious about this in my own teaching; that sometimes we think
that, especially in higher education, it's about filling the heads, and not
engaging the heart.
Leo: A lot of what we do in education is all about, has become about,
cognition and results and academic performance. I think to the detriment
of our emotional side and to the heart, and then to even just skill-based
learning.

Leo's sanguinity draws from a wellspring of belief in the possibility of change. He also acknowledges the power of our team and the values we subscribe to. It is notable that he remarks that in order to sustain a relational pedagogy, you need to have team support.

Leo: I do think what we've nurtured among ourselves has been very
powerful. We managed to hold onto the core values of our team…. It's very
hard to teach the way we do without that kind of backup. We've all shared

that common view of education and of learning; what really education is about. At the heart of it, is relationships.

I think additions like Nora and Emer; they've bought into our culture very much so. They've really found a natural home. I think people who have come in have been people who are very like ourselves, but they've also embraced it, have found it very nurturing too, in terms of our relationships, but also our approach to teaching and our relationship with students in the college. When I do retire, I'm not worried about the cohesion or strength of the team.

As we finish, I thank Leo for his time and for sharing his philosophy for living and teaching. I admit to being emotional during our conversation.

CA: I don't know what it [the emotional reaction] was about. It's just amazing hearing you talk about your career. I would hope that when I get to the same stage I would be as passionate and positive. I want to hold onto all those things. I hope they don't get chipped away.

Leo: The most important thing is to focus on the relationship [with the student] as distinct from focusing on all the outside concerns you can't change.

In my research journal excerpt below, I reflect on that 'Billy Elliot' moment. It is in this conversation that I realise that our inquiry must pivot to an online space, this catches me off guard, I still hoped things would return to normal in the office in Ballylacken. I can understand why I was feeling so emotionally brittle:

I just felt so tired and emotional. Leo is leaving. The team is changing. The Taoiseach announced Level 5 restrictions again. That means I definitely won't be able to meet people in person for my inquiry. I am so fed up with Covid!

> [Field Text: Research Journal, October 2020]

As I write these interim texts now at an even further remove, it is conspicuous that I do not cry or even acknowledge that I was feeling emotional as Leo was telling his story. I

think that this interaction is symptomatic of my whole experience as a researcher. I give primacy to the cognitive and suppress my emotional self, continually retreating into academic discourse, rather than focussing on the 'here and now' experience. In this inquiry, I find it very difficult to stay with experience, and not hide under the cover of a disembodied, detached academic. It is striking just how ingrained that mind/body split is for me in terms of academia. This highlights my constant struggle between an objectivist, positivist research paradigm and the more subjectivist, constructivist inquiry I aspire to.

Keep the Heart at the Centre

Although Leo has some dystopian thoughts about the future of higher education in terms of possible policy directions, he is assured and hopeful about our team and our values surviving in the post-Covid-19 climate. He tells me that my research is "another way of reinforcing our values. It gives us a chance to name it, articulate it and put a rationale around it."

Leo's advice is "keep the heart at the centre" and you will not lose your motivation. He tells me emphatically; "if you're committed and passionate about something, you won't let it go easily". I hope that remains true for me too as our institution (and our team) evolves and changes in the coming years. I am hoping Leo's optimism and hope can dispel my niggling pessimism about our future as a team and the sustainability of our caring pedagogy.

It is notable that Leo talks about his practice in terms of teaching, not lecturing, his is the world of classrooms, not of lecture halls. Leo also speaks about the ontological commitment of teaching; it is a way of life for him. Leo builds relationships with students inside and outside the classroom. He believes that the heart, connections, and relationships must be central to our educational endeavours. Relationships matter; connection is more important than content for Leo. The team approach we have adopted in Ballylacken is crucial to supporting his teaching approach.

Postscript June 2022

Leo did end up retiring at the end of that academic year. It was a strange time; we have been so disconnected because of the pandemic that in some ways, Leo's leaving does not have the same emotional punch it might have had if we had remained working daily in Ballylacken. Covid-19 and working in a digital space had already begun the process of separation.

Meeting Yvonne: 'And Then I Step into Ballylacken'

It was great that my first conversation was with Leo, as we know each other for so long, there is a deep trust between us. I was at ease and open to listening to him tell his story. I do not know Yvonne as well. She is a newer member of the team and as such, I have not had that much interaction with her. I hope I can create a comfortable space for us to connect. Yvonne joined the team two years ago, after an initial career working in social care practice. She is young, energetic, and passionate about social care. She connects online from her walk-in wardrobe so that she will not be interrupted. She is at home and comfortable; an easy rapport is achieved. We begin discussing her transition from social care practice to teaching in higher education.

> *Yvonne: I still have so much more to learn about teaching and learning and so many more skills to further develop. I want to focus on my teaching. I want to get fully confident and comfortable. I want to really just focus on the classroom, my modules, building content. I do think that's going to take a few years. I don't think it's something that can be rushed. I want to put all my energy into that.*

Teaching for Yvonne is;

> *Yvonne: A process of constant engagement and facilitating a process of learning as opposed to teaching or talking to them. It is about creativity too, in terms of how you structure the sessions.*

She is committed to her teaching, her students, her own professional development. She hopes to undertake doctoral studies in the future. For now, she is busy with her young family and transitioning from practice to academia. Yvonne's pedagogy is deeply informed by her experience as a social care practitioner, and although still new to lecturing, she feels she has a lot to offer her students in terms of her own knowledge of practice.

> *Yvonne: I love social care practice and am now sharing that passion and my learning and my skills and my knowledge with other people. The students really, really enjoy that. They love hearing stories from practice. It's also about bringing whatever is unique to you, to your teaching as much as possible.*

She proceeds to describe the need for reflection and self-awareness for social care students. Yvonne discusses the importance of reflection in social care programmes.

> *Yvonne: Social care is fabulous. I love it. It's a wonderful role, but it is challenging. I think that in order to be a really effective practitioner, you have to bring as much of your personal self to the role. I think students don't fully understand that initially. They struggle with 'why is this so important or why do I have to reflect so deeply? Why do I have to know myself?' It's when social care gets challenging that this really comes up for people. There are going to be some very difficult days. You have to have the skills to overcome it, to reflect on it and to learn from it.*

We discuss the pivot to online teaching due to the Covid-19 emergency and how we continue to provide a caring climate in an online context.

> *Yvonne: In terms of online teaching, I think we're going above and beyond and that's something the students have recognized. It's just our way of doing it. We really want to make sure the students are supported and get their feedback on that. That's something that we've created ourselves. We'll have learned so many valuable skills and things from this experience, to bring forward with us.*

Yvonne describes supporting students on their placements during a particularly stressful period due to the Covid-19 pandemic;

> *Yvonne: One student in particular said 'I really felt supported. You were there. You were emailing. It was not an ideal situation, but we did get through it'. There was straight away that sense of unity, the students felt supported. They felt assured, comforted. While we are facing into another very uncertain semester and that same cohort of students are going out on placement, not knowing what's coming down the road, they felt okay, we can do this.*

Yvonne delineates her relational pedagogy, she brings herself to her teaching, while at the same time being very conscious of good boundaries between the personal and professional self.

> *Yvonne: In terms of relationship building in social care, it's so important to be able to give a little, and I feel that it's the same now in my current role in teaching. That you're giving a little bit of yourself. It is good to be confident in sharing a little bit, but not too much, having that care boundary, keeping yourself safe in that process. If there's a sense of genuineness and an openness about you, it builds that relationship and develops the teaching and makes it a more real and positive experience.*

Yvonne describes how the first year of teaching was challenging in terms of adjusting to and establishing good boundaries in her new role. She tells me that although she is quite reflective, "it's something that gets missed in the busy-ness of what we're doing every week".

> *Yvonne: Last year I felt I needed to be constantly available, and I didn't really have that boundary for myself. I was replying to emails late and I was feeling I needed to reply really quickly. I think it was around my own confidence, whereby I was just trying to have the answer as quickly as possible as opposed to reflecting on it and giving the person time themselves. Whereas now, I give them that space to tease through*

themselves and be a support person for that, but don't try to fix or rush
with an answer all the time.

Yvonne's description of her first year reminds me of my early years lecturing; that feeling of 'keeping one page ahead' of the students.

> *Yvonne: Last year was chaotic. It was overwhelming. It was survival*
> *mode. I suppose for me stepping into teaching, as somebody described it to*
> *me, was timetabled chaos … It's just a different mindset and you're so busy*
> *and so switched on for those few weeks. Already next week for me,*
> *[Reading Week] even though I have meetings every day, it's still that little*
> *bit of break and that space for reflection, regrouping and regathering*
> *yourself.*
> *CA: I really like this idea of timetabled chaos. It's comforting. You're*
> *speaking about the rhythm of the term. I think when you're not in*
> *academia, it's hard to understand that. But when you're in it…*
> *Yvonne: When you are in it, then it's what helps us to function and what*
> *helps us to be really good and to be effective. When it is the busiest time*
> *and you have to be full of energy and completely switched on and then*
> *when your breaks are coming, for you to be able to regroup and re-*
> *energize.*

A Duty to Educate and not a Duty of Care

Yvonne goes on to recount a story from her induction in Central Institute last year;

> *Yvonne: Something that struck me, it will always stay with me was when I*
> *was doing induction. The whole point of one of the sessions was that we*
> *now had a duty to education and not a duty of care. That basically we were*
> *here as lecturers and there were all different support systems within the*
> *college to support the students but emphasizing that our focus is on*
> *education and that these services are there to do everything else.*

I am startled that a separation of care from education is emphasised so explicitly to new staff joining the Institute. But as Yvonne details, the Ballylacken campus strongly resists this dichotomy. No induction is necessary to *our* caring practices. It is in the ether in Ballylacken, embodied in the team.

> *Yvonne: Then I step into Ballylacken, and I don't see that. I think we go above and beyond. It's something I have talked to Nora about in terms of where we've come from in practice, at the forefront of everything is duty of care. It's very hard to switch off from that. I think in Ballylacken, it's something that's promoted and fostered between the whole team. I think we get particularly invested in trying to support students as much as possible.*

Contrasting the culture in Central Institute, Yvonne recounts an email a colleague recently sent to everyone in the department;

> *Yvonne: Now that is burnout. That is where you need to evaluate, mind yourself and reflect. I don't ever want to get to that stage where I'm really unhappy. I thought 'would that person not just consider changing something that's going on for them'.*
> *I feel, and I recognize that privileged place that I'm in, in terms of still being able to keep that passion and being able to share that with other people. That's why I'm confident that this passion and the love for what I'm doing will always stay as well.*
> *CA: I don't want to end up being that person either, it's one of my reasons for doing the PhD; I want to still care, and I want to still have passion. I'm curious as to how we can sustain this. I suppose you're new and have that energy and passion. I think I still have it? [Rhetorical question].*

When I reflect later on our conversation, I note in my research journal the caricature of a burnt-out colleague. I notice that although they are usually railing *against* issues; they at least remain passionate about something. I feel my own passion ebbing away, I am retreating towards silence and passive acceptance. It takes tremendous energy to continuously care about something.

Yvonne is enthusiastic in her praise of her colleagues in Ballylacken;

> *Yvonne: I suppose that community spirit and that team support piece is particularly relevant to Ballylacken. I don't know how I actually would have gotten through last year without having the team. I'm so grateful for it. I know, if I have a question, it's just popping it into our chat or sending an email to somebody. You never have to overthink that because everybody is genuinely supportive and looking out for you. You can just ask those questions really without thinking 'is this a silly question or is this something I should know by now?'*
> *CA: I think it's a very safe environment. It's safe to be vulnerable or it's safe to say; 'I don't know this'.*
> *Yvonne: I had many of those moments last year and everybody was just so assuring, it was amazing, that sense of support. They're inspiring: that passion, that care, that love for what they do. I think it just makes me realize how lucky I am in terms of Ballylacken and the role models that we have there. That's what I'm aspiring to.*

It is wonderful that newer colleagues like Yvonne are taking up the mantle. I admit to her that due to the stressful conditions I have experienced in work in the last year [due to the changes in management] I have not always been as grounded as I wish to be. I regret not being more of a positive role model and support to Yvonne. I am truly grateful for my colleagues who embodied our ethos and ensured that she feels fully part of the Ballylacken dynamic.

> *CA: It's nice to have a positive conversation. It's more in line with the way I would want to be … .as I am generally … in creating and connecting in a heart space with people.*

I greatly admire Yvonne's enthusiasm and optimism. Spending time with her provokes a glimmer of hope, tempering the weariness and wariness that has set in over the past year. I want to return to a space where I feel more hopeful about our Institution and my future within it.

Yvonne talks about her pedagogy in terms as a process of constant engagement and facilitation. For her teaching is being "completely switched on". This reminds me of the Carol Rodger's (2020) concept of pedagogical 'presence', an 'in the moment' state of alertness to our teaching and to our students. Like Leo, she espouses a relational pedagogy, citing genuineness and openness as important aspects of this approach. Echoing Leo, she too views reflection as crucial for students and for her own practice. She identifies herself as an educator; one who does not subscribe to the dichotomy of education and care advocated in her induction in the Institute. She highlights the dominant discourse circulating in higher education around care/education and how this team resists this logic in our everyday practices. The team in Ballylacken is the central character in this narrative, which has ensured that a care-centred pedagogy is sustained as new staff join the team.

It was while I was immersed in composing Yvonne's story in early January 2021 that the government announced that all education facilities would not re-open after the Christmas holidays. Higher education was to once again pivot to emergency remote teaching. I have a vivid memory of sitting in the 'good room' of my husband's family home, the dining table, used only rarely for Christmas and family occasions has become my work desk. Schools are closed, and I was working full-time from home. We had elder care commitments and a young son to be entertained. I am teaching 16 hours online a week. I see a missed call from the Head of Faculty. He has left a message to tell me that the department is being restructured; the team members must choose which programme to follow, staying with our current department or moving to a new department in a new faculty. I decide to go to the social care department as the majority of the team are choosing this department. This was an emotional response; what I most value about my work is being part of the Ballylacken team. This process fragmented the team, we are now teaching on two programmes, but these are based in different departments and in different faculties. It is hard to be a cohesive team when pulled in different directions. This restructuring highlights the precarity of our team and the larger institutional forces which surround us (but do not necessarily care about us).

Post-script June 2022

Yvonne opts to stay with the social care programme in the department reshuffle. As I write this, she has received her module allocation for next September and will be teaching across three campuses and so will be only minimally in Ballylacken.

Meeting Deirdre: 'Bruised, Battered, but not Burnt Out'

Deirdre and I have worked in the same department since we joined the Institute twenty-one years ago. We teach in different subject areas so would not have worked closely together. She likes teaching, but her heart is in development work; she worked for many years overseas with development agencies before joining Ballylacken. In recent years, she took a career break and worked abroad in Africa. During the inquiry, I feel we have gotten to know each other more. I recognise her keen sense of humour and fun, coupled with her deep commitment to collective action. At times over the past few months, she has been a major support to me.

I schedule our conversation during Reading Week in October, imagining space and time to connect and reflect. However, due to hours of online teaching, I reach this week exhausted. Deirdre's declaration regarding my research energises me.

> *Deirdre: Really the work you're doing is so important! Recording*
> *everything that we do, as against all the other practices and thinking.*
> *[A phone rings, someone momentarily enters the room].*
> *CA: This is actually real life, isn't it? [Laughter]. One of our colleagues*
> *was in a walk-in wardrobe because otherwise there would be too many*
> *distractions. It's also the reality of trying to create workplaces in our*
> *home. It's a balance, because it is our home after all, not our workplace.*

We proceed to discuss how we have adapted to teaching online over the last few weeks.

> *Deirdre: I've been talking to a lot of parents whose kids have gone to*
> *university this year. It's really shocking the way the kids are being treated,*

they have to sit down for six hours a day and listen to pre-recorded
lectures. No care, no nurturing, nothing! Compared to what we do…
CA: *It's become apparent really with COVID…it's actually amplified what*
we do in terms of caring for the students.
Deirdre: *I remember one day I couldn't get online, and I was mentoring*
the students. I drove into town. I met the guards and they said: 'where are
you going'? I said: 'I'm going to the college'. They said: 'I think it's
closed'. I was going to sit outside the college [to connect to the Wi-Fi] and
mentor the students. You would do it for the students. They have busy lives.
They are trying to balance work and COVID and minding their parents
and all kinds of stuff. It's my job and I will do it the very best I can.

She honours her commitment to her students, as her anecdote of driving into the nearest town to access the internet illustrates. Poor broadband can affect connectivity but there are further complexities in connecting relationally with our students in the online environment. Deirdre details 'tuning in' to her students, telling me that she welcomes each student by name.

Deirdre: *I think the 'camera's on' thing now, I know it drives them mad,*
but I'm absolutely adamant about it. I always say 'Good morning, James.
Good morning, Catherine-Ann, then 'cameras on!' It is tuning into them,
isn't it?
I tend to teach in 20-minute blocks. I use the 'chat' function, particularly to
comment on something from their own experience. That way they get to
know each other better. Then I'd just put them into groups. I say, 'I want
somebody to chair and somebody to record'. We create an environment, a
culture, where they're expected to participate.
We all love that Yeats quote out at the front, about 'lighting the fire', and I
think it's a belief in that and the belief in people and being able to make
social change. They are not passive vessels. It's about the creation of a
better society and equipping them to do that.

Outside the entrance to our campus there is a sculpture with the W.B Yeats quote: "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire". This is a tangible reminder

of a commitment to a particular pedagogical approach. Deirdre tells me that she views students as not the proverbial "empty vessels". They have what Luis Moll *et al.* (1992, p. 132) term "funds of knowledge"; vast information drawn from their own lives outside the classroom (Moll, 2019; Moll *et al.*, 1992). Our role as educators is to foster their passion for learning.

Deirdre displays a passion for her subject but also for relating to her students. She shows deep empathy for her students and reveals how she enjoys pedagogic relationships.

> ***Deirdre:*** *The joy is the interaction, the connection and watching them getting the 'aha moment'. Seeing the growth. I suppose when you're teaching something like Sociology, you can make it very real. I would never make them discuss anything very personal, but they do bring stuff up. I remember the very first session I had with the third-year students, and one of the girls said that she was an only child because her sister had died, and nobody knew that. We ended up going for coffee to the canteen.*

A Culture of Collegiality

Deirdre reminisces about the original members of the team who joined the fledging Institute in 1999 and early 2000. We have a long history of working together, and Deirdre traces the influence of our first Head of Department on our values and our pedagogy.

> ***Deirdre:*** *It's definitely the relationship that we had when we were managed by Tom[7]. All the team building. The strategy workshops that we had where we laid out the principles of the department; the trust; the accountability; the mutual way of working and all that. Bonding like that as a team. Then being allowed to do your own thing, within the confines of the Institute. That was so amazing. We had that spirit which was very collegial. That wasn't the case in other departments in the Institute. You wouldn't dream of teaching/treating the students badly. We treat them with such respect, like peers, not like empty vessels.*

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7   Pseudonym

> *CA: It's such a powerful legacy. Imagine 20 years later that people are still talking about things that Tom did and modelling a lot of those fundamental skills, and that still nourishes us.*
> *Deirdre: Tom would say very openly that he assumed our qualifications were great, but he took us on for our personalities, our characters. How well we could work as a team. Whereas most academic institutions would choose people because of their qualifications, and they couldn't give a damn whether they could even talk nearly! [Giggle].*

Deirdre discusses the new Technological University which will come into existence next year. She will not mourn for the old Institute; uncaring practices do not engender institutional allegiance.

> *Deirdre: It is all about culture when an organization is trying to re-form itself. There is a big job to do if they want the University to be different from our current college. Our President said the other day that he would shed a tear for our old Institute, I won't shed one tear. Not. One. Drop.*

Deirdre proceeds to outline how we have supported each other in Ballylacken and the new staff who have joined the department.

> *Deirdre: You have to create a relationship with your teaching team, like we have, and with your students. In most cases, the institution will not facilitate that. You have to create your own way to connect.*
> *I think that's our role now, as mentors. And they [new staff] need to find an older staff member, but somebody that's not cynical and jaded, to assist them and to work with them. I love the enthusiasm. It's great to have our younger colleagues; like Nora, because they have the energy, but we have the experience, there's no doubt about it. When you see them getting burnt, we can help them.*

She highlights the importance of the team's solidarity for resistance against systemic practices that diminish our agency and autonomy.

> *Deirdre: It is brilliant to see Nora and Yvonne [newer staff members] taking the reins and we knew we had to help them. The way that we band together, not work as individuals and we insist on that and that drives them mad. Having a bit of fun, having a go at the system in a way that's productive.*

Deirdre construes the relationship with the institution as "adversarial" and underlines the contrast with how the team relates to each other and to students. We have substantially moved away from a style of management that was "based on high trust and autonomy" which was typical of Irish higher education (Walsh and Loxley, 2015, p. 1137). The new management panopticism creates a low-trust environment where professional ethics and principles are devalued. Processes such as allocating modules have become power struggles between management and staff.

> *Deirdre: The way the system is set up nearly an adversarial relationship between the Heads of Departments and the lecturers because it's his or her job to squeeze as much out of us that they can. Our Heads of Department, they're administrators, they're professionals. They're not one of us. We're in this ridiculous nonsense of a hierarchy, where there's no regard for professional integrity. There's no trust. What do they think we are going to do? [Exasperated tone]. The power that the Head of Department has is the timetable. You know the way that it is used as a weapon? When you hear stories upstairs [in another department] that they use the timetable as well as a weapon to punish…it's disgraceful.*

Despite these practices Deirdre feels that we have not become pessimistic or apathic. She proceeds to tell me;

> *Deirdre: I don't think any of us are burnt out. I mean, we're definitely bruised, a bit battered, but we're not burnt out.*

The team and our culture of caring has been a strong buffer for all of us to retain our passion and enthusiasm for teaching.

Weaponising the Timetable

When I was composing this storied account in late April 2021 management allocated our modules for the following year. Instead of teaching modules that we have substantial expertise and interest in, we are instead given each other's modules. We engage with management to collectively discuss this. This does not go well. We meet many times as a team, we send a collective response requesting that we teach in subject areas we have competence in and passion for. We engage with the union, who takes up our case with senior management. These module allocation battles, as Deirdre mentioned in our conversation, take up all the energy and headspace of the team for many months. Right into our summer holidays we are still engaging with our union and hoping that we can get our modules back. Sara Ahmed's book Complaint! (2021) is replete with examples of academic institutions and how they handle (or more often, do not handle) complaints by staff and students. She describes complaints as hard work; "*so much work to not to get very far*" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 58, emphasis in original). This resonated with our experience during this time; complaints going round and round and getting us nowhere. I have to agree with Ahmed, complaining is exhausting.

These pieces are taken from my journal and highlight what has happened in terms negotiating our module allocation, which Deirdre refers to. The excerpts below from my journal evoke a sense of the stress I felt, due to what I perceive as a profound disrespect towards me (and my colleagues).

> *The team has met on many occasions over the last few weeks to discuss module allocation. We have many conversations, send polite emails, try to cajole and negoatiate, in order to teach the modules we have compentce in. I am exhausted after a difficult and demanding year of emergency remote teaching. I want to know what my modules are so that I can prepare for next September. I check the emails obsessively… nothing. In the meantime, my colleagues have received their allocation. Modules that they have invested in and developed huge expertise in are summarily taken from them. All of our team are allocated modules that others had previously taught.*

During our meetings I can hear the stress in people's voices. Pat talks about his exasperation; a module in which he has shown great innovation in, has been taken from him. Helen tells wearily of the overwhelm she feels. As Deirdre describes it, module allocation has become "a weapon to punish", for some unknown transgression on our part. Interactions with management are increasingly fraught. Someone mentions taking stress leave because of this situation. This resonates with me and my own stress levels. I do not know if it is incompetence or malevolence, but as Helen despairingly tells me during one of our meetings: "It is also a kind of disrespect and negligence, and really, I suppose, a lack of care". This carelessness has significant impacts on us.

The potentially divisive practice of module allocation has paradoxically brought us even closer together. We band together to support each other. We decide to negotiate this as a team, rather than accept the individualised approach. Management refuse to communicate with us collectively. Significant time and energy is expended on this process. This is a key battle for us, can we be a bulwark against the uncaring practices of our institution? Deirdre facilitates multiple team meetings and attends late night Union meetings, working tirelessly on our behalf. She has the courage of her convictions and the energy to lead the fight for our academic integrity. I feel like I have been 'in the wars'. I am not sure I can keep up this level of emotional investment; I need to care less.

In September we return to campus, our module allocation remains unchanged. We lost the battle.

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[Field Text: Inquiry Log, June 2021]

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I feel under attack. If the timetable is the weapon, what is the war? I feel the war is an attack on me, on my values. I am stressed, overwhelmed, distressed. There is violence in this – I am harmed by this lack of respect and carelessness. I love my work, I love the interaction with the students, and I love learning. But I can't go on working in this kind of environment. I daydream about an imaginary future, where someone wonders, what ever happened to that vibrant group in Ballylacken? They used to be so committed, so energetic, so innovative. I answer despairingly: Their

remnants are here, but at some point, for our own self-care, we had to stop
caring. 'Turn up, do your job, go home'. A dystopian future for the care-
less institution.

[Field Text: Personal Vignette. A dystopian daydream, September 2021]

The excerpts above document what is a deeply disrespectful process, depleting our energy from the pedagogic relationships which should be at the core of our teaching. The practice of module allocation undermines our sense of agency, our professionalism, and our scholarship. David Hawkins (1974, 2002) conceptualises teaching as a triangular relationship between I, thou, and it; the teacher, the student, and the subject/wider world. To teach in a relational manner presupposes subject mastery, this allows for the focus on the I-thou dyad that is essential to a relational pedagogy. Hawkin's trilogy helps illuminates why the module allocation process is so distressing for us. The constant upheaval with our modules is so disruptive as it deflects energy from the relational.

Fundamental to the pedagogic relationship is respect, as we hear from Deirdre. She details the process of "tuning into" her students, resonating with Carol Rodgers (2020) description of presence as attending to and being *tuned into* the learner. The respect this team embodies in our relationships is unfortunately not reciprocated from management. What Deirdre's narrative highlights though is that the team has been a vital source of emotional and professional support, in the absence of supportive managerial relationships. This support also allows us to resist practices that undermine collegiality and solidarity. I am thankful for Deirdre for her support for me during this time. I think that without her, I would have become a more care-less educator.

The challenge during this inquiry has been in acknowledging the distress I felt over how our modules were being allocated while also focussing on what care and a care-based pedagogy entailed. This has led to this constant tension between fearing the current issues with management would take over the inquiry, to, on the other hand, trying to pretend it is not happening and suppressing my emotional reactions to events that are unfolding in the midst of this inquiry. My research interests arose as I wanted to amplify what I understood as a nurturing team that supported my care-centred pedagogy. As the inquiry unfolded, due to ongoing conflict with management, it also became for me how I could keep caring, as I experienced a profound lack of care from my institution. Sara Ahmed,

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when discussing complaints in academic institutions, writes: "The institution becomes what you come up against" (2021, p. 7). Unfortunately, during this period, my institute became, for me, the opposite of care.

Postscript June 2022

I met Deirdre for a coffee during the summer. She is delighted; she has been offered an opportunity to work with an external development agency next semester. The details have yet to be worked out, but she imagines that she will not be based in the office in Ballylacken in September.

Meeting Helen: Care and the Professional

Helen joined the institute at the same time as me. She lectures in social policy and recently completed her PhD in youth work. I remember when I started my own doctoral studies, I was struggling to understand an article I was reading on Foucault. I sat with Helen in the canteen, and over a cup of coffee, she explained in really simple terms, (not an easy feat), governmentality and power. Although she is a serious academic and scholar, she wears this lightly. I imagine that is how she teaches social policy too, by making the complex accessible.

Helen and I have had many philosophical conversations about our roles and work contexts, so this is an easy space to enter with her. I remark to Helen that we have been colleagues for over 20 years. She tells me that she worries about what the next 15 years will bring for us. The Institute is in a state of flux, we are to become a Technology University next year. I comment humorously that I am taking it day by day! We often speak about the emotional demands of teaching; Helen has been a great support to me too in recent months as I struggled with high teaching loads, new modules and undertaking doctoral studies. I have a sense that Helen does not necessarily identify herself as a caring lecturer, so I am curious to tease this out with her.

I begin our conversation by asking what inspired her to become a lecturer. Though initially drawn to becoming a Youth Worker, an opportunity arose to lecture soon after she graduated. She felt that she could also make a difference by lecturing, through shaping

the emerging Youth work professional. Social justice and equality have always been fundamental motivating factors for her, she can clearly trace the biographical reasons for this. Although she admits to being more 'muted' now about the possible impact of education for students who come from a disadvantaged background, she still feels that there is a positive impact for individuals in their own lives.

> **Helen:** *It is also about personal growth, confidence, self-esteem. We're there as well to bring students through that journey. It's not just a piece of paper, it's a process and it's about how they come out as individuals, both personally in terms of their confidence but also in terms of their questioning of some of the societal issues that are happening.*

We discuss Helen's approach to teaching social policy, a subject that students find challenging. She feels that this then becomes *her* challenge. How can she make a theoretically heavy subject real for the students? How can she raise their awareness of the impact of policy on their personal and professional lives? She cares about social policy and hopes to influence her students to care too. She outlines how she engages her students through her own passion and commitment.

> **Helen:** *I am quite passionate about youth and social policy. I believe that if students see you work hard, they also work hard. I think passion is, no matter what you're teaching really, is important. It is what students buy into. It's what they hear or see it in you, even when sometimes they're not understanding some of the materials. What they do understand is that this is something to care about. I think that hooks them in.*

Helen encourages students to think more deeply about social policy and hopes to shape an "emerging professional" who is capable of critiquing social structures and inequalities. She models her own thinking process in class, posing questions to prompt deeper engagement with the material. She likes to add a dash of humour. She uses her own biography as well as autobiography to highlight inequality.

> *Helen: It's about critical reflective practice. Sometimes I've got them to read autobiographies of people who've been influential in social policy. They love stories and the stories can be powerful. In those stories, they can see people reflecting on inequality either in their own lives or in the lives of the people they worked with. I would also tell stories about my own life or my parents' lives or my grandparents' lives. Biography is really important. Sometimes I would get them to think about their own personal philosophy; their own worldview. I would also get them to reflect on how social policy has impacted that worldview.*

Helen has a deep commitment to social justice and wishes to encourage her students to challenge inequality in their future professional practice. However, she feels that we have not adopted a model of critical reflective practice as a team or embedded this enough across the programme. This is not something we have articulated as a team, although it resonates strongly with my own view of education. I remark in our conversation: "Fundamentally what are we doing as educators if we're not trying to make people change the world to be a better place?" For me, a just world needs caring professionals. Care that does not address systemic structural and societal issues is empty rhetoric.

I ask Helen what are the key things she has learned that she would pass on to a new staff member. Describing teaching as "being contained in that classroom with a group", she recommends "engaging your passion". She suggests "you've got to be able to read a group, you might realize people are not with you and you've got to be able to read the group and react". She goes on to describe the autonomy and agency she has within the classroom;

> *Helen: Once I go into the classroom and close the door, that's my space where I have control (not control of the students) but I have control of what I do in that space and subverting and playing with learning outcomes and just being a little bit more critical about what we do, the role that we play in the student's journey and in the whole education sphere. Remembering that power that you have and bringing that into the classroom.*

Remembering to question always, what you're doing, trying to achieve. Not just going along with whatever the learning outcomes say. You've got to have an aim and objective in what you're doing in the classroom that is not stated necessarily in the module descriptor. Otherwise, it is just factory processing, if you don't have a clear sense of what you're trying to achieve, outside of the module, outside of the programme.

The idea of *playing* with learning outcomes resonates strongly with me. I remark to Helen that I had not previously questioned this concept. She feels that it is "factory processing" if we unquestioningly adhere to the prescribed learning outcomes. Helen feels that having a clear sense of purpose is crucial for lecturers. She is grateful for the space our conversation has given her to reengage with her purpose, something she is conscious of, but also at times forgets.

The Ballylacken Energy

We agree that along with the influence of the doctoral studies many of the team are undertaking/have completed, we have also achieved "a mature wisdom as a group" which allows us to critically question some of our practices. We proceed to discuss the communal office space in Ballylacken that we have shared for many years**.** Helen describes an "energy you pick up on", which she defines as a commitment to our students and a commitment to each other. She feels that this culture and ethos spurs us on to care more, through what she terms an "unconscious peer mentoring". Tracing the conditions that established a particular culture in Ballylacken, she feels that "who we are and how we are right now comes out of all of that experience". She emphasises the direction that our first Head of Department gave us, trusting us and this in turn enabled a trust in each other.

> **Helen:** *That culture just got established by our actions, by our teamwork, by our committee work and by our reflections on all of those things. That ethos, that commitment to doing a good job, the commitment to students, the commitment to each other. I think we rely on each other now in Ballylacken. We still have that trust in each other. We look to each other, rather than look to the organization, in what we do, for the reassurance.*

Some of the things we see go on in terms of practices, we look to each other to say, 'could this not be better?' And to bring us back sometimes, because you do drift away to the way a big organization does things, where that anonymous feeling of 'just anything goes, and you just get in and get out and you don't get involved'.

We look to people to bring us back, a compass, to remembering what we're there to do and how we can do it. How we can do it in a good way, in a better way, in a way that serves the students well, in a way that's serves us well. I care about the team and not letting the team down. Doing the best because you also feel that everybody else around you are doing their best.

Using the metaphor of a compass to describe the team she feels that in the larger Institution we need the team to remind us of our values, of what's important to us. We are reminded of our "commitment to excellence", to serving the students and our team. She feels that this culture is an essential aspect of our capacity to care for the students and to care for our team. This resonates for me; I feel the same and have often thought I can only continue to care because I am surrounded by people who care. I envisage the team as a compass too. It is very comforting to realise that others feel the same.

I ask Helen if she would herself as a caring educator. She tells me that she would not formulate it in that way.

Helen: *From the teacher point of view, I see it as my job, I want to be professional about my work. I care about the experience students get. That makes me want to do a good job, both for myself and for them. So that's the way I think I would frame it more ... I do see that because of the small groups you get to know students, so, I think ... I do care. Care does come into it, but I wouldn't frame it that way.*

I am really struck by the fact that Helen does not see herself as caring. I tell her emphatically that we each enact care in different ways.

> *CA: My experience of what you do, is something that I would totally typify as a caring educator, with high standards of professionalism. I see that as an aspect of care, actually. Because if we care for the students, we put the work in and do our best.*

Helen proceeds to detail her practice of showing discretion about assignment dates, tasks, and attendance when the student's situation requires that. She has many conversations with students before or after class or students calling to the office. This represents someone who does care about and is committed to her students. As our dialogue continues, I notice a change in how Helen perceives herself. Initially she tells me that being professional necessitated being detached from the students. Helen perceives care as something predominantly relational. She conflates care with affection, asserting that she is "not really a great affectionate person". However, other staff members have had an influence on her practice. She now recognises the value of that relational element and the positive influence that we can have on a student. As our conversation develops, she comes to a different understanding, telling me;

> *Helen: I do think that we do … I do care about the students. I'm always afraid or I have this view that to be professional meant to be objective and standoffish and removed from the student. I've seen other lecturers be much warmer and involved with students, and let's say in broad terms, care about them, in a way that I'd never thought of doing. Just in encouraging words in the hall or in the canteen. Letting them know that they have talents and capacities. I can see those students really grow from that, in terms of their confidence and the encouragement. I've learned that from seeing other people do it. I feel that as I've gotten older, I feel a little bit more like I can do that.*

This resonates with Laura Berlant's (2011) work on cruel optimism, where she suggests that the discourse around professionalism can sometimes mean that we are complicit in practices/ideologies we may not actually acquiesce to. This dialogue around care prompts me to consider the many aspects of care. It can be viewed as a characteristic, a practice, and an ethos. Care may be about being warm and affectionate. It is also about our practices with our students, whereby we are flexible with assignments and course requirements if

needed. It is also an ethos that underscores our pedagogy and way of relating to each other in the team.

Helen tells me that she cares about her own standing, that she wants to be seen as someone who does a good job. As I spend time revisiting our conversation, I am left with a sense of the absolute professionalism that Helen embodies. She displays a deep commitment to her students and a passion for her pedagogy. She may not identify this as care, but for me, these high standards of professionalism demonstrate a crucial aspect of care. The concept of professionalism infuses our conversation and I wonder now about the power that a dominant discourse has to shape our practice. I am curious about the discourse of professionalism we have internalised. How does this impact and possibly constrain how we teach? The idea that being 'professional' means being 'objective' is a powerful paradigm. What Helen shares with me is her unfolding and emerging practice, influenced by others in our team, that professionalism can also encompass care.

Despite being constricted by outcomes-based metrics, Helen recognises that we can and do exercise control in our classrooms. Leo too advises me to focus on the relationship with our students, rather than the outside forces we cannot control. Despite constraints teachers have, what Deborah Ball (2018) terms, 'discretionary spaces' in our classrooms, where we have choices about how we respond. Carol Rodgers (2020, p. xiv) suggests that we need to be "more alert to-more present in" these discretionary spaces. We can and do disrupt dominant discourses through our caring pedagogy. Prompted by this discussion on agency, I also feel more hopeful. It is less disempowering when I reclaim the power I have through and in my everyday practices with colleagues and students.

Postscript July 2022

Helen applied for a position working in the Youth and Community Work department of a prestigious university in late June. She rang to tell me that she had gotten the position. Of course, I was thrilled for her. But it was also tinged with a huge sadness, which she herself felt, as she told me her news. I just do not want to think about what the office will feel like when I go back after the holidays and see her desk emptied out.

Nora sends this message to our group on Helen's last day;

> *Nora: It will be very surreal, clearing it out and disappearing under the cloak of summer silence ... Lots of love to you Helen, it is really hard to believe it is true! Having the cleanest and tidiest desk I've ever seen will make the physical clear-out straightforward for you ... but the emotional and intellectual void you will leave for us all will take a lot longer to clear! I have no doubt though that you will always carry a piece of Ballylacken with you, and we will always be here cheering you on as you rise onward and upward ... Your solid, grounded, caring, and passionate self will be deeply missed by students and staff alike.*

Chapter 4: Stories of Care: Encounters with Nora, Claire, and Eamonn

Introduction

I meet with Nora, Claire, and Eamonn towards the end of October and early November 2020. We were still working from home and the darkness arrives early every day now. I need to put on an extra jumper as the house is getting colder. It is a busy time, but I have settled into working online and feel quite competent with the technology now. I am enjoying having these conversations with my colleagues, it is an opportunity to connect with people. Physical contact with people is minimal at the moment as the country is on a strict lockdown. As my research conversations progressed, I have become very aware of building time in before our meeting, to quieten my mind from the busyness of other distractions. I hope to connect on an emotional level, to get a felt sense of my colleagues' lived experience. I close down the computer, close my eyes, breathe. I set the intention to be fully present to each person and to our research encounter. When we finish, I write up reflections in my diary, again attending to both the cognitive and affective elements of our meeting.

Meeting Nora: 'Wherever you go, go with all your Heart'

Nora is thoughtful, kind, and full of heart. When I think of a caring educator, I think of Nora. I greatly admire her deep commitment and caring towards her students. I feel excited about having this conversation. We connect online, in her upstairs bedroom. At one point, she remarks humorously that "the children are roaring" downstairs. She is a busy mother of young children, and I really appreciate that she carves out this time for us to connect. I begin by asking Nora what inspired her to become a lecturer. She hopes to "influence future professionals to bring that caring element and that sense of compassion" to their practice. She believes that these are the elements that create helpful and healing relationships. I remark that this is a powerful purpose for an educator and yet I wonder if it is actually possible to teach our students to care or be caring. There are no modules on care in our degree programme and care, as such, is not explicitly taught Nora passionately believes that we can teach care by modelling care.

> *Nora: I hope I care for the students. I try and model that for them. Everything I work in, in terms of education, always comes back to myself. I'm trying to model that care and model how I hope that they may in turn work with other people…*

Drawing on the work of Una McCuskey's *The Dynamics of Attachments* (2005) Nora hopes to represent a safe caregiver for our students. She feels that "a lot of people potentially in social care/social work come in as an overdriving caregiver and a very low care-seeker".

> *Nora: Una McCuskey would very much look at the balance of the caregiver and the care seeker. To be able to give care, you have to have received care. I'm hoping that I can help people get a better balance. In my work with them, I'm constantly encouraging people to seek care and so that balance of awareness of the care-seeker and the caregiver.*

As we converse, I remind Nora about a group of students she taught a couple of years ago. Two major tragedies occurred within a few months of each other. Over the Christmas holidays a classmate died suddenly. Then in early spring, after a devastating car crash, a second student suffered life-changing injuries.

> *CA: You dropped the agenda and then you were with them, and you supported them and if they will ever remember anything, they'll remember that you modelled that care and that you were with them on the journey, as opposed to 'now we have to move on to lecture number two and learning outcome number four'. Their biggest learning will probably be that time with you!*

> *Nora: Thanks CA. You're giving me goosebumps now! That's what I hope, when you're saying how I model care, I hope that it does involve being fully tuned in. It involves being tuned into everything that's going on in a class and being willing and able to drop the agenda…And still, they learned more. They learned more how to manage grief. They learned how to communicate. They learned how to deal with all kinds of emotions and*

family systems and group dynamics. There's so much learning in that. It was unbelievable.

When tragedy struck for that class Nora carried and cared for that group as they navigated trauma and grief. She dropped the agenda, i.e., the prescribed curriculum and embodied and modelled care in her pedagogy. I imagine if we wish to educate people to be caring professionals then this type of approach is essential. We have to be willing to drop our agendas and be fully present to our students. Nora's method of modelling care teaches care, whether we understand it as a skill that can be taught or a characteristic to be fostered. According to Nora many of our students have experienced challenges in their lives and therefore we must adopt a trauma-informed lens to our practice. There are many intersections between a caring pedagogy and a trauma-informed one. This is a very profound shift in how we relate to our students. It is a more compassionate, trusting, and humane way to interact with them. This conversation has given me the language to understand my own practice differently and prompted changes in how I relate to my students.

> **Nora:** *Trauma-informed care changes the premise from 'what's wrong with you?' to 'what happened to you?' If somebody is coming and there's an issue where they aren't doing, or they haven't submitted an assignment; it isn't 'what is wrong with him, but I wonder what's happening for them? What stopped them doing that?' I try and have that frame of view because it helps me too. It helps me have compassion, tells me not to be frustrated, and to understand that whatever their behaviour, It's not about me, or a reflection on me. It's about whatever's going on for them and to try and de-centre from that. So that helps me keep emotionally more level as well.*
> **CA:** *That's actually a very profound shift in how you're relating to the students. There's that compassion piece, it's a more helpful place, and you're also taking your ego out of it.*

Pockets of Care

Nora feels care should be infused throughout all aspects of the department. Care should be a core ethos of the pedagogy of a Department of Applied Social Sciences. It is more than its subject matter. Care needs to be experienced at all levels by the students, individually from the lecturers, at year level, at course level and at department level. Care also needs to be experienced by the staff from the department and from the Institution. Nora describes that process as creating "a holistic containment, a holding atmosphere". She conceptualises this by drawing on the work of Gillian Ruch (2007), who describes the process of holistic containment as relating to three domains: emotional, organisational, and epistemological. If we are to continue to give care, we must also receive care from our organisation. Nora has found at times that her caring practice has not been reciprocated by the Institute. She experiences a painful disconnect between her holding of learners and how she is held organisationally.

> *Nora: Is our organisation holding up and able to provide that holding space and care? Which I found quite difficult that it wasn't there and that was quite dis-regulating for me in some ways ... Some of my personal distress has been in trying to regulate myself and find my pockets of care in that so that I can stay in a space where I'm able to continue to give care.*

Practicing self-care and "tuning in to when I need to take a step back if my resources are down" is essential to her practice. She also credits her family support and external supervision; "I have places where I have that care and that hold". Nora uses the metaphor 'pockets of care' to describe the places where she experiences that care and that 'hold'. She is grateful for our team support and also the individuals within the team who support her. I feel this same sense of being held and cared for in our team. It has been a major buffer against the encroaching managerialism in our organisation. I feel these 'pockets of care' are essential for me to continue to work from a caring space with students.

The importance of caring is an essential aspect of our pedagogy with students; Nora asserts that "if the need of care is greater, then for me, that overrides". Nora recounts a similar story to Yvonne, where new lecturers are told; "Your duty is *not* to care; it is to educate". This advice completely ignores the relational aspect of teaching. Indeed, as

Kathleen Lynch (2010) argues, there is a very strong culture of carelessness in higher education. Nora epitomises the opposite of this careless culture.

Here she describes a simple teaching moment, where first-year students have to introduce themselves to the class;

> **Nora:** *'Now while you're waiting for your turn, how are you feeling, check-in with your body, because that's really important information. Being able to tune into my body because that'll inform you moving into social care. It gives you important information about how you deal with uncertainty, how you are in new situations, how do you find groups. I'm learning about this to learn about myself and to become more self-aware, but not only for that. I'm learning because if I can tune into it, then it'll make me a safer practitioner'.*
>
> *If I can build or help support them to build their own self-awareness, their own inner practice, their own inner sense of self. You can bring and support other people in coming on that journey as well in a really safe embodied way. We're educators, so I tried to model it in that sense.*
>
> **CA:** *There are a lot of things there. I could just spend the whole time talking about that. But bringing in the body, but also recognizing that the students themselves have learning and knowledge that's not necessarily in a book, actually, there's a knowing in the body and they could tune into that. That also becomes a resource in practice for them.*

She tells me that "helping students recognize the impact and power they have is really important to me in my teaching". She wants students to know that their self is the greatest tool and wants to help them "to tune into their whole person". Nora uses lots of techniques to bring awareness to the body. She loves;

> **Nora:** *The high energy moments where we can all get up and do something and you feel that real total dynamic movement.*

She believes that the student's inner practice and somatic awareness will fundamentally help in their future professional lives. As I listen to Nora recount how she focusses on

embodied learning and the student's own knowing I am again reminded of how disconnected my own experience was in higher education.

As I remark in our conversation;

> *CA: I only wish I knew this stuff when I was in college. I think a lot of time, for me, it was people filled our heads, but nobody ever talked about the body. I think that's profound actually. Because we know now that you can't live a divided life, we have to bring the body in.*

It saddens me to reflect on how disembodied my education experience has been. Nora encourages students to value their own life experience, their own ways of knowing, to stop privileging the head over the heart. She weaves theory into our conversation in a way that makes it come alive. I imagine being in one of her classes and watching her make the theory dance – with practical lived examples from her own life and professional practice. She integrates theory and practice and seeks to embody the values she teaches.

> *Nora: It's natural in the sense that, the theories, and the things I speak about, it's not that I decided I'm going to do these and be this, but on my journey, they're the ones that resonated most with who I feel I am.*

Referring to the Rogerian concept of authenticity she speaks about "a sense of our inner selves, when our ideal self is closely in line with our actual self". She tries to "live in that space and help others to live in that space too". This resonates with Walker and Gleaves's (2016) suggestion that authenticity is an important aspect of a care-centred pedagogy.

> *Nora: I think helping people become who they are and helping them have that realistic feeling of who they are and being okay. You need to have that ability to tune into all the other elements that are going on for people and to bring that human element with you and show them that you're human too. The first line of my teaching philosophy is: Wherever you go, go with all your heart. So, I'm a strong believer that we're all growing and becoming our true selves. I'm learning to embrace a new title of Practitioner Educator and bringing all my heart into this journey.*

Nora brings her whole integrated self to practice. She represents a radical alternative to the careless conception of a lecturer, choosing to identify instead as a Practitioner Educator, someone who embodies care. A caring pedagogy is not some tick box exercise, it is "bringing me every day as best I can". She is always "putting out messages of care and models that it's okay to be yourself and that you are worthy of care". For Nora, care is a pedagogy, an ontology, and a philosophy for life.

Nora introduces me to Gillian's Ruch's (2007) concept of holistic containment in our discussion. I travel with this idea, it offers a way of naming and describing what I have been noticing across our conversations: The sense that the team offers the support (or containment) that the organisation does not or cannot provide. This sense of feeling 'held' or 'contained' by the team is what facilitates resistance, fosters hope and enables us to sustain a care centred pedagogy.

This account shines a light on the relational aspect of research conversations when adopting a Narrative Inquiry stance. This is a dialogic space. I am present in and engage with Nora in our conversation. Nora gets "goosebumps" when I remind her of an incident that I felt was significant to explain her pedagogical approach. As our conversation progressed, I notice and reflect back to her how she uses theory to make sense of her experience. She is visibly moved by this – she feels affirmed as I notice something that she values about her practice. I had read Ronald Pelias' (2019) idea of being present to others, as 'leaning in'. I notice my back is sore from the effort to 'lean in' to this space with Nora. It was a connected and attuned experience. Nora is 'wide awake' to the learner, the learning, and to herself, reminding me of pedagogical presence which requires "in-tune-ment" as outlined by Carol Rodgers (2020, p. 36). Being wide awake is essential for a narrative inquiry too, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2006). This encounter felt like a wide-awake space that allowed for presence and connection.

Postscript June 2022

Nora rings to tell me the wonderful news that she is pregnant, she will be going on maternity leave in November. Her teaching for next semester has been allocated across 3 campuses so she does not imagine she will be in Ballylacken much anyway.

Meeting Claire: 'What Does Care Actually Mean?'

Claire started in Ballylacken a year before me. She had a varied career in training before joining the institute. She teaches a wide variety of modules, in management in the voluntary and community sector and in professional practice. Accompanying one more group of first years to fourth year will see her at retirement. She is deeply committed to her students and this team but in recent years she seems to have reached a positive detachment from the institutional stressors of the job. We schedule our conversation for Reading Week, imagining time to reflect and connect. Claire has come directly from another meeting; the illusion of a quieter week is shattered by the added demands of emergency remote teaching and supervising placements during the Covid-19 pandemic. She puts on the mute button while "munching biscuits", there is a familiarity between us, we have been colleagues for over 20 years. I tell her that this is primarily what I term 'a reflective space' to discuss her lived experience as a lecturer. I do not use the term 'caring educator' with Claire; I have a sense that she would not identify with that.

We begin by reflecting on the many iterations our college has been through since its inception as an innovative third-level institute in 1999. The college was established with a broad development remit; staff had a teaching as well as community/business outreach role. Claire views her current role as "confined" by high teaching loads with limited time for community engagement or research. She tells me that;

> *Claire: You just turn up and you teach your hours, nobody wants to really*
> *know about any of your other competencies or capacities.*

Claire goes on to outline the impact of a care-less institution on her motivation and engagement levels;

> *Claire: I mean none of us are experiencing care from the people that we*
> *are responsible to. I'm experiencing, the more we go on, a level of*
> *dismissiveness … I'm capable of doing lots of things so it's suiting me now*
> *to disengage. I have all these hours and all of this time, and this energy*
> *and I feel really nobody gives a sugar …then we start to withdraw. Really*

the Institute is only getting this much value, instead of that much value out
of me.

We discuss the next institutional change looming large for us, the Technological University. In the university system Claire feels that "the people who are valued are the people who research and the whole notion of teaching is diminished". Each institutional change has changed her identity as an educator, "you become a different person" for each different organisation. Claire views herself as "somebody who facilitates learning" rather than "the old-fashioned lecturer, where they just stand up and disseminate what they know".

Claire's epistemology encompasses the possibility of students accessing their own "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 2019; Moll *et al.,* 1992, p. 132). She displays "a deep respect for that unknown territory that is the experience of the learner" (Rodgers, 2020, p. 37). She values the students' lived experiences and perspectives; telling me that she has learned as much from students as they've ever learned from her. Claire depicts the traditional lecturer as "high and mighty" she hopes that she is "accessible" to her students. Claire feels that we must model a core level of respect for the students, touching on a familiar theme that arose in all conversations in my inquiry.

> **Claire:** *If we're teaching them anything, it is teaching them how to work*
> *with other people. To some extent, you want to model some way of doing it.*
> *The overall thing is the fundamental respect for a student. Students pick up*
> *respect too. The respect for the student is a mirror of the respect that you*
> *would want them in turn to show towards other people.*

Fuzzy and Blurry Boundaries

Referring to the many years we have been teaching, Claire reflects on the fact that previously if a student was struggling, we might have gotten "head, neck and heels involved to try and help them". She is clear, though, that it is not the role of the academic to get involved with students who need more support because of issues in their personal lives. Now, she asserts, we have learned to refer students to counsellors or other professionals who can assist them. She also alludes to the fact that some staff might find

it more difficult to maintain boundaries with students, seeking to assist them if they are experiencing difficulties.

> *Claire: In social care or early childhood education, a lot of students who come into it are from care and from backgrounds requiring care or engaging with care. How you are in your own life; it's not part of what I am responsible for in terms of my professional life. Now that's not to say I abdicate responsibility. I'm conscious that something is happening in your life but it's not my job to manage that. It isn't my job to start engaging with you as a social care professional, really engaging with them as service-users, rather than students. That's one of the challenges that we're having at the moment, there has been a fuzzing of boundaries around that for us. Is that creating a particular construct as well that is very different from plasterer who might have been in the care setting, but where for him or her the educational experience allows them to park who they are and become their separate professional self? Whereas we're creating a blurry boundary between self and professional.*

If we envisage personal development to be part of the professional formation of a social care worker, this raises a crucial dilemma. The plasterer can become a good plasterer without addressing his/her personal issues, can the social care worker? As I reflect on this, I imagine Nora might answer very differently than Claire. I think it is a vital discussion for the team to engage in: these 'blurry boundaries' need to be explored.

Care does not have Currency

I am curious whether Claire would identify as a caring educator. She takes a long breath and pauses before she answers.

> *Claire: Probably not. It doesn't have currency in the context of professionalism. You turn up to a job focused on teaching, would somebody value care? ... They wouldn't particularly value care. They would value your professional knowledge and your professional doctorate... and nobody ever asks you whether you care about the students*

or not. Would you describe yourself as a caring professional in a CV? Not for a lecturing job.

CA: I'm really curious about this notion that lecturing, and care are separate. This idea of what a professional looks like.

Claire: I don't disagree with that. I'm saying that when you ask would I describe myself as a caring professional. In the context of this, I wouldn't label myself that way.

CA: But do you feel that you are a caring educator?

Claire: Well, I'd like to think I am, but I'm not sure. The judgment is probably better made by the students. You're hoping that you're doing it. You're trying to demonstrate care. What does care actually mean? The university, for example, creates these standards that everyone must meet. Is that care? In creating standards at that level, are they caring for the students? If care is about their long-term career prospects, then yes, they are caring for them. But it doesn't look anything like what you're talking about. I think the concept of care is not so simple.

Equally, tough parenting is caring but it doesn't look very pleasant. It might not be nice, and the student might not have any warm feelings about it, but the reality of it is that it's really good for them at the end of the day. It's proper care, but it's tough.

CA: So, care, each of us is enacting it differently?

Claire: Yes, and it's complicated. I mean, doesn't care looked different in different contexts. What do you mean by care at all? Does it look different from my perspective? From the student's perspective? I wonder sometimes whether it's as important if I were teaching engineering or science because they're not as interpretive as social science…I have a question (I think the principles of professionalism will stand up any which way) about whether or not I need to care about the students or whether the students care about me or not, matters? I only need them to know what they know.

I was asking you the question for you to think about whether, if you were doing this research in another space, would it be very different, or would it be the same? What is care then anyway? In my research, care was often about being the best professional you could be in order to properly

prepare and present the knowledge that you've got, but in a co-created

space.

CA: Does it matter that you care about the students, and they care about

you?

Claire: You've used this word 'care', but I say 'well, what is that?' Is that

the word I'd use to describe what I'm doing? Where does it come from?

Does it come from a heart space or a head space? Does it come from (for

me) from a logical thing or does it come from a heart place where I

actually fundamentally care about the students as people? I don't know if

they're the same things. I think the outcome can be the same for the

students.

Do we care on an emotional level or on a cognitive level? Claire suggests that either way, the end result is similar for the student. She suggests that it is the students who will assess whether she is caring or not. This is problematic if the care is like the tough parenting she describes. It may not feel good at the time, so will students value this 'tough care'? She queries whether it is necessary that students care about us. This question reverberates with me, I had never considered the importance of reciprocal care from my students. I reflect on how my motivation levels drop significantly if I sense my students do not seem to care about my module. If they do not care about my subject, I feel this personally, as somehow not caring about me. This is a new awareness for me. How my students connect with the subject matter (and me) is also an important aspect of the educational encounter (Hawkins, 1974, 2002).

As we come to the end of our conversation I ask;

CA: How did this process feel to you?

Claire: Don't ask me how I feel about it, ask me what I think about it!

[Laughter]

Our encounter is full of pugnacious energy, we wrestle over language, meanings, and feelings. She tells me that her robust engagement is "out of care". Although Claire poses

insightful questions about care, professionalism, boundaries, and the nature of research, I am not sure I have a felt sense of her lived experience as an educator.

As I revisit our conversation months later, I realise I must address my opaque use of the term care. Claire asks me rhetorically, what does care actually mean? I feel that Claire is bristling against my use of the word 'care'. I am curious about her resistance to using the term 'care' or 'caring educator'. She asserts that care is not valued when it comes to teaching, it is your qualifications and knowledge that count. She wonders would care matter if we taught in different discipline areas. I answer emphatically that surely it must matter when we are teaching social care and early childhood education. She later answers this question herself when she tells me that "if we want people to care, we must model care". Leo, Nora, and Yvonne all embrace the idea of care in their teaching, for others, it is less straightforward to use the language of care to describe their practice.

Postscript June 2022

Claire has chosen to teach all her modules in another department for the coming semester. The Head of Department there is easier to work with and she is given modules within her expertise and competence. She still has one foot in our department and one foot in the other, she tells me that she will wait and see how this coming semester goes before deciding which direction she will go in.

Meeting Eamonn: 'I Don't Call Myself a Lecturer Anymore'

Eamonn was one of the original lecturers hired in the new Ballylacken institute in 1999. He celebrated a significant birthday a while back; we were all still in the office then, so we were able to share a cake and mark the occasion. In my mind, Eamonn is the 'founding father' of our team and our care-based approach. When I started in Ballylacken he would have informally mentored me, sharing resources generously and steering me kindly and quietly in terms of my practice. I am nervous but also excited to meet with him. Nervous as a novice researcher and wanting to appear as a competent interviewer. Excited, as Eamonn has had such a pivotal influence on my thinking and my pedagogy. As he remarks at the start of our conversation; it feels like "a very organic, natural process". We have been having these philosophical and pedagogical conversations informally for years.

We discuss the primacy of care to his pedagogy and his professional identity. We talk about the collegiality and trust that is the bedrock of our working relationships. Eamonn describes the team as "a comfort blanket". I admit that I would be very disheartened without that support, of which Eamonn is the cornerstone. I feel that he is the embodiment of care, in a large, at times, uncaring Institution. I hope this storied account provides a glimpse of the impression Eamonn has had on me, as an unassuming mentor for and guide to, being a caring educator.

'The Care Agenda'

Leo and Eamonn both studied in Maynooth University in the late 1970s, subsequently teaching in secondary schools before joining Ballylacken Institute. This initial formation and earlier career mean that care is a central part of the education process for both. Eamonn describes Maynooth University as his "spiritual home" in terms of a care-based focus in education. Maynooth University has a reputation for a focus on social justice, adult education pedagogy, and community development, having "a deep and historic commitment to liberal education" (Maynooth University, 2018, p. 6).

We begin by tracing his early career as a secondary school teacher where he explicates his strong sense of vocationalism.

> *Eamonn: There was a real sense of loving what I wanted to do, having an inner sense of calling to service. It was a sense of really helping young people. I was a Year Head then as well as teaching, so it put me into a very central pastoral role.*

Eamonn describes his teaching as "having an inner sense of calling to service". This reminds me of Carol Rodgers' sense of presence as "acting in the world in ways that serve" (2020 p. 8). He feels a vocational motivation to care for others as he outlines here;

> *Eamonn: To profess. It's all around service or giving; the old religious idea of vocationalism. The concept of professionalism is actually very rich around vocationalism.*

He recounts stories of corresponding with past students and also proudly receiving a signed copy of Cecelia Ahern's first book (his former English student). I have a felt sense of the importance of relationships for Eamonn.

> *Eamonn: I just loved it, and we would have remained very good friends with some of the students that I taught, especially if you had them all the way from first year to Leaving Cert, you'd still be in touch with them, and I've been at several weddings of students I taught back then. And then lovely little serendipitous things happen. I taught Cecelia Ahern, who turned out to be a novelist later on, and her first book, she'd actually sent me a copy of it, and I received it on Valentine's Day in the year she published it, with love from your favourite student. And so, yes, there's some lovely acknowledgements and affirmations. I always feel very blessed. And I use that word deliberately. I always feel very blessed to have enjoyed that career; that path and I got so much fulfilment from.*

From his early days as a secondary school teacher, care has been central to Eamonn's pedagogy. He cares about and is deeply committed to his students, his colleagues, and his scholarship. He speaks of "a noble intention… in terms of care and in trying to show care". He emphasises the importance of "that caring piece that's wider than just education…added to subject knowledge and its scholarly commitments". Eamonn speaks avidly about his move to third level teaching in the newly established campus in Ballylacken, representing the enthusiasm we all felt as we embarked on our careers in what promised to be a new innovation in higher education.

> *Eamonn: When you think of it now, the first third level institute in the entire country, that actually got the space to develop modules and have them as a central spine in a curriculum around personal development, human capacity building, personal effectiveness.*
> *It's taken the pastoral to its fullest of space. It's really proactive and it's saying to people, we can help you develop yourself to be the best you can, so you can cope with all of the things that life throws at you. That you have some sense of the talents that you have or the wholeness of your being, your capacity to really prosper.*

A significant period in his career was his involvement in teacher training for second level teachers. This allowed him to "fold teaching, pastoral care and personal development together". At this time, he also returned to his *alma mater* to study for his doctorate. Eamonn completed his studies in the Adult and Community Education department, the first such department in Ireland, committed to Freirean ideals and liberation theology. Mary Ryan (2015) contends that this philosophy;

> *with its emphasis on equality and social justice, continues to underpin the*
> *distinctive approach of the Department's adult education teaching*
> *programmes and research agenda.*
>
> (Ryan, 2015, p. 15)

When Eamonn talks about Maynooth University, he is animated and passionate. I realise that his enthusiasm for Maynooth University has also influenced my own decision to study there. It is interesting to note how much Maynooth University features in my inquiry. Both Eamonn and Leo undertook their undergraduate studies there. Eamonn and Helen completed their doctorates here. Nora and I are currently doctoral students too. Maynooth University was Eamon's "spiritual home" in terms of a care-based focus in education. It reconfirmed his values around "collegiality and sharing, dialogue and conversations". It also powerfully validated his commitment to care in education.

Eamonn tells me ardently that;

> **Eamonn:** *The care agenda is no longer part of the dictionary of the unconscious.*
> *I can make it explicit. I can theorise it.*

Eamonn is explicit about naming his pedagogy in terms of care (as is Leo). Maynooth University also solidified his ontological conception of care; he tells me; "This nailed it for me! This is who I am too."

Creating 'a Climate of Real Learning'

Eamonn outlines how he contracts with each group he teaches. He tells his students at the outset;

> *Eamonn: I'll do the absolute best I can do; we'll check-in as we go, and I expect the same from you as well. If we put in the effort collectively, this can be a really phenomenal experience, a growth experience for yourself and an educational one.*

Bringing an adult education register to his teaching, rather than a traditional didactic one, Eamonn explains;

> *Eamonn: I don't feel the responsibility is always mine. It's like you're creating a climate of real learning in a class.*

He asks his students "what can we do collectively?" He tells me; "If I am not feeling an energy, I stop and check in". Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006, p. 266) conceptualised this as *presence*; "a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical" context of the learning environment, with the attendant ability to respond.

> *Eamonn: I've really become much more attentive to those kinds of things that are around our whole relationship with each other and respect for wherever we're at. I help to create an environment where it's really open to questions or what they feel about something; that there's a safe space to say what that is.*
> *I feel and I think my students feel when something special and magical has happened. You feel that it's embodied in the classroom. You get this fantastic question from somebody, or they give an example of something and even via Zoom you can still have those moments. For me it's those conversations; they're so profound.*
> *You see the faces and you just know there's a light-up moment, or sometimes you might see something that's difficult for somebody, a moment*

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of awareness, even. It can be disruptive too. Especially in Sociology,
because you're always looking at the individual and society, human
advantage, and disadvantage, of power and inequality. They begin to see
structures that have been responsible for who they are.
I suppose when you say about the difference between teaching and
lecturing, I mean, to me, that's it. In lecturing, it's one way and we don't
know what's going on intra-personally for them when we're lecturing. But
when I'm really teaching and it's like that Martin Buber concept of the I
Thou; that's when the golden stuff happens. I suppose we've been very
lucky the smaller numbers that we have. I don't call myself a lecturer
anymore. It's the vocabulary of the sector you're in, but I am a teacher.

Eamonn, echoing Nora, remarks that because there is no module explicitly on care on either the social care or early childhood education programmes, "care then becomes a really important piece to wrap all curriculum with". Eamonn recounts the simple caring practices he enacts; individual feedback, module evaluations, check-ins with a struggling student. He offers quiet and subtle support to students during bereavement and loss experiences (he has experience in this area).

He details giving a group of fourth year students' individual feedback sessions. The students comment that friends in other colleges never get "one-to-one attention or care". There is no doubt that Eamonn's students feel cared for; he recounts the story of a student telling him during a Year check-in; "but you always care!" Eamonn's students let him know that they care for him; in their interactions with him, in his teaching evaluation forms, in emails he has received years later about the difference he made in many students' lives. He proceeds to tell me that students leave notes for him at the bottom of this module evaluations; "they say some lovely things, about the care in particular or maybe about the day you did x". He tells me that we should not underestimate the small interventions which can help our students.

Eamonn's values emerge clearly as we converse;

> **Eamonn:** *I think vulnerability would be another value too. I would be far*
> *more aware of this as I've become more experienced and older. I think we*

were sometimes taught in classroom management modules to have a stiff upper lip and to put on a bit of an act. It's been a lifetime process of letting go of all that nonsense. And I think it really is nonsense.

This idea of embracing our vulnerability in the classroom resonates with much that I have read and reflected upon in my own practice. Citing influences such as Paulo Freire, Parker Palmer, Nel Noddings and Maxine Greene, Eamonn draws on a particular epistemological and ontological conception of pedagogy, whereby we bring our whole embodied self to the relational and affective dimension of teaching. Later I reflect on the 'nonsense' I still carry from earlier imprints about education; I see the old scripts running every time I try to bracket myself and my emotions from the inquiry process.

> *Eamonn: One of the things, I think, is being authentic; being your real self and being prepared to admit mistakes and the whole thing of being reflective as well.*

Eamonn dismisses the idea that you can separate who you are outside the classroom from within the classroom. He feels that the concept of professionalism has been "hijacked into the managerialist agenda". As part of my own doctoral studies, I have become aware of how much this managerialist discourse has impacted on my own practice. He disavows the separation of the personal and professional 'self'. He expresses this concept succinctly; "you teach from who you are". My identity has also shaped my pedagogy, but in turn, my teaching has influenced who I am. I am continually learning about myself and my practice as an educator. My conversations with Eamonn over the years are an important part of the on-going reflective practice that nurtures and encourages insight and awareness.

The Dilemma of Care in Higher Education

Eamonn worries;

> *Eamonn: Maybe we are doing too much, and that the attentiveness and the care has the potential to become a barrier to their development of self-responsibility.*

He feels that third level education is about fostering independent and autonomous learners. Even though an educator for over 40 years, Eamonn is still questioning and reflecting on his practice. Our autonomy and agency as educators need to be balanced with reflective practice.

> *Eamonn: Where the boundaries are between giving the students a lot of guidance and a lot of support and maybe sheltering them? What is the best kind of care that empowers them as opposed to that just supports them? Maybe making it more explicit with students about why we care and care towards what. I think we can infuse our teaching and our pedagogies with care, but we need to be careful what are the outcomes from it.*
> *It's not that they're disempowered in any way from reaching their potential. It's a care to support their self-advocacy, and they would in turn be role models. I suppose it's around the agency and the decisions you make around continually renegotiating it. There are balancing acts there, I think. It's not easy. I would prefer to err on the side of that caring space and from that develop boundaries so that students know where the limits are.*

He asks me whether I find this dilemma in my own work.

> *CA: I wonder do we have a good balance … I think we scaffold their learning. We have to always watch that tension, I think, and reflect on it. But I think we fall on the right side of it.*

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural, emotional, and economic capital, Eamonn raises some fundamental questions about equality and education: "The worlds that they're going back to are still the same worlds for them". He feels that there is something "sheerly instinctive" about wanting to help people that are vulnerable or on the margins. Citing the work of Lynch *et al.* (2015), Eamonn outlines a feminist critique of the concept of care. Care must entail empowerment *and* equality. I agree, care must have the critical lens of social justice.

> *Eamonn: It is about helping people remove barriers that are in the way, but that gives them the autonomy to name those barriers for themselves and to help give the tools to negotiate them. There is a political edge in that feminist critique; if it doesn't give that kind of freedom to create, and if it doesn't empower it, if it doesn't give people agency, then I think it's questionable.*
>
> *CA: We're not just soothing people and saying, 'this is okay'. We're saying then, how can things be better or different?*

As he details supporting students, I ask Eamonn what supports him. Family, friends, reading, poetry, and the team in Ballylacken all provide sustenance. He feels "a sense of home", working with colleagues in Ballylacken, who are all committed to "empowering people to be the best they can be".

> *Eamonn: I know it's all the little things and rituals over the years and the fun that we had. Just silly things like birthday cakes or the Christmas things we've had. They're all very important pieces because they give meaning, and they create a sense of connectedness.*

He feels very cared for by his colleagues. He hopes this is reciprocated. Unfortunately, I miss the opportunity here to emphatically state, that I too feel very cared for and supported by Eamonn.

Eamonn feels that Ballylacken has been central to the creation of a values-driven culture that we have maintained for over 20 years now. As in many of my conversations with colleagues a former Head of Department (HoD) is mentioned as key to this ethos. I share Nora's discussion with me around the concept of holistic containment. I feel that two former Heads of Department did provide this containment for us.

> *Eamonn: I do wonder about the support for those leaders who are involved in holistic containment for their colleagues and for people that don't value them. Who minds them?*

We discuss Lynch *et al.*'s (2015) book, *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialisation, Carelessness and Gender.* The book resonated strongly with me; Heads of Departments were interviewed as part of a research project, and they emphasise the invisibility of care in their work. It reminds me of our last HoD who resigned and returned to teaching. Care that is not valued is difficult to sustain.

He remarks that those of us who joined the original Institute in the early 2000s still hold on to the values that were fostered in those early days. There is a norm for us in sharing resources, which is not normal in the rest of the organisation. There is a fundamental trust between us. We discuss the organisational merger we experienced. He feels that because "we care about what we do and who we are as professionals" we may have experienced more stress during the merger. This is a key point; because we care, we feel things more keenly. Maybe this is the cost of caring? If we cared a little less, we would not experience the stress and dissonance we can often feel, within the larger Institution.

> *CA: The team is a big buffer for me. I think I'd be very disheartened and probably a bit depressed without you all! Since COVID that sense of being contained by the team is really important.*
> *Eamonn: Definitely, it's a comfort blanket. It's become an even more important one since the change-over [the merger with Central Institute] …I do wonder how that marriage of the old and the new is panning out [with new staff]. Is caring in that marriage?*

I answer that even though we have not been explicit about our values, I feel the new staff members have embraced our ethic of care. Eamonn's subtle yet powerful guidance and gravitas have been key to the successful marriage of new and old values. He would like us to have a collective conversation about care. He imagines that "everyone has their own sense of what caring means, but it would be very useful to tease that out more". Carole Rodgers (2020, p. xiii) tells us that philosophies of teaching are "both hewn in and tempered by experience" but rarely discussed. This idea emerges from many of my participants; the desire for the programme team to discuss the broader philosophical underpinnings to our pedagogy and practice. And as Claire reminds us, we need to unpack the "fuzzy and blurry boundaries" around care too.

As Eamonn outlines what sustains him in his practice, he remarks;

> **Eamonn:** *I suppose, realising when you're in education, that what you're doing is always significant. You never know what impact that has for someone else. It's the gratitude for that, on every day.*

The Practice of a Care-centred Pedagogy

Eamonn and I meet for a final time to discuss his comments on the latest iteration of this story, nearly a year after our first discussion. He would like if his account could capture some of the more tangible practices that he enacts in his classroom. We discuss how we might offer practical signposts to others who are interested in enacting a relational pedagogy in higher education. Those who might not subscribe to the same ontological views of this team but who, none the less, may wish to enhance their teaching practice. The list here captures good pedagogical practices that Eamonn feels could be enacted by any lecturer who might wish to adopt a more relational pedagogy in their classroom.

Eamonn suggests having module inductions and contracting with each new group of students. He makes an effort to remember what people said about themselves in their introductions as subsequent hooks for building relationships. In this contracting session he makes his values as a caring professional explicit. He outlines his commitment to quality, support, care and 'tough care' when required. A commitment to quality entails having well-prepared materials that are continually updated. He has displayed a life-long commitment to his own scholarship and professional development.

In terms of support, Eamonn scaffolds assessments and helps students develop assessment literacy. He explains assessment briefs and shares criteria for success, whilst also giving helpful and timely feedback. He advocates using authentic assessments which are linked to students' professional and career needs. Eamonn, like all my participants, adopts a co-constructivist and exploratory teaching approach. He uses lots of examples and challenges his students to come up with their own resonances of meaning. He implements active learning strategies for engagement with individual, pair, and group activities in his classes. He encourages students when tasks are well-completed or when they make

positive contributions to learning. He also collaborates with students in the organisation of seminars/conferences/field trips.

Eamonn emphasises the importance of tough care, it is important that the outcome of our care is one that empowers the students, to help them grow and flourish. It is not a process that seeks to create dependency. But if a student needs care in times of transition or loss in their personal lives, Eamonn will support them. Eamonn advises staying optimistic in times of change or recalibration. He suggests that we need to stay close to the heart and values of authenticity, especially when we are challenged by system-wide challenges. He advocates quiet resistance, self-nurturing, and assertiveness.

My conversations with Eamonn capture a rich repository of values, practices, and pedagogical approaches. Eamonn speaks of a "quiet resistance"; I begin to understand the culture in this team as a form of resistance/refusal of the dominant discourses prevalent in higher education. Eamonn exercises his agency in terms of how he describes himself, rejecting "the vocabulary of the sector" to identify as a teacher. Our subjectivity is usually deeply influenced by the dominant discourse (Neimeyer, 2000). In Eamonn's case, he rejects the dominant logic to embrace a care centred identity, that of a teacher. I notice that none of my participants describe themselves as lecturers; we are educators, practice educators, teachers, facilitators. How we name ourselves can be viewed as an act of resistance, one of the many mundane practices that this team engages, which offers a counter-narrative of care to the dominant discourses in higher education.

Postscript June 2022

When we had our original conversation Eamonn was seconded for a semester to another department working in teaching and learning support for staff. This position continued into the next semester and has now become a permanent move. Almost imperceptibly, he has left our team, the department (and Ballylacken).

Chapter 5: In the Midst of Care and Carelessness

Introduction

Over the spring and summer of 2021, I spent time going 'back and forth' with my participants, making meaning together, as I composed the storied accounts of our conversations. It feels like it is time now to gather together to have a collective discussion on care, something both Eamonn and Nora talked about wanting to do. Before we meet, I feel that I need to revisit the care scholarship I engaged with at the earlier stages of my research. I am reading the same texts that I encountered previously, but there is a different texture to them now. A mutable term like neoliberalism is filled with meaning as I literally feel what Rosalind Gill (2009, p. 240) terms the "hidden injuries" of neoliberalism in my tired body and sore back. Motta and Bennett (2018, p. 643) wondered how we can "keep pedagogies of care alive and subjects that care present". This resonates intensely now, with my feelings of exhaustion and my wish, at times, that I could just stop caring. I understand now that care struggles to thrive when it is not supported as a central aspect of our work (Hawkins, 2019; Motta and Bennett, 2018).

At one point in our inquiry, Claire asked me exasperatedly, "what is care then anyway?" Like Claire, several scholars have grumbled about the lack of clarity in the core concept of 'care' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Care is not a simple concept; it has ontological and pedagogical layers that I need to delineate at this stage of our inquiry (Hawkins, 2019; Lynch, 2022; Motta and Bennett, 2018). I want to have a clearer theoretical framework with which to scaffold our impending group discussion.

In this chapter, I consider the careless academic, as typified by Cartesian rationalism, which heavily influences how academics view their role. I begin to understand how carelessness is deeply woven into academia. I outline an ethic of care, which provides an ontological orientation toward relationality and care, for our work in the university. I discuss Nel Noddings' (1992, 2005) conception of 'care as relation', alongside Joan Tronto's (1993, 2013) five phases and elements of care. Influenced by these theorists, I suggest that care is an ontological commitment to our students and our colleagues. In the Ballylacken team, we care together; the stories in this inquiry speak of care as a collective

process, underlining Tronto's contention that care is a "collective responsibility" (2013, p. 35).

As this inquiry attests, we are increasingly negatively affected by neoliberalism in our institutions (see also Hawkins, 2019; Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021; Lynch *et al.*, 2015; Motta and Bennett, 2018). The stories in chapters three and four reveal the thorough dismantling of our community of care. Indeed, the university is moving further away from care as it adopts neoliberal values and systems, seeking to become "a handmaiden of the market" (Lynch and Grummell, 2017, p. 208). These changes permeate into all levels of our practice; changing how we work collegially in the academy and how we teach and engage with our students. This team cared and created a climate of care*;* but as we see from this inquiry, these broader contexts can, and do affect our capacity to care.

The Care-less Academic

Many times, during this inquiry, I questioned whether I could continue to care in my work. This was an uncomfortable position to find myself in. In immersing myself in the literature of care I began to understand more clearly why the concept of care is so troublesome for some academics. Care is a problematic construct in higher education as it disturbs "well-learned distinctions between public and private" life (hooks, 1994, p. 198), as well as the rational/emotive dichotomy (Lynch, 2010). Care is also often conceptualized in maternal terms leaving it "less often considered in higher education with its emphasis on autonomous, self-directed adult learners" (Mariskind, 2014, p. 306). As Walker *et al.* (2006) point out, many academics question even whether a need for care exists in higher education. On a basic human level, we care about students, but deeply embedded in our conceptions of higher education is the idea that our role is about fostering autonomy and disavowing or denying our caring selves. This view of education has a long lineage, which can be traced back to the rational economic actor (REA) view of the citizen (Lynch, 2010; Nussbaum, 1995). The person to be educated is seen as autonomous and logical (Mariskind, 2014) and is to be prepared for *his* (sic) life in the public sphere.

In higher education, we conceptualise our role as educating this *rational* actor. The idea of caring for our students is incompatible then with the Cartesian view of the autonomous, *care-free* third-level student. But this prototype of the ideal third-level student does not exist in my institution; many need to work to be in university[8], many are mature, and some are parents with care responsibilities. Our students in Ballylacken have busy care-full lives, and my participants display a deep respect for how this impacts their university experience. Moreover, Charlotte Overgaard and Jacqueline Mackaway's (2022) research suggests that;

> *all students, not just those with caring responsibilities, benefit from being*
> *seen as complete people with dependants and dependencies.*
>
> (Overgaard and Mackaway, 2022, p. 3)

The REA model of the citizen is viewed as care-neutral, however feminist scholarship has established that this concept of citizenship is deeply gendered (Lynch 2010, Nussbaum 1995). In the REA paradigm, care is consigned to our private life, generally seen as 'women's work', and highly associated with femininity. It is easy to dismiss care as something that female academics do or as the sole remit of social care and early childhood education and care programmes. This narrative promotes the idea that women are somehow particularly predisposed to care. Men do care work too, but it is not associated with masculinity. Feminist-inspired work has taken care work out of the private sphere (Gilligan, 1982) and highlighted the public significance of care and love. Nussbaum (1995) has also emphasised the importance of caring as a human capability meeting basic human needs. Kittay (1999) contends that the REA model ignores the dependency and inter-dependency that is central to human experience.

Joan Tronto (1993) also argues that our economic, political, and cultural institutions cannot operate without the support of care. She also points out the political dimension of care, whereby caring helps reinforce privilege (Tronto, 1993). Her notion of *privileged irresponsibility* suggests that the caring work carried out by some groups (women, minorities) enables other groups (men, majority groups) to benefit from this work, while

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8   Recent research from the ERSI (2022) suggests that 16% of students, in the age cohort 18-22, are employed part-time during term time.

simultaneously disavowing care work (Tronto, 2013). It is often women or minorities who do the care work in the university (Dowie-Chin and Schroeder, 2020).

As the National Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2016) points out, women often do the;

> *unglamorous and invisible admin work that is not valued or rewarded …*
> *female colleagues engage disproportionately in teaching, administration*
> *and pastoral care of students.*
>
> (HEA, 2016, p. 64)

The Review recognises that this relational and care work is often invisible, and not valued or rewarded in our institutions. As we can see from this inquiry, the men, and women of Ballylacken do the 'unglamorous' work the report mentions. Our inquiry makes this work more visible and offers the possibility that it may therefore become more valued by our institutions. It also highlights that care does not have to be consigned to women in the university; in our team, both the men and women care.

An Ethic of Care

Considering the long lineage of disrespect for care in liberal and neoliberal thinking it is understandable that it is not seen or valued in our higher education institutions (Lynch, 2010, 2021; O'Brien, 2014). From the 1980s on, feminist scholarship has been pivotal in taking issues of care, love, and solidarity out of the privatised world and focussing on the gendered aspect of care relations. Carol Gilligan (1982) proposed that young girls display an alternative relationship-based ethic, rather than one based on abstract, universal principles. Traditional approaches to ethics are underpinned by an ontology that humans are typically separate, autonomous beings that I may or may not have obligations to. For Gilligan, the ethic of care is "a psychological logic of relationships" that places our interdependence upon each other at the core of our thinking (1993, p. 73). She and Joan Tronto (1993) both distinguish between obligation-based ethics and responsibility-based ethics. In care ethics, the underpinning ontology is relational. As we are already in relation to others, we ask ourselves; "How can I (we) best meet my (our) caring responsibilities?" (Tronto, 1993, p. 137).

An ethic of care suggests that care and caring should be viewed as fundamental to society and for human life to flourish. The ethic of care offers some signposts, not necessarily rigid principles, as to "what is necessary to be well and live well in the world" (Barnes, 2012, p. 18). It is "a moral way of life, one that guides personal interactions in every domain of activity" (Noddings, 2010, p. 72). This is how I understand care now; to care like this is a way of living. Maeve O'Brien suggests that if we shift to care ethics as a frame for our work in academia, we would not reform merely our content or the emphasis in our teaching, but we would "infuse" our whole practice, "so as to listen for the voice of relationship and realtional interdependency" (2014, p. 7). O'Brien (2014) suggests, and I agree, that we should view education as;

> *fundamentally relational, which develops the whole person … for the creation of a good, caring and just society.*
>
> (O'Brien, 2014, p. 8)

Across the conversations of this inquiry, I see that all participants imbue their practice with the 'voice of relationship'; we wrap the curriculum with care, as Eamonn suggests.

An ethic of care in higher education pivots from rigid rules to acknowledging our students' vulnerability and the context and particularity of each situation, recognising "relationality and contextuality rather than abstract principles" (Barnes, 2012, p. 19). As Eamonn describes "the agency and the decisions you make, continually renegotiating it for different individuals". An ethic of care suggests that we allow some flexibility in our deadline submissions that acknowledges our students' lives and commitments. There was a shift in the discourse around our students at the height of the Covid-19 emergency. I noticed a significant change in the register of conversations from management at our exam boards throughout the pandemic. If a student had failed, we were asked if it was related to the pandemic. Grades were recorded in the system as an 'I', denoting extenuating circumstances, which would allow the student to repeat without having to pay fees. Previously, care was never mentioned, it was a rigid rule and 'I' grades would not be recorded unless the student had submitted a medical certificate. I feel that an 'ethic of care' is a helpful construct to counter careless practices and systems.

Caring With and Caring Well

For Nel Noddings "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours…or an individual attribute" (2005, p. 17). Noddings (2012a) writes that caring relationships must be at the centre of teaching. If we understand care-as-relation, then, as we see from the stories of care in Chapters 3 and 4, each one of us enacts care in unique ways in relation with our students. This way of understanding care resists an easy template or checklist for a care-centred pedagogy. There is no 'care recipe', Nel Noddings (2005) tells us. We navigate our care-centred pedagogies through our relationships with our students, and this changes as we work with different groups, and as we grow and evolve as educators. A template is restrictive; a way of being is expansive and generative. The stories in this inquiry all suggest care as understood as a way of being, and a way of being with our students and each other.

This way of being with each other and our students can be further understood by drawing on Joan Tronto's (1993, 2013) work. She delineates care into five phases; caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving and caring with. She expands this further with the five elements of care (*ibid.*); attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and trust and solidarity. Tronto states that to care well it is necessary to integrate all five elements into the five phases. Tronto's framework is a good lens to highlight that my participants *care with* and *care well*.

Tronto's first phase is *'caring about'* which entails "noting the existence of a need" and requires attentiveness (1993, p. 106). As a lecturer, we first have to be attentive to our students and their learning as well as recognising that they have caring needs. This sense of paying attention reverberates across the pages of our inquiry. It is common to the pedagogy of all my participants, we continually check-in and tune in to, our students and their learning. The first step is paying attention, but I also have to recognise that my students have caring needs. We see from a recent ESRI report, by Emer Smyth and Ann Nolan (2022), that there has been a significant decline in the mental health and well-being of young people in Ireland in the 20-22 years category during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to this report, 41% of young men and 55% of young women reported a clinically significant level of psychological distress. These reports feed into ongoing

discussions on student mental health/well-being and render the importance of *caring about* our students an urgent necessity.

As well as being attentive and responsive, we also need *'to take care of'* our students. In order to take care of my students I have to feel somehow responsible for that need and determine how I will respond. To be responsive to our students in this manner we need to have time and space. And in many instances, with teaching loads of up to 18 hours a week[9], we do not have the space *to take care*. But also, many lecturers simply do not envisage their role as involving care (Walker *et al.*, 2006). As Kathleen Lynch (2010) argues, rational/emotive and professional/ personal binaries are deeply embedded in our conception of lecturing and scholarly work. Also, when care is associated with softness, as Nora describes it, it is easy to dismiss it as not part of the 'hard' rationality required in the university. That is what is so interesting about the stories in this inquiry; care is fundamental to how my participants understand their teaching.

Tronto (1993, 2013) describes *caregiving* as the 'hands-on' work of responding to people's needs, involving competent action. For Tronto (1993, 2013), because care is ontological and we are in relation, we therefore *must* care. For some lecturers, their role is to impart knowledge, and they do not recognise the relational element of teaching and learning. As Claire tells us, 'hand holding' is used to derogatorily describe a Ballylacken practice, by a colleague in Central Institute. In this view, holding a hand, a physical and emotional act of care has no place in the university. My participants take Tronto's (1993, 2013) more ontological view, so care is central to our role as educators. I do not wish to suggest a binary between lecturers who care and those who do not. As we see from my participants' stories, care and carelessness are deeply embedded in the contexts and constructs of higher education. But for me, and my participants, care is foundational.

Care receiving, the fourth phase focuses on the relational nature of care. Here Tronto (1993, 2013) draws attention to "the responsiveness of the care receiver to the care" (1993, p. 134). Tronto also talks about the dangers of being too caring, and thus creating dependencies. I hear this concern expressed often, lecturers worry about being 'too

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9   Clarke *et al.* (2015, p.16) state that: "Irish academics in institutes of technology do much more teaching than their counterparts in universities."

caring', especially when the role of lecturers is conceived as fostering the autonomous student. Eamonn and Claire's stories touch on this tension; they talk about tough care and not doing too much for our students. Nora worries about being viewed as a "soft touch". My participants are paying attention to the outcomes of their care, recognising "that the object of care will be affected by the care it receives" (Tronto, 1993, p. 107). Ultimately, as Eamonn tells me, it has to be care that empowers our students. He contends that we need to be clear about the outcomes of our caring. Eamonn feels that we should continually reflect on our practice to ensure that our care supports and scaffolds our students, but also empowers them to thrive and flourish in the world.

Joan Tronto contends that we need to think seriously about the nature of caring needs in society. She explicated a fifth phase, *caring with,* in her book *Caring and Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice* (2013). *Caring with* positions care as a collective process and practice of solidarity, with trust and respect as essential elements of this practice. *Caring with* entails the habits and patterns of care that emerge over time. So, instead of individual caring lecturers, this view suggests that care is a collective responsibility within the university. Care is not an individual pursuit; it is an understanding of the interconnectedness of self and others and personal and social concerns. The ideal of care is an "activity of relationship" and we take care of the world by sustaining that "web of connection" according to Carol Gilligan (1993 p. 63). For my participants (and for me) care is a collective endeavour and an ontological orientation towards relationality and connection. Viewing care in this way shifts it from the individualising tendencies of neoliberalism and positions it as a "collective responsibility" (Tronto, 2013. p. 35). This team cares with and cares well.

Carelessness and Neo-liberalisation

According to Tronto (2013), care is so "thoroughly backgrounded" and economic forces so "thoroughly foregrounded" that it has distorted how we understand the concept of care (2013, p. 139). This distortion, or neoliberalism, has hugely impacted my colleagues and me. Neoliberalism understood as an ideology, a form of politics, and a set of policies, moves education from a public service good to a capitalist knowledge economy service (Lynch *et al.,* 2015). According to UK academic Dilshad Sheikh (2022), industry now requires universities;

to move beyond simple bachelor's degrees that often focus more on theory than practice as their primary product. More agile, lower priced, digital credentialed packages of learning' are highly valued by employers.

(Sheikh, 2022)

This quotation lays bare the neoliberal logic that is infecting our work in higher education. Educators and students are constituted as rational economic actors working in the neoliberal market economy (Lynch *et al.*, 2007). In the neoliberal academy, we should be delivering 'packages', like postal deliveries to our customers (sic)/students. As educators, we are now positioned as couriers of these 'packages of learning'. Colleagues are competitors as we become more 'agile', and our courses become lower priced. Students become consumers or 'income streams' (Ward, 2021).

Neoliberalism has defined the ideal citizen as a careless, self-sufficient, rational, competitive, entrepreneurial, detached, consumer (Grummell and Lynch, 2017; Lynch *et al.*, 2015). It influences all aspects of our work in higher education, including the purpose of education itself, our curricula, our pedagogies, and our identities as educators. Through this inquiry, I have come to realise the profound impact that neoliberal thinking has had on my teaching and identity over the past number of years.

I have, like many academics, readily and largely unconsciously, internalised the market logic of standards/efficiencies/outputs/measurables in my practice. Teaching and learning must be 'auditable', and calculable in terms of quantifiable 'outputs'. Rosalind Gill (2009, p. 241) suggests that academia is an excellent exemplar of the neoliberalisation of the workplace. She proceeds to assert that we are perfect neoliberal subjects, with our endless self-monitoring and internalisation of new forms of auditing and calculating. This certainly resonates with my own experience of uncritically adopting new practices over the last number of years. Maeve O'Brien argues that the "reductive language of outputs" does not capture what she describes as "the messiness" and "richness of relational praxis" (2014, p. 4).

As I reflected on my practice, I have become aware of how I had accepted outcomes-based education as 'common sense' and adopted it wholesale into the curriculum and

module design I was involved in. Biesta (2005, p. 77) writes that specifying learning outcomes (LO) in advance is a "gross misrepresentation of what constitutes education". It can also be argued that LOs are a mechanism of control and an attempt to standardise education. Walsh (2018) points out that there has been scant analysis paid to whether LOs can even deliver the transparency, comparability, and mobility they promise. Damian Murchan (2015, p. 194) questions whether outcomes-based education may indeed "unnecessarily constrain pedagogy in higher education". O'Brien writes that a "culture of performativity and focus on named specified outcomes lies in tension with one that is open, relational and process oriented" (2014, p. 4). I realise that the space for a caring pedagogy is constrained as I rush to cover content rather than build connection.

Neoliberalism "subordinates and trivializes those aspects of education that have no (measurable) market value" (Lynch *et al.*, 2015, p. 83). The 'learning outcomes' approach to module delivery rests on the assumption that one can quantify learning. And yet, as Bernie Grummell (2017, p. 3143) contends "emotional and relational knowledge and learning processes remain invisible and difficult to quantify". In seeking to measure and quantify all learning in advance, we risk making teaching a mechanised process. If a student's learning does not fit neatly into a *deliverable*, we de-legitimise it in favour of something that we can claim to deliver in advance, and as standard across all cohorts, as a 'learning outcome'. As Helen points out in our conversation, if we are merely delivering learning outcomes, our role becomes just "factory processing". Maeve O'Brien (2014, p. 4) writes that rich relational practice produces "unintended outcomes, unknowable affects and effects that we cannot hope to measure". This has a huge resonance for me, as I had uncritically adopted learning outcomes as 'best practice' in my teaching. I reflect deeply on Helen's call to subvert the learning outcomes.

Care Does Not Count

New managerialism claims to be driven by 'efficiency', it values high performance and competition, emphasising regulation and control. These values "parasitize and weaken the very values on which the organisation depends" (Lynch and Grummell, 2017, p. 205). The discourse of new managerialism is predicated on the careless view of the citizen, based on competitive self-interest rather than solidarity. 'Soft' care has no place in the hard world of performativity (Ball, 2003; Smyth *et al.*, 2000). We are not expected to care

about each other or our students, but we must care about outputs and key performance indicators. A caring team like ours has no value in this type of culture; as Claire alludes to, care has no currency in this environment.

Care itself is neither a quantifiable commodity nor an outcome that is amenable to measurement. There are of course outcomes of caring, but they are usually not measurable over a specific time frame. We often only witness the gains and losses from having or not having care over time. Also, the processes by which one might try to measure caring would undermine the very essence of caring (Lynch *et al.*, 2015). Care, Harriet Hawkins (2019, p. 823) tells us, resists being "totted up and entered into institutional ledgers". Hawkins writes that "care work needs to be made to count" but it is a "tricky process" (2019, p. 831), telling us that it can be discomforting "when care does get enrolled within these metrics of merit" (2019, p. 830). We do not want care to simply be another measurable item, a tick-the-box activity, where we must self-regulate our behaviour and our institutions can then absolve themselves for their care-less systems. This type of 'performative care' hollows out what it means to care.

Care understood as a way of relating to others, is not amenable to measurement. We cannot command care. But that does not imply that we should abandon accounting for care. Mountz *et al.* (2015) pose an interesting question;

> *What if we counted differently? Instead of articles published or grants*
> *applied for, what if we accounted for thank you notes received, friendships*
> *formed, collaborations forged?*
>
> (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1243)

I think that this inquiry shines a light on the 'outputs', which do not usually get recognised by our institutions. We hear these 'outputs' in the stories that Leo and Eamonn shared with us, emails received long after students have graduated that acknowledge their gratitude to these educators who supported and enabled them to achieve their potential.

In 2011 the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (colloquially known as 'The Hunt Report') was published (HEA, 2011). The report only mentions 'care' three times,

each about the pastoral care of international students[10]. These students are a considerable revenue stream for universities and, therefore, must be minded because of their economic value. Otherwise, the Strategy Group (*ibid*) are substantively silent on the necessity of care in higher education. They value care only where it has economic implications. Hunt and colleagues recommended reducing duplication in programmes "by rationalising programmes and offering them in fewer institutions" (*ibid*, p. 41). This would require that all institutes of technology would merge with other institutes in their region to become Technological Universities (TU). Ballylacken duly merged with Central Institute, beginning the process which ultimately would lead to becoming a TU. Ballylacken has predominantly locally based students, many of them mature, with family commitments. But this aspect of caring for non-traditional or socio-disadvantaged students is unimportant. In Huntian terms, we are inefficient!

An 'efficiencies' narrative enables the depersonalisation of staff; lecturers and support staff are units on spreadsheets. Departments can be restructured, staff moved around to suit 'strategic or corporate goals'. 'Efficiencies' are a great way to smuggle in structural changes, hiding under a seemingly positive outcome, but one that does not consider people who have formed connections in teams. The restructuring of our department during the Covid-19 pandemic is a good example of this narrative. This decision was blind to the relationships and collegiality that existed in the team, cleaving us apart so that the department could be more 'efficient'.

Although higher education institutes in Ireland have thoroughly embraced neoliberalism (Fleming *et al.*, 2017; Lynch *et al.*, 2015; Lynch and Grummell, 2017), there has also been much resistance (Clancy, 1989; Finnegan, 2019; Lynch *et al.*, 2015; Lynch and Grummell, 2017; Walsh and Loxely, 2015). My participants continue to care, whether it is countable or efficient or even recognised by our institution. Part of this inquiry has been amplifying the importance of care in our college, reflecting Tronto's (1993, p. 180) assertion that it is "a fundamental concern of human life". She furthermore suggests that is "time that we began to change our political and social institutions to reflect this truth" (Tronto, 1993, p. 180). The stories in this inquiry speak of this truth – care and

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10 Hunt *et al.* (HEA, 2011) do mention 'wellbeing' but only twice and only in relation to economic development and economic well-being.

relationships, as much as 'efficiencies', should be a focus for our higher education institutions.

More Regulation, Less Trust: The Terrible Twins Come to University

Since the early 2000s, as the Irish state has pursued an overtly business model in terms of third-level education, the systems, and principles of new public management (NPM) is being consistently encoded into higher education (Lynch 2006; O'Malley 2012). This entails increasing performance and monitoring systems and accountability rather than professional self-regulation. I feel this impact in my everyday work as I experience, what Hodgins and McNamara (2021) call NPM's terrible twins, more regulation, and less trust. I have been feeling very stressed at work over the past couple of years. I am not alone in feeling that something is changing for the worse in our working environments. Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara (2021) assert that the past two decades have precipitated a more individualistic and competitive culture in Irish third-level institutes due to the proliferation of NPM practices. They draw on research detailing the worsening conditions generally in universities; citing studies that demonstrate that the working environment in academia has become highly stressful, careless, toxic, and precarious. Academics across all sectors of higher education in Ireland report worsening stress levels (Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Kenny, 2015). Declan Fahie's (2019) study on the lived experience of Irish academics sheds a light on the deterioration of collegiality at the third level. Focussing on toxic leadership, it is replete with examples of bad practices by individuals in higher education institutes. Precarity is increasingly experienced by academics (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015, 2020) and being care-free continues to be a huge advantage for a successful career in academia (Ivancheva *et al.*, 2019).

The National Strategy for higher education asserted that third-level Institutes must now "strike a balance between the demands of the market and their academic mission" (HEA, 2011, p. 92). But this was not something I paid attention to back in 2011. It has been through a host of small changes that I have been "nudged into thinking and acting in ways that fit with market rationality" (Sayer, 2015, p. 16). I have internalised the message of productivity, been a 'good' educator, and feel personally responsible if I cannot 'deliver' the outputs required. I have also internalised the resilience narrative of the ideal neoliberal citizen. Neoliberal representations of care strive to individualize the experiences of stress

as a personal failing, not as a systemic issue of the university. As Brenna Gray (2022) tells us, we are invited to "breathe, meditate" to resolve the situation, and not to address the structural issues that are causing the stress in the first place.

New Managerialism can be viewed as a form of governance which shapes our practices and our identities. New forms of regulation are adopted into institutional practices and infiltrate our everyday interactions. Stephen Ball (2003) writes that performativity has a deep impact on the inner life and identity of educators. These practices are embedded in the "assumptive worlds" of many academic educators (Ball, 2003, p. 215). It is creating new kinds of teacher subjectivities and changing our relationships with our colleagues and students. Helen recently suggested, that to survive in our institution, I needed to care less. I am finding it emotionally challenging, trying to balance an ethic of care, with the demands of productivity. Peck and Tickell (2002) suggest that we can experience neoliberalism both 'out there' and 'in here'. 'Out there' in the classroom, I notice the effects on my practice and how I am increasingly focused on 'covering' learning outcomes and teaching to assessments. 'In here', I feel it in my heart and also in my body, feeling depleted and increasingly worn out.

Ball and Olmedo (2013) urge educators to take up a political position in relation to power. Educators must critically examine the meaning and enactment of the policy if we wish to resist neoliberal practices. We must question how power works to reproduce or produce some narratives as dominant whilst marginalising other narratives. We must question the macro policy agenda that seeks to make education "a handmaiden of the market" (Lynch and Grummell, 2017, p. 208). What does this discourse do to what knowledge is valued and to how we teach? To how we care? Narratives of care are constructed within broader institutional contexts and institutional structures and discourses can and do impact how educators enact care (Walker *et al.*, 2006). As Gert Biesta (2005), drawing on Foucault, writes;

> *Discursive practices … constitute – what can be seen, what can be said, what can be known, what can be thought and, ultimately, what can be done.*

<div align="right">(Biesta, 2005, p. 70)</div>

Discourses influence all aspects of our work in higher education, including the purpose of education itself, our curricula, our pedagogies, and our identities as educators. These discourses become embedded in the thoughts we think and in our everyday relations (Brookfield, 2005, p. 102). This inquiry offered me an opportunity to question these discourses, those unseen forces which shape my subjectivity and my practice as an educator.

Ball and Olmedo suggest that we think about "subjectivity as a site of struggle and resistance" (2013, p. 85). Ball (2016b) urges us to use the term 'refusal' rather than 'resistance', which implies power as domination. Refusal is also a process of self-definition, questioning who I am and whom I might become (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p. 94). I worry about whom I am becoming in this performative culture, but I am grateful that I worked in a micro-climate of care in Ballylacken for over 20 years. The people and practices documented in this inquiry are a quiet testament to refusal.

Care as Resistance

We can develop caring relationships the more we feel cared for, valued, and secure within our institutions (Rossiter, 1999, as cited by Mariskind, 2014). But the neoliberal university devalues caring, collaborative relationships (Mariskind, 2014, p. 317). In its push for more accountability and regulation, our universities are "cannibalising" a collegiate culture (Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021, p. 2). Careless subjectivity is produced through an audit culture and ranking, through "micro-practices of bureaucratisation and professionalisation" which "attempts to produce a culture of hierarchy, competition, and individualism through the eradication of cultures of solidarity, care, and collectivity" (Motta and Bennett, 2018, p. 634). When our institutions foster individualism and competitiveness between colleagues, it can be increasingly difficult to sustain a caring community (Walker *et al.*, 2006). Precarity, which is widespread in higher education institutes in Ireland does not help engender caring, connected collectives (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015, 2019; O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019, 2020). As the university slowly dismantles the places and spaces for care, where will communities like ours continue to find space to care?

Recent scholarship has foregrounded the importance of relationships, care, and connections within teaching and learning in higher education as a means to counter the uncaring neoliberal academy (Black and Dwyer, 2021; Gravett *et al.,* 2021). Mountz *et al.* (2015) argue that;

> *Cultivating space to care for ourselves, our colleagues, and our students is, in fact, a political activity when we are situated in institutions that devalue and militate against such relations and practices.*
>
> (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1239)

Michelle Murphy (2015) contends that it is time to "take a more critical stance toward the politics of care", which pays attention to how "the exercise of power operates through care in many divergent ways" (2015, p. 719). Mariskind (2014), too, exhorts us to bring a critical lens to how care functions in our higher education institutions. This is not something I thought about before our inquiry, I knew I was tired, but I did not have the critical lens with which to understand my conflicted feelings about being a care-centred educator.

Joan Tronto (2017) suggests that care is the antidote to neoliberalism. Re-centralising care into our concept of higher education *could* potentially be a powerful corrective to neoliberalism. However, we need to be mindful of the 'care as resistance' narrative, where our care remains invisible and undervalued. We all keep caring at a personal cost, but the systems do not change. We have to be wary that we are not serving the neoliberal regime through our care (Hobart and Kneese, 2020). Hannah McGregor (2020) asks all academics to consider when and where care should be refused or resisted: namely, where it props up the institution. It is teams like ours whose emotional labour sustains our institutions, and we continue to carry out this labour, even though our institution does not value it. However, I wonder if I/we can keep caring if our institutions continue to be so care-less. Can care survive in such an inclement climate?

The older members of this team all commenced their higher education careers in the academic year 1999/2000. We have witnessed a huge amount of change in our institution over this time, mergers, restructuring, and management changes. Claire and I previously discussed our designation as a Technological University. We are standing on the cusp of

the transformation of our Institute, which "represents a breadth and ambitious state of change in the HE landscape in Ireland"[11] (Collins *et al.*, 2020, p. 9). According to Collins *et al.* (*ibid*), these developments will entail;

> *a root and branch transformation of the working life of academics in the Institutes of Technology that transition to become Technological Universities*
>
> (Collins *et al.*, 2020, p. 10)

While the authors contend that teaching staff have 'spare capacity' it also contradictorily acknowledges;

> *Even at their lowest levels, therefore, the teaching levels of academics in the sector are high and difficult to sustain in the context of a significant re-alignment of the sector towards research.*
>
> (Collins *et al.*, 2020, p. 39)

In the university system, Claire feels that "the people who are valued are the people who research and the whole notion of teaching is diminished". There is a significant threat to care as the new Technological Universities are expected to deliver on a research agenda, while also teaching students who may need extra scaffolding to navigate their third-level journey. We are standing at a turning point for our institution – will care be part of our transformed institution?

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we encountered the Rational Economic Actor (REA) and how it affects our view of our students and our role as lecturers. This model lies deep at the heart of academia, significantly skewing our relationships with our students. I traced the feminist exposition of the ethic of care, which counters the careless discourse of the REA. I drew on the work of Joan Tronto (1993, 2013) and Nel Noddings (1992, 2005) to provide a

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11   Collins *et al.* (2019) draw on discussions contained in the Report of the Technological Universities Research Network (TURN).

theoretical lens with which to better understand my participants' lived experiences. Noddings' care as relation and Tronto's five phases and elements of care, allows us to grasp how we enact care in our pedagogy, how we care well, and care with each other. I also hope to have brought us closer to the social and policy contexts in which my participants are positioned. By coming to a deeper understanding of neoliberalism I understand the forces which enable or constrain how we enact care in our work.

I now view our pedagogy and our way of working together as a resistance to the broader forces of neoliberalism. Systems may not care, but systems consist of individuals, who can and do choose to care. While acknowledging the power that policy has to shape our identities and possibilities as educators, I now see that we have the agency to resist policy imperatives. We can refuse practices, values, and ideologies. That refusal begins with our critical reflexivity, we cannot refuse if we remain unaware, sleepwalking into systems and values that are at odds with what we believe. This becomes a key framework for me and one that I can offer my colleagues, which focusses on the agency we have as educators, a way of giving us hope to keep caring.

This inquiry has been a process of waking up, of entering into a state of 'wide awakeness', as advocated by Connelly and Clandinin (2006). My participants shine a light on what Kathleen Lynch (2022, p. 3) calls a "care-centric narrative", which challenges "capitalocentric modes of thought" which consistently and deliberately deny the profound need for us to care, in higher education, and in our world.

Chapter 6: The Gathering- an Exploration of Care in Higher Education

Introduction

In group supervision, in early March 2021, I discuss how I will gather with my participants for our collective conversation. I am overcome with emotion. I realise that I have been trying to 'bracket off' my feelings, as I focus on what I unconsciously conceive as the more cognitive work of writing up research texts. This resonates with Deborah Ceglowski's (2001, p. 16) description of trying to "inoculate" her writing against feelings and emotional reactions. I finally acknowledge my deep disappointment over the changes that have occurred in our team. The idea of gathering everyone together crystallises at this moment. I realise that I, and possibly my colleagues, need a sense of closure. Over the years we have had many shared experiences of organising conferences and events as a team. We have had team building away days and many facilitated sessions on our vision and values. We were great for our little team rituals; coming together to mark transitions at the opening and closing of the academic term. I realise now that we need to mark an ending. This fills me with sadness.

Leo has retired and his desk is cleared out. Eamonn is working fully online with another department, so although his desk is still full of stacks of books and papers, he is gone from Ballylacken and the team. Yvonne is on maternity leave. Nora has started doctoral studies and is busy with the impending regulation process for the social care programme. Claire is service teaching and occupied with a programmatic review. Deirdre is carrying out research in another department. Pat has moved to another faculty based on another campus of Central Institute. I email all my participants, nervous about whether people will have the energy/enthusiasm to take part. When we used to meet in past years, there was always cake. We have missed so many occasions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the fragmentation of the team. 'There will be cake', I promise everyone. For me, making a cake is a gesture of care.

Over the next few days, I receive responses from everyone in the team. Leo is busy and enjoying an active retirement, yet he enthusiastically agrees to join us on campus. Unfortunately, an academic council meeting has been scheduled so Eamonn can only join us for a part of the morning. Claire is away but everyone else is attending. I am excited

and now I am nervous too as I begin to plan what this session will look like. How will I articulate what I have learned as part of this inquiry process? How will I use the time to gather our collective vision of care in higher education? I want this to be a care-full process. Drawing on Carol Rodgers' (2020) concept of presence, I also want to pay attention to the affective and embodied as well as the cognitive knowledge generated as part of this inquiry. This is also deeply relational research; this day is intended to help us make meaning together.

In preparation for our gathering, I revisit my research notebooks; full of scraps of conversations, reflections, and lived experiences. I attempt to grasp, feel, and intuit connections and meanings emerging from our inquiry. I had previously shared the interim research text with my participants, using that as a springboard for some tentative 'thread' making. But we had not yet had a collective conversation. I read extensively and attempt to gather all that I have learned from the scholarly community who write and research about care. I am frazzled as I attempt to soak up every word I could find on care in higher education. Again, I find I am separating my head from my heart. I slow down, and spend some time reflecting, feeling, and writing. I want this gathering to be generative and nourishing; reminded by Ailwood and Ford's (2021) exhortation that we need to slow down and create more care-full spaces in the academy.

This chapter seeks to evoke the experience of our collective conversations during this gathering. It moves between what emerges today and the past conversations we have had as part of this inquiry. It weaves insights gleaned from this gathering, alongside threads that I have foregrounded as part of the inquiry process. I use the present tense to denote what emerged this morning, threaded alongside the past tense which signals insights and conversations that arose during my initial research conversations 18 months ago. I will weave our past biography and present moment to understand how and why this group of educators care.

Gathering

It is a beautiful sunny morning in Ballylacken in early May 2022, and I arrive early to a quiet campus to set up our room. I open the windows to let the warm summer breeze in. The chairs are placed in a semi-circle, and the flipchart outlines my plan for the day. A

candle sits in the middle of the room, I light an incense stick. It has been an intense couple of weeks as I sought to prepare for today. I take a few moments to connect with my emotions, to come out of my head and into my emotional body. I feel ready now. I want to offer the group a sense of the complexity of care that I have encountered. I hope to allow space for us to have a collective conversation on care. I want us to articulate what a care-centred pedagogy means to each of us. This is the last coming together of our group for this inquiry. I am reminded of the Irish word 'meitheal'[12], denoting the collective effort involved in the harvest, when friends and neighbours would gather to support and share resources. It is also a gathering in the sense of a social re-connection, a space to come together, to be in each other's company for a time. This is the autumn of our inquiry, I am harvesting and drawing together what I have learned.

I asked everyone to arrive early so that we could have a before-the-session time to chat. I want to create an unhurried space and allow time to connect again. We start the morning with a coffee in the canteen. Nora shares the exciting news of a new baby on the way. Yvonne has returned from maternity leave. Leo, just back from a spa break in Wexford, is a great advertisement for retirement. It is just so lovely to sit in the canteen together again. We move to our designated room. There is a nice synergy for me, this is the room where I gave my first lecture 22 years ago. I remember the lectures, printed off on acetates, shown on the overhead projector. This seems like an antiquated practice now. But I do not feel ancient and the energy in this room now is fresh and vibrant, there is a hum of connection and conversation.

People remark on the lovely aroma in the room from the incense. I offer around an aura soma essential oil, pouring a few drops on everyone's palm. I ask everyone to close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so. Inviting each participant to inhale the oil and take three deep in-breaths and out-breaths, we proceed with a grounding exercise, giving our bodies and minds time to settle into the room. We finish with a stretch, and where needed, a yawn. I am very aware that none of this embodied practice was possible when we engaged in our initial research conversations, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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12   Meitheal denotes a co-operative labour system in Ireland where groups of neighbours help each other with farm tasks, such as the harvest. "To the heart of the concept is community unity through cooperative work and mutually reciprocal support."
http://www.maryrobinsoncentre.ie/meitheal.html

The breadth of that disconnection and separation is apparent today, as we see, smell, feel and experience coming together in this room.

I begin with a round of checking in. Everyone is excited and curious about our day ahead. I outline the plan for the morning, it is a flexible one, giving voice and space to my participants to co-create and co-design the day's journey. I then ask that people write about their lived experience of care in higher education on the wall (which I had papered over, imagining that we might create a 'wall of care'). This triggered a spontaneous discussion that is powerful and authentic. The conversation began to flow, and I let it. I realise that I have been processing, thinking, and writing about care and our experiences for the last 2 years. I need to allow a space for each of my participants to articulate what care means to them. By arranging the chairs in a semi-circle pay I am paying attention to the physical environment of our learning together, as Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) suggest. Westacott *et al.* (2021) contend that we need to make space for care in higher education. And the circle is a simple, yet powerful architecture, to create a space for us to tell our collective story of care.

A Climate of Care

What is clear when we come together today is how much this team had created a 'climate of care'. And the epicentre of this climate was Ballylacken. We discuss the significance of working in proximity to each other in a shared office space in Ballylacken. As we gather here this morning it is poignant to note how much this has changed. Days that used to be punctuated by chats, communality, and the busyness of teaching, are now more of a solitary endeavour. The office is quiet. The physical bond we had with the office has been severed. We are present for our teaching but not for our team. I cannot remember the last time we met as a team, some of us meet at the now once-a-semester department meeting or our bi-annual exam boards. The Ballylacken energy has been severely dissipated. There are still friendships and collegiality, but there is not a cohesive team anymore.

In our conversation last year Helen had termed it the 'Ballylacken energy' that you absorb when you are in the office. Occasions were marked and celebrated. Resources were shared. The team acted as a guide for Helen.

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> *Helen: We look to people to bring us back, a compass, to remembering what we're there to do and how we can do it. How we can do it in a good way, in a better way, in a way that serves the students well, in a way that serves us well.*

This resonated with me. I felt the same and have often thought I can only continue to care because I am surrounded by people who care.

Helen described the different ethos in Central Institute and how the team spurs us on to care.

> *Helen: Some of the things we see go on in terms of practices, we look to each other to say, could this not be better?*

As Leo too remarked previously, "we managed to hold onto the core values of our team". Sometimes during this inquiry, I wished that I could just stop caring, due to my exhaustion or overwhelm. But then, like Helen, I felt compelled to care by my colleagues. As Helen explained;

> *Helen: I care about the team and not letting the team down, doing the best because you also feel that everybody else around you are doing their best.*

The feeling of community experienced by sharing the office in Ballylacken was the glue that held us together and allowed us to sustain our caring practice.

The 'Ballylacken energy' is a signifier too for the history of our original department and our professional formation under Tom [pseudonym], a former Head of Department. The 3 newer members of staff never knew Tom, but he appears again today in our discussion, he has become a legend now in our folklore. He featured in many of our research conversations, recognised for the culture he enabled and embedded in our formative years. Tom fostered a particular climate in Ballylacken, whose remnants still exist. In a previous conversation Leo reminisced about joining the newly formed Institute;

> *Leo: When I came into third level, I suppose, luckily, working with Tom as a mentor in Ballylacken, that whole relational thing became really the ethos of what we did... It became all about the students. I really found that it gave me a chance to really develop that.*

Tom's impact is one of the reasons that we have not become cynical or disaffected, Deirdre told me last year. She feels that Tom sought to hire people for their personalities and their ability to work as part of a team. The team building and bonding which laid out the principles of the department continue to influence how my participants view themselves. We still see ourselves as team members, rather than solo operators. Values of trust, autonomy with accountability, and a collegial spirit were inculcated in those early days.

In her book, *Written on the Body* (1994), Jeanette Winterson describes our bodies metaphorically as a palimpsest, where other people's impact is figuratively imprinted on us, layering up to create our current way of being in the world. These accumulations of experiences gather on us over time, and some are so significant that they leave lasting impressions. Within academia, Hamilton *et al.* (2021) describe the idea of an 'imprint', rather than the traditional individualistic understanding of legacy, that people leave. As outlined in the many stories that emerge today and over the course of this inquiry, Tom has had a lasting imprint on the culture of this team, and while new experiences are written over his original influence, we still retain these foundational values.

Pockets of Care

Previously Eamonn and I had discussed the culture in the Ballylacken team around sharing resources, he remarked that this collegiality is not everywhere in the wider organization. This sharing is built on a foundation of trust solidified over years of working collegially together. This is redolent of Raymond Williams' (1977, pp. 122-123) concept of residual cultures which are; "effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process" while emergent cultures carry "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships". Residual and emergent cultures are alive and well in this team. Today,

at this gathering, I feel this culture is embodied as we sit collectively in a circle, listening and processing together.

In recognizing and prioritizing our relationships to each other, we are demonstrating care; there is a felt sense of care for each other in this room today. In the past the team had acted as a 'comfort blanket' for Eamonn.

> *Eamonn: I feel a lot of care. I feel very cared for as a colleague. And I know it's all the little things and rituals over the years and the fun that we had in Ballylacken … They're all very important pieces because they give meaning and they create a sense of connectedness, I think. If you're looking at mental health, the idea of connection is very significant.*

In earlier conversations, Emer, Yvonne and Nora all detailed the support they feel as they transitioned to their new lecturing roles. Longer-term members of the team emphasised the importance of feeling connected to each other. This is distinct from the main campus where staff do not share spaces according to departmental affiliation. Staff are dispersed across the Institution; they may rarely meet each other during their working week. Helen felt that the team helps us to combat that sense of individualism, "that anonymous feeling", prevalent in the wider Institution. Ballylacken is viewed as being very distinct from the Central Institute culture, as Eamonn's story illustrated;

> *Eamonn: I would have said to people 'look, I'll forward you an exam brief, and I'll forward you a rubric that I'm using'. And some of my colleagues were actually quite shocked with that; that I was willing to just give something that I created to them. This happened twice or three times where somebody said; 'Are you really sure?..... So, it's been making me reflect that the culture that we have in Ballylacken, in our group, around that thing of sharing resources is not everywhere in the organization. And I think we have taken it as just the norm almost.*

Both Leo and Helen talked about not letting the 'Central Institute' culture pervade how we do things in Ballylacken.

Leo told me;

> **Leo:** *We didn't let the kind of culture that was coming from the larger Institution get into Ballylacken. We just didn't let it permeate into what we did.*

Nora, a past graduate of Central Institute, talked last year about the changes she noticed on the main campus as the department has grown. The values that were evident in the early days of the programme have changed as it has expanded.

> **Nora:** *Part of me was quite disheartened, not in our Ballylacken team, I am so grateful there. There is absolutely that caring culture. But lecturers [on Central campus] who I would have been to ... that taught so well about care ... then to see it not being appreciated.*

Yvonne details the difference she notices in Ballylacken. She recounts this morning the story she told me last year, of her induction in Central Institute. There she is told to focus on the education of, not care for, her students. The group is shocked to hear this care-less view of our role as educators. In Ballylacken care for students is endorsed and nurtured by the whole team. Yvonne's story resonates strongly in the circle as the impact of the idea of separating care from education is discussed. We engage in a thought experiment – imagine if lecturers really did not care! How would our students experience their education? If we imagine the lack of care, we may come to truly appreciate its significance to our pedagogy. I think again about how precious our care-centred approach was. Sometimes we only truly appreciate something's value when we begin to contemplate its absence.

For this team education and care go together, following Mortari's (2016) etymological description;

> *To educate comes from educare, which means to bring up or nourish, to care for, and to educate, instruct or form.*
>
> <div align="right">(Mortari, 2016, p. 456)</div>

Eamonn spoke previously of "a noble intention… in terms of care and in trying to show care". Leo and Eamonn really own the language of care. They are both very explicit about the centrality of care in education. Eamonn recounts his time in Maynooth University and how his doctoral studies, "helped me aim it now with others now and I'm very specific". I had not reflected on how much Eamonn has impacted my own practice. Now I can see how influential Eamon (and Leo) have been on my own teaching, through modelling a care centred pedagogy. Helen too remarked on how her practice has changed as she witnessed how our colleagues enacted care for our students. Hamilton and colleagues (2021) describe the idea of imprint as the kind of effect we have on those we work with. The imprints of care are deep, leaving emotional traces on each other as we work alongside over the years.

All the newer staff recognised the value of the Ballylacken team in terms of promoting a caring culture. Nora and Yvonne told me about the importance of informal mentoring for them when they joined the institute.

Nora remarked in an earlier conversation;

> **Nora:** *Thankfully I have all you guys and our walks and our chats. And Claire has been a fantastic support for me as well. I'm really grateful for that.*

Helen described the team as a compass and speaks about the "unconscious peer mentoring" that occurs. She detailed how this has changed elements of her practice, but also her sense of identity as an educator. This mentorship helps orientate new staff in terms of a care-centred way of interacting with students and colleagues. Eamonn and I had previously discussed the newer members of the team, the original seven have been joined by three new lecturers in the past four years. When Eamonn and I spoke a year and half ago, he wondered if "care is in that marriage" (of the new and the older staff). I told him resoundingly that "they have taken on the baton". Eamonn told me then that "the care agenda is no longer part of the dictionary of the unconscious. I can make it explicit." As we sit now in Ballylacken, it seems to me that we have all elevated our understanding of care. I definitely notice a shift in our language around care this morning. As we create

explicit spaces of care, and for care, we begin to understand just how much care has been silenced and shunned in our discourses in Higher education (Lynch, 2010). I agree with Mountz *et al.* (2015, p. 1247) that care needs to "come out of hiding". This morning, instead of smuggling care into our practice, I feel that we are really making it visible.

Meaningful Moments

I ask the group to share the artefact they brought this morning that represents what is important to them in their teaching. Eamonn motions to me that he has to leave. It feels as if he is torn, he has another commitment that he must attend to, but he still feels deep belonging to this group. It brings into focus for me how Eamonn continues to grow in his role in teaching and learning, but still some residual threads keep him connected to us. He shows us a diary, representing nearly 40 years of teaching experience that he has reflected on. It is quick reflection, but its significance passionately shared as he moves out the door. I appreciate that he made the time for this gathering this morning. I value his influence on how I enact care in my teaching, the deep imprints, written on my practice.

Deirdre recounts an anecdote of meeting the mother of a former student recently. The mother lets Deirdre know that her son is now working in Community Development in Africa. This particular student needed a lot of encouragement and support to succeed. Deirdre believed in him and helped him flourish. This is a story she is proud of. Emer shows us the puppet fairy that she carries with her. This fairy has been with her throughout her career, from working in early years' education to becoming a lecturer for future ECEC professionals. This is the image I have of her pedagogical approach, hands-on engagement with students. She always used to leave the office on her way to class with a big blue bag, full of props, with which to engage her students. Leo brings a book to represent his life-long love of books, and his hopes to inspire this love of learning in others. Again, I am reminded of the major legacy that Leo has, over 40 years of teaching. Yvonne, just embarking on her teaching career, compared to Leo's longevity, shows us a star, and tells us how each point represents the different roles she plays: educator, practitioner, learner, future researcher. As Yvonne continues in her career in education, I hope that some of us will have had that positive imprint on her that Tom had on us, many years ago.

Pat shares a collage of pictures made by his students many years ago. It is of a time when he accompanied his students to Brussels annually, as part of their studies. It holds emotional resonance for Pat, of fond memories a time when we felt part of a cohesive department (prior to our merger with Central Institute). He wonders will he leave it in the office in Ballylacken. He does not feel the need to bring this to his new department, for his new journey in a different faculty. We do not claim it either; what do we do with these old remnants of another era? I share a picture of the team at the conference we organised a number of years ago. This is what sustains me. I admit to the group that it is this team that enables me to keep caring, by supporting me when I experienced the distress of the last two years. I stumble on my words here; I still feel the echoes of stress from last year. There were times during this inquiry when I felt I need to care less, or not care at all. This team provided a touchpoint or marker to find my way back to my values, to my caring practice. It is like Ailwood and Ford (2021 p. 169) remark, "as care disappears from view, it becomes a matter of concern". I needed to experience standing on the precipice of carelessness to step back into care. Like Helen's metaphor of the compass, this group has guided me back to care.

Nora, tears rolling down her cheeks, shares a poem Eamonn had previously sent her, written by the 14th century Sufi poet, Hafiz.

I sometimes forget
that I was created for Joy.
My mind is too busy.
My Heart is too heavy
for me to remember
that I have been
called to dance
the Sacred dance of life.
I was created to smile
To Love
To be lifted up
And to lift others up.
O' Sacred One
Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares.
Free my soul.
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious.

"It may be the hormones", she jokingly tells us. I think otherwise. This quotation captures something profound. Sometimes we forget and our minds are too busy to dance. But dancing is contagious and so is care. We are here to "lift others up", to care deeply about each other, we achieve this together in a climate of care.

Carelessness in our Institutions

I feel very emotional as I listen to Nora read this poem. There is something spiritual, as Eamonn mentions, when we gather like this to listen and share and speak from the heart. I feel like I am holding the space for everyone this morning. I have been processing the

changes that have occurred over the 2 years in my writing and in my supervision conversations. But others need the space today to process what has happened to us as a team over the duration of the inquiry. I sense that I need allow space this morning for people to articulate some of the difficult feelings and turmoil we have experienced collectively. Deirdre is angry. Helen is sad. Nora is very emotional. Claire too told me in our earlier research conversation;

> *Claire: None of us are experiencing care from the people that we are responsible to... I'm experiencing, the more we go on, a level of dismissiveness.*

Eamonn emails afterwards that he had not realised the impact of all that we have gone through institutionally, has had on us. The institutional punches were felt individually because of the physical disconnection of the Covid-19 pandemic. The neoliberal academy does not provide care for its staff; as Deirdre remarks, "the system will not help you". Because the organisation does not provide her with that "holding space or care" Nora seeks out "pockets of care" elsewhere, so that she can continue to give care. This team provides us with 'pockets of care' so that we can continue to enact care.

These 'pockets of care' enable Nora to offer her students what she describes as "a holding atmosphere";

> *Nora: So just providing people, as you often say, that 'space' and being able to hold them because people need to know that we're able to hold them. You know, that we're not going to break. If they say something or do something that we're going to be okay.*

In our conversations a few of my participants also use the language of 'holding' in terms of teaching and their relationships with students. Eamonn mentions "holding that space" with a student that is struggling. However, Nora feels a distressful disconnect between her holding of her students and how she is held organisationally. Nora theorises this disconnect by drawing on Gillian Ruch's (2007) concept of holistic containment. Drawing on the work of Wilfred Bion (1962), Ruch (2007, p. 660) suggests that social care professionals need to be supported and offered 'holistic containment' in order to fully

realise the potential of reflective practice. This containment relates to three domains: emotional, organisational, and epistemological. Building further on the work of Bion (1962), Ruch (2007) argues that his theory illustrates that for reflective practice to be realizable, the apposite physical, cognitive, and emotional spaces or 'containers' need to be *in situ*. We could extend this concept of holistic containment: For care to be enabled we also need the appropriate physical, cognitive, and emotional containment, or spaces too.

In order to provide care for our students, we need to experience care ourselves. Gillian Ruch's (2007) research highlights the importance of being 'supported' by our organisations. When we are providing that 'hold' for our students, that we in turn need to feel 'held'. This allows professionals "to develop as reflective, confident, autonomous, and creative practitioners" (Ruch, 2007, p. 670). In absence of organisational containment, the team has been vital in providing emotional and epistemological containment for us. Because we care for each other, this helps us to extend that care in our classrooms. We provide that essential support for each other, echoing Ruch's (2007) assertion that teamwork and collegial relationships are important repositories for containment. We experience epistemological containment in contexts which encourage communication and collaboration. Ruch (2007) argues that when appropriate supports are provided practitioners do not have to focus on their professional survival but can direct their intellectual and emotional energies to thinking holistically about their practice. Extending Ruch's (2007) concept to teaching, the supportive professional relationships we have created seem to offer containment. Because this team offers emotional and epistemological containment, we can focus on a care centred practice and pedagogy. This containment, these 'pockets of care', enable us to sustain care. And as Leo suggests "it is very hard to teach the way we do without that backup".

Ruch (2007, p. 669) writes about the interrelationship between the individual, the team and organisational practice contexts as "inextricably inter-related, with each informing and shaping the other". Our experiences over the past two years within our organisation have created much dissonance for our values. Nora quietly remarks this morning that when our values are dissonant with management, we either change our values or we leave. As we look around the circle now we can see those who have left. We are still holding onto care – but it is in serious danger of being irrevocably eroded.

Ruch (2007) emphasizes that if practitioners do not experience positive emotional containment, this can manifest as low morale and burnout. As Deirdre attested last year, we are not burnt out, none of us are cynical or jaded. Throughout all my conversations, and this morning, there is a passion for our practice, our subject areas, and our students. This team supports us epistemologically and emotionally and enables us to sustain our caring pedagogy. The Ballylacken collective encourages us to teach in a care-centred way and to live by an ethos of care for each other and our students. We hold and are held by each other, providing an essential containment to enable care. I feel and experience this holding as we sit and share this morning, the circle acting as a container to process difficult emotions.

Care-full Encounters

As we come together for the first time in over two years, I realise what an intense time of change we have experienced, as we lived and worked through a global pandemic. The combination of pivoting to working from home and the staff and structural changes over this period have fundamentally altered us as a team. Previously Deirdre had remarked humoursly that the Ballylacken team annoys management because of its collective ethos. One may be tempted to see destabilising our team, creating upheaval with module allocation and departmental restructuing as an effort to dismantle a collegial approach and break the power of the collective. Indeed, it has been argued that neoliberalism actively seeks to eliminate bonds of solidarity and relationality (Ward, 2021). Many authors contend that neoliberalism is also characterised by a lack of respect for staff and the desire to curb the agency of academics (Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara, 2021; Smyth, 2017). The decision to restructure the department at the height of a global pandemic is also symptomatic of the carelessness of our institutions. Badenhorst and McLeod write that "under managerialism … individuals and units are ruthlessly moved and restructured" to pursue 'strategic' goals (2021, p. 261). These 'strategic' goals can and do have outcomes which are very detrimental to collegiality and to a culture of care.

Eamonn leads us to a wider conversation about metrics, performativity and the managerialist culture that is pervading our Institution. And whilst it may be tempting to blame these practices on certain individuals within Central Institute, I am more inclined

to agree with Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara when they assert that "the practices of neoliberalism cannot be attributed to any one person" (2021, p. 3). It is important to point out that Central Institute is not unique in its adoption of the ideology of the market. It has been, like many educational organisations, afflicted by the market logic of neoliberalism.

Leo remarked last year;

> **Leo:** *A lot of what we do in education is all about, has become about, cognition and results and academic performance. I think to the detriment of our emotional side and to the heart.*

Alison Mountz and colleagues (2015, p. 1238) declare that "care work is work". Unfortunately, it "does not fit within the parameters of the visible" (Westacott *et al.*, 2021 p. 108). Rosalind Gill (2018, p. 97) suggests that the "counting culture" renders invisible aspects of academic labour that are not amenable to measurement. Care is not valued, visible and easily quantified. It is also not seen as something to be protected and minded. This morning, in this room, with this group of educators, I feel care as an embodied and authentic presence as we reconnect and learn together. Ailwood and Ford (2021) declare;

> *Finding ways to express the importance of care in our work…is vital in our current environment of isolationist, individualistic neoliberalism.*
>
> (Ailwood and Ford, 2021, p. 170)

They talk about pushing back against neoliberalism to build slow, care-full, and deep pedagogical encounters in the university. This morning is a wonderful example of such an encounter.

Countering the Dominant Discourse

Nora tells the group about feeling almost ashamed about her caring approach. She previously remarked: "Increasingly, at Central Institute meetings, I feel like my caring is a weakness". This reminds me of Sara Ahmed's (2017, p. 37) comments: "You become the problem because you notice a problem".

I recall a Ballylacken exam board I attended late last year. While waiting for the meeting to commence Pat, Nora, Claire, Deirdre, Helen, and I chat about the late submission policy that has been proposed by the department. If the student submits an assignment one second overdue, marks are deducted, reminding us how assessment processes are deeply entangled in power relations (Gravett *et. al.*, 2021). We proceed to discuss the nuances of this 'punitive' type approach. The language around it seems particularly care-less and blind to the complexities of our student's lives. Claire tells us that colleagues in Central Institute have suggested that we are "hand holding" our students, we are doing too much for them. There seems to be a conflating of support with less quality; if we provide support, it reduces standards and rigour. It reminds me of Nora's story in our earlier conversation where someone describes her as the "soft touch social care worker". 'Soft touch' is a scornful term to describe what Nora feels is actually a care-centred approach to her practice.

Claire suggested that we should use the term 'scaffolding' of our students instead. In the ethics of care, rather than thinking with abstract principles, we think "with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation" (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). If we adopt a care ethical approach to late submissions, we understand the complexity of our students' lives and make decisions that are nuanced by particularity and context rather than hard and rigid rules.

Increasingly at department meetings, it feels as if the Ballylacken team are speaking a different language. Practices which seek to give primacy to compliance over care are being embedded in the department's procedures. This stands in stark contrast to the ethos of our team. We are bumping up against what Ailwood and Ford call the "sticky net" of accountability, regulation, and outcomes-based education (2021, p. 158). And also, the logic of the Rational Economic Actor (REA) which pervades how third-level students and lecturers are constituted. We are encouraged to view students as rational agents, working independently and autonomously. This paradigm fundamentally alters the pedagogic relationship: in this model we do not need to form connections with students or care about them. Helen's comments last year alluded to this.

> **Helen:** *I'm always afraid or I have this view that to be professional meant*
> *to be objective and standoffish and removed from the student.*

However, we get to see Helen's practice evolving as the inquiry progresses as she tells me she has: "learned that from seeing other people do it". Helen, and the team, are resisting the dominant care-less narrative and seeking to find a vocabulary to justify our caring approach, drawing on Vygotskian (1934) 'scaffolding' rather than the pejorative 'hand holding'. We need to position care as an effective component in teaching and learning in higher education that is valued and validated in a growing body of research (Mountz *et al.*, 2015). Westacott *et al.* (2021) argue that we must advocate for care, make space for it. This team makes space for care.

Nora surfaces a tension that we can experience in enacting care in our practice. There is a tendency to dichotomise the 'soft touch' against the 'hard' rigour of academic standards. Eamonn too worried about what he terms the 'care dilemma' inherent in our pedagogic encounters, between a care that enables and empowers and one that creates dependency. Freire (2005, p. 6) differentiates between caring teaching and "paternalistic coddling", which (he argues) leads to acceptance of mediocrity or "accommodation".

Eamonn talked about infusing our teaching with care, "but we need to be careful what outcomes from it". Echoing some of Claire's concerns, he worried that "maybe we are doing too much, and that the attentiveness and the care has the potential to become a barrier to their development of self-responsibility". Eamonn felt that we need to be "more explicit with students about why we care and care towards what". Mortari (2016, p. 462) suggests that "The purpose of education lies herein: to help students cultivate the desire to care for themselves". This is very redolent of Eamonn's view that "it's care that supports them in the searching for what they need for themselves".

I think Eamonn navigates this balance between care and standards. He tells his students: "If I put a lot of work into preparing materials … I do expect that back". Claire too addressed the issue of care and standards, citing what she calls 'tough care';

> **Claire:** *The student might not have any warm feelings about it, but the reality of it is that it's really good for them at the end of the day…. It's proper care, but it's tough.*

Care is not the enemy of standards and rigour; indeed, we might claim that care spurs our students on to achieve more. In 2019, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education published a report entitled '*Making a Difference' A Student View of Excellent Teaching*. The dataset for this report comprises nearly 4000 anonymous student submissions, drawn from surveys in 2014 and 2016, on what makes good teachers and excellent teaching in higher education.

Students remarked that good teachers;

> *Make a difference to students' learning and their lives…. they were fair and sometimes tough, setting high standards for them but supporting them every step of the way to achieve those standards.*
>
> (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2019, p. iii)

Of course, this binary is a construct, and we can and do provide care *and* have high standards. Mariskind (2014) talks about pedagogical care as challenging students to learn and achieve and having high expectations for them. Eamonn talked about "tough care", but he would "prefer to err on the side of that caring space" if needed. We expect high standards from our students, whilst also recognising their need for extra care at times during their educational journey with us. It is this weaving of pedagogic and pastoral care that ultimately creates the conditions for our students to flourish.

Courageous Counterpoints

Nora is questioning her philosophy of caring as the gravity of the dominant discourse is hard to counter. There is a tension as caring is not valued or counted in a performative culture; "performance has no room for caring" (Ball, 2003, p. 224). The discourse of new managerialism is predicated on the care-less view of the citizen, based on competitive self-interest rather than other-interest/solidarity. The "primacy of caring relations in work with pupils and colleagues" has no place in the hard world of performativity (Smyth *et al.*, 2000, p. 140).

Eamonn feels that managerialism has "hijacked" the true meaning of professionalism. Neoliberalism is creating new kinds of teacher subjectivities and changing our relationships with our colleagues and students. Ball states starkly that "this is the struggle over the teacher's soul" (2003, p. 217). Not to be overly dramatic, but the struggle is tangible this morning. This is the clash of our caring values against the performativity culture of the neoliberal institution.

The team is countering the dominant hegemony and supporting each other, also providing epistemological and emotional containment for each other. Ball (2016a) points to the importance of collective resistance, with educators who act as Hargreaves's (2003, p. 30) "courageous counterpoints". Courage is fostered in community and allyship. In the neoliberal university, it is a radical act to care about colleagues and work in such a collegial way. Gill (2009) details academics that are usually too exhausted to resist the neoliberalisation of their Institutions or do not know how (or what) to resist. This team is a key resource in refusing the performativity paradigm. This meeting today is evidence of how we can support each other to resist/refuse dominant discourses.

Previously I had asked Leo how I can remain as passionate and positive as he is. He advised me to focus on the classroom and the students and I will not lose hope. It must go deeper than that. I need to 'refuse' ideologies that are at odds with my values. That refusal begins with my own critical reflexivity, I cannot refuse if I remain unaware, sleep walking into ideologies that are inimical to what I believe in. As Ball (2016a) notes, neoliberal 'reforms' are often so incremental that we only realise them in retrospect. My doctoral journey has been a process of 'waking up'. This entails critical reflection on our practices and beliefs as well as the structural conditions of the education system (Ball 2016a). Ball and Olmedo write that "neoliberalism is experienced and perceived in the classroom and in the soul" (2013, p. 88). The stress I am feeling is as a result of encountering an ideology that is extremely incompatible with my own philosophy and ontology.

Helen talks this morning about our caring and collegial practices as acts of defiance. "Care is political", she declares, echoing Stephen Ball (2016a), who exhorts us to be aware of the power we hold as educators, both in the classroom and in the wider education sphere. Nora had asked in a previous conversation: "Whose agendas are important up high and

who has the power?" This echoes Murphy's (2015) contention that it is time to "take a more critical stance toward the politics of care", paying attention to the politics of care and how "the exercise of power operates through care in many divergent ways" (2015, p. 719).

Last year Helen cautioned that if we do not critically reflect on our practice, it is "just factory processing". Educators must critically examine the meaning and enactment of policy if we wish to resist neoliberal practices. Sometimes policies can seem far removed from the classroom. Before undertaking doctoral studies, I did not understand the broader forces at play. I now have a lens with which to question and critique how power works to reproduce or produce some narratives as dominant whilst marginalising other narratives.

Pat worries about the language of care being co-opted by the institution; care is not a tick-box exercise. This is not unlike Kathleen Lynch's (2022) concerns about the marketisation of care, when care is 'packaged' and sold in units. Pat highlights when the language of care is co-opted by those who do not embody an ethic of care. The institution can adopt an 'air of care', but as Nora suggested last year, care needs to be felt and experienced by everyone in the organisation, staff, and students. This gathering allows the team to surface these dominant narratives and counter them with a more care centric discourse. Eamonn previously suggested that we need to "wrap the curriculum with care". This morning he mentions the new Teaching and Learning strategy he is working on.

One of the seven pillars of our new Technological University is 'Pedagogies of Care and Transition'. This is significant- explicitly inserting care into our strategies, naming, and amplifying pedagogies that place relationality at the centre of teaching and learning across the university. The team has provided a forum whereby we can question and challenge some of the dominant logic of neoliberalism. This can of course create "discomforts and misalignments" as we engage in "some kinds of reluctance" to neoliberalisation (Ball, 2016a, p. 307). Ball (2003, p. 220) feels that we become "ontologically insecure" and much of this self-doubt is internalised, it becomes a matter of personal anxiety rather than public debate. That is why the team support is so vital, to help us realise that this is not a personal failing (like Nora suggesting her caring is a weakness).

Deirdre declared during our conversation last year that the team is "having a go at the system in a way that's productive", leading to what Burchell calls a state of 'permanent agonism' (Burchell, as cited in Ball, 2016a). While agonism suggests the positive contribution that conflict brings, it is important to note that it does not always feel good to be in this contrarian position. Complaining is also exhausting, as Sara Ahmed (2021) documents. Being part of a collective has been essential to enable us to question, critique and resist. Deirdre declared: "In adversity we're saying to the system, you're not going to treat us or anybody else like that". We can observe here how the team is disrupting dominant paradigms with our collegial approach. Gatherings like today's one gives collective voice to our experience and enable us to better understand the broader neoliberal forces at play in our institutions.

Although under new managerialism, fundamental changes are being smuggled into our work practices and our subjectivities, this group of educators has resisted the dominant discourse of the care-less lecturer. Ball and Olmedo (2013, p. 85) view subjectivity as "a site of struggle and resistance", indeed how we describe selves can be understood as an act of resistance. Neimeyer (2000, p. 209) argued that the self is "deeply penetrated by the vocabularies of our place and time, expressing dominant modes of discourse". Yet all my participants eschew the typical term of 'lecturer' to describe themselves. Eamon asserted;

> *Eamonn: I don't call myself a lecturer anymore. It's the vocabulary of the sector you're in, but I am a teacher.*

Leo too declared himself a teacher. Nora embraced the term practitioner educator. Yvonne describes herself as an educator. Claire told me that she views herself as a facilitator. While acknowledging the power that policy has to shape our identities and possibilities as educators, we can see that we have the agency to resist policy imperatives. As we witness in this inquiry, policy enactments vary across institutions and even across departments. Participants point to a different culture in Central Institute and indeed within our own department. We can see then that policy enactment is therefore rendered "fragile and unstable" by different subjectivities (Maguire *et al.*, 2015, p. 485).

Slow Tiny Acts of Resistance

This seems like a good time to share with the group the concept of care as resistance. This is something that has given me great comfort as I struggled with the institutional issues over the past two years. I have come to understand the way we work and care for each other and our students as an act of resistance. Recentralising care in higher education is seen by many academics as key to refusing neoliberalism (Black and Dwyer, 2021). Ailwood and Ford (2021, p. 169) write about "slowing down, holding space for a learning community … rather than a constant and rapid acquisition of knowledge and skills". Slow scholarship and care can be conceived as a resistance to the accountability regimes and regulation of the neoliberal university. I share Harre *et al.*'s (2017) concept of S.T.A.R, the resistance of small everyday practices.

> *Let's generate and enact slow, tiny acts of resistance in the company of others whom we enjoy and whose thinking and conduct can teach us. Their companionship will comfort and sustain us.*
>
> (Harre *et al.*, 2017, p. 12)

I love the idea of STARs, all the small acts of caring which can potentially generate a massive resistance to neoliberalism. The group respond enthusiastically to the concept of STARs. I join in the liveliness of the moment, declaring "*we* are stars!" And of course, we are stars in one sense, care is not just what we do, it is who we are. As Leo wholeheartedly declared in my very first inquiry conversation: "It's more than just an educational rationale for me. It's a way of life. It's a statement of intent!" Our 'being-in-relation', our ontology, is a profound act of resistance. This energises us as we remember the agency we have in defining "what the academy looks and feels like" (Westacott *et al.*, 2021, p. 112). Badenhorst and McLeod (2021, p. 266) assert that "recognising the affective body in the academy is also an act of resistance. By allowing time to name and articulate our feelings this morning we are also creating a space for resistance. STARs prioritise collegiality and solidarity, creating the conditions for hope (Badenhorst and McLeod, 2021). By understanding our practices of care as acts of resistance we foster hope and courage.

Leo, talking about the team, asserted previously that;

> **Leo:** *We all shared that common view of education and of learning; what really education is about. At the heart of it, is relationships.*

This team, by placing students at the core of our pedagogy, and our relationships with each other as central to our practice, significantly disrupted and resisted the neoliberal urge in academia. We eschewed neoliberalism's attempt to "silence the social in our selves" (Ward, 2021, p. 41). Our group strongly 'refused' neo liberalism, mirroring Fergal Finnegan's (2019) research which argues that neoliberalism is and continues to be resisted by staff (and students) in HEIs. We shared an open plan office in Ballylacken and had an open-door policy in terms of being accessible to our students. This is not the norm in most departments in our Institution. We were actively subverting the competitive and individualising tendencies of neoliberalism by continuing to value and work within a team culture, based on a shared professional identity and values.

Caring With

This morning we are experiencing and understanding care as a collective practice. Joan Tronto highlights the role of trust and solidarity in care: writing that '*caring with*' entails the habits and patterns of care that emerge over time. Care is not an individual pursuit, it is an understanding of the interconnectedness of self and others, and personal and social concerns (Gilligan. 1982). We do not care in isolation. Claire had previously queried whether it is necessary that students care about us. I had not really considered the importance of reciprocal care from my students before I embarked on this inquiry. I reflect now on how my motivation levels drop significantly if I sense my students do not seem to care about my module. Helen too this morning refers to the importance of mutual care. We care *with* each other as colleagues but also *with* our students. Care needs to be mutual and reciprocated in our pedagogic encounters.

When care is individualised, it marginalises and denies the interdependence of students, teachers, and the university. In Claire Mariskind's (2014) study, care is depicted as the responsibility of individual teachers: it is not viewed as a collective responsibility involving all aspects of the university. She argues that "the notion of a caring community

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is not always thought of in relation to universities" (2014, p. 316). Our inquiry amplifies care as a "communal practice" (Mariskind, 2014. p. 318). We could be described as "care advocates" (Mariskind, 2014. p. 313) because our institutions do not recognise that care is needed or take responsibility for addressing the need for care. Mariskind (2014) states that we need to have a greater awareness of the possibilities and benefits of care in higher education; contending that we need care to be infused throughout our higher education institutions which would support both individual and our collective well-being and enhance our teaching and learning. I cared with this team; we cared with our students too. Caring with, care as a communal practice connects us to the deeper ontological purpose of our care; understanding care "as a way of being-in-the-world" (Noddings, 2012b, p. 775). This team practiced communal care as a way of being and working together in the university.

Helen tells us at the end of today's gathering – it feels like we have 'filled our buckets', evoking the idea of replenishing our care reservoirs. There is something very nourishing and uplifting about the morning. The feeling of agency is a powerful antidote for hopelessness. I do not feel that refusal is possible on my own; the forces are too strong. Community and collegiality therefore become key sites for hope. It is vital to acknowledge despair, but also essential to engage in collectives like ours, who can support resistance, foster optimism, and help us sustain our care centred pedagogies. Dall'Alba (2012) asserts that care can be used to re-imagine the university in our teaching, research, and social engagement. There is a sense of hope and optimism in the room as we end. We talk about building alliances, fighting for care. How do we defend care? Helen shares an image, "we are in a circle, but we are facing outwards now". Each of us is now working in different departments, faculties, or on different campuses. How do we create spaces of care, and spaces for care as we each embark on a separate trajectories?

We have covered a lot of ground today and it is time to part ways. I had started out this morning hoping to create a space to share our lived experience of care in higher education and secondly to explore what a care centered pedagogy means to each of us. All the conversations and stories so far have focused on people's experience of care and significantly, lack of care. This is what was needed, and I let the group go where it needs to go. We traced the climate of care located in Ballylacken and discussed how the team provided containment that helped sustain our caring practice. We also realised how we

can and do refuse careless discourses through our practice of communal care. I feel elated and energized after the gathering. It is powerful when we come together and share our lived experiences like this. I compose this chapter, send it to everyone, and engage further with Nora, Eamonn and Helen around some of the threads that have emerged.

Eamonn emails me after I send him a draft chapter of our discussion:

> *Firstly, thank you for this amazing piece of writing! It is utterly wonderful, and you should be so proud of what you are 'unearthing' 'dismantling' and 'creating.' As I read it -I am informed, inspired, angry, reflective, interrogative, contemplative, tearful and yet optimistic. You have engaged me in so many ways of looking at our shared experience in Ballylacken. I will read it again and then see if I can clarify some of my own responses and insights ...*
> *For now, I salute a piece of writing that is one of the most insightful and inspiring I have read in a long time. Take a bow – you are blazing a trail and unearthing a real diamond in this study.*
> *Eamonn*
>
> [Field text: Extract from an Email received from Eamonn, June 2022]

Chapter 7: Understanding Care and Finding Presence

Introduction

In my plan for the Gathering I had envisaged spending time reflecting back to the team all that I had learned over the course of our inquiry. But on the day, it felt more important to hold the space for my colleagues to speak of care and their lived experiences. So, there are still some significant "narrative threads" (Clandinin *et al.*, 2010, p. 84) that I need to detail, that did not surface during our group conversation. All of the narratives in this inquiry traverse each other; we are entangled through our shared history, values, and practices. Jean Clandinin (2013) advocates noticing relational intersections – places where stories intersect and collide. This inquiry shines a spotlight on our relationships, with each other, our students, the department, and the wider Institute. Care is embedded in relationships, and it is in relation that we see care in these storied accounts. This inquiry has helped me become aware of and understand that a climate of care allows us possibilities to refuse dominant discourses. Our climate of care enables a relationship-rich and care-centred pedagogy. Presence has become a key resonance for me, which captures many of our practices as care-centred educators.

This chapter aims to capture the remaining reverberations across our conversations, from my ongoing engagement with my colleagues, alongside what I have learned throughout this journey. I describe three significant learnings that arose for me. Firstly, I discuss pastoral and pedagogic care in our work in higher education. This binary is highlighted in many of my discussions with my participants, which leads me to discuss the importance of pedagogic and pastoral care in our work. Care is often dismissed in higher education; it is suggested that it is not our job as lecturers to care about our students, our role is to fill their minds. In all my inquiry conversations, relationality is positioned as a central element of our pedagogy. I agree with my participants; care is an essential ingredient in good teaching and learning in higher education. We need to de-gender care, as Clare Mariskind (2014) suggests, and claim it as a core pedagogical practice. Secondly, what reverberates across our conversations is the ontological basis of our pedagogy – care is expressed as a way of being with each other and with our students. Thirdly, I conceptualise this way of being with our students as a practice of presence. Care is embodied through presence. Finally, I offer my understanding of care, gleaned from

working alongside my colleagues and my engagement with care theorists, during this inquiry.

During our earlier conversation, in relation to her own doctoral thesis, Claire shared;

> **Claire:** *There wasn't any easy boundary to put on things but at some stage, you just have to. You have to leave some things.*

As Clandinin and Caine (2010) suggest, what is shared in research texts is usually just a portion of the stories that were told and retold in the field. I have foregrounded these areas, knowing there are so many others that I have had to leave (for now).

Pastoral and Pedagogic Care

Often care in higher education is understood as pastoral care, which is then positioned as the remit of university support staff who are responsible for the well-being of students. Clare Mariskind (2014) suggests that there is also 'pedagogic care', which is centred on students' academic achievement. She demonstrates that lecturers in her study provide both pedagogic and pastoral care, like Eamonn, who talks about "infusing our teaching with care". Mariskind (2014) contests this care dichotomy and stresses the importance of pastoral care to enable success academically. In our conversation last year Eamonn remembers a particular student;

> **Eamonn:** *There was a lovely guy from down South Tipperary way, and he had gone through a lot of difficulties, personal difficulties … Once I was aware of what was going on, it was a check-in about every second week. It was just a space for him to say where he was at and give an encouraging word then. Then it was giving him some kind of advice about a skill or something that could just hold that space, and to say we'll stay in touch if he needed. I think, for me, it was very little, it was just normal, what you would do. We underestimate those interventions I'd say. I think for them, they don't maybe come to third level expecting that kind of support.*

Interestingly, Eamonn suggests that this student might not have expected such care, highlighting the common perception that lecturers do not care about their students. From

Eamon's story, we can see that pastoral and pedagogic care are both necessary when we acknowledge the interplay between the rational/affective and personal/professional, in terms of student success.

This might be a useful distinction for Claire, who wondered in our conversation about "blurry boundaries" in our teaching between the personal and professional lives of our students. Claire worries that some of our newer social care professional colleagues struggle with boundaries as they have professional training in helping vulnerable people. Nora, coming from a practice background, asserts "if the need for care is greater, then for me, that overrides". Eamonn too tells me that he would "err on the side of that caring space".

Claire tells me that how the student is in their own life "it's not part of what I am responsible for in terms of my professional life". There is a tension here for Claire, what she terms 'blurry boundaries', in terms of educating social care students. Nora and Claire both feel that as some of our students have personal experience of the care system so may need more support than other students. However, Claire does not see that the personal should be part of their professional formation, reminding me of the "well-learned distinctions between public and private" prevalent in higher education (hooks, 1994, p. 198). Here Claire distinguishes educating the personal self and the professional self;

> *Claire: Is that creating a particular construct as well that is very different than a plasterer who might have been in the care setting, but where for him or her the educational experience allows them to park who they are and become their separate professional self? Whereas we're creating a blurry boundary between self and professional.*

Nora differs significantly here in her sense of our role. For her, the personal and the professional self are inextricably bound together. And she is adamant that we cannot teach about care without engaging in care;

> *Nora: I'm trying to model that care and model how I hope that they may be or how I hope they may experience me or how other people they work with may experience them.*

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Nora tells her students about their future roles as social care professionals;

> **Nora:** *People may not remember exactly what or how or who or when, but they remember that this person made me feel really bad about myself or scared me or didn't give a crap about me. Or they made me feel secure and safe ...*

People remember those who cared about us, and no intervention in social care will be successful, according to Nora, without care. We could extend this to teaching too. We learn best from those educators who cared, as Leo reminds me;

> **Leo:** *How often have you learned from anybody that you didn't really care about? ... That old cliché that students don't care what you know until they know that you care. I actually think that's very true.*

Leo goes on to outline how he demonstrates this cares in his interactions with his students, both inside and outside the classroom.

> **Leo:** *I also try to work pretty hard to build relationships with them outside of class too ... If I meet them [students] in the corridor, I'd often stop and just have a chat, I'd make the time to stop and do that ... It builds relationships by showing an interest in other people's lives.*

For Leo, pastoral, and pedagogic care weave together in building connections with his students, which he believes creates the optimum conditions for students to flourish.

Care is a Core Ingredient

During our inquiry conversations I ask both Helen and Claire the same question: would you describe yourself as a caring educator?

> *Helen: Care does come into it, but I wouldn't frame it that way.*
> *Claire: Probably not. It doesn't have currency in the context of professionalism. Would you describe yourself as a caring professional in a CV? Not for a lecturing job.*

Despite growing evidence that care is core to effective higher education pedagogy, the academy, and many academics, are resolute in their resistance to recognise care as part of academic labour (Mountz *et al.*, 2015). Claire, during our conversation, argued that universities only value "your professional knowledge and your professional doctorate" telling me "nobody ever asks you whether you care about the students or not". Joan Tronto (1995, p. 112) contends that the dominant discourse of care links it with the "private, the emotional, and the needy". And as Clare Mariskind (2014) points out, when autonomy and independence are seen as socially valuable and neediness is seen as a burden, then care will be denied or positioned as a weakness. We can see this when Nora tells the group during our gathering that she feels that her caring is viewed as a weakness by Central Institute colleagues.

Although there is often an ideological assumption that women are 'naturally' predisposed to be caring, this is not evident in our inquiry. It is my two male colleagues who are most vocal about what Eamonn calls "the care agenda" in education. Claire and Helen originally hesitated to identify as caring educators. I place relationality and care at the centre of my teaching but somehow, I too resist describing myself as a *caring* educator.

Clare Mariskind (2014, p. 308) tells us that it is "the association with vulnerability, emotion, and the private sphere [that] further genders and thus devalues care". Perhaps care in higher education is so devalued that some of us hesitate to describe ourselves as 'caring' educators. This leads me to consider how gendered our notion of care is. In her research, Maeve O'Brien (2008) suggests that women can often feel a moral imperative to do care work. When care is tied to our construct of motherhood it is incorrectly

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positioned as something innate rather than a skill that is to be learned. Harriet Hawkins (2019) cites research that suggests that students expect female lecturers to be caring and that they are negatively evaluated if they are not 'performing' this role. There can be consequences for female lecturers, for non-conforming our care roles.

Mariskind (2014, p. 318) suggests that we de-gender care and view it as a complex pedagogical practice, performed by men and women, involving cognitive and emotional aspects. This inquiry documents care as a 'complex pedagogical practice' performed by both women and men. Following Motta and Bennett, I agree that care should be: "an onto-epistemological commitment expected from both teachers and students" (2018, p. 640). This stance, they argue, takes care seriously – "as a rigorous and iteratively re/developed ethics of mutuality, relationality and difference" (Motta and Bennett, 2018, p. 640). This elevates care, it is not simply my disposition or an emotional approach, or an expectation cast on female lecturers, it is an ontological commitment for all lecturers and our students.

Last year I had exasperatedly asked Nora; "Why aren't we having more of these conversations? Why isn't this upfront in what we do?" Care is not valued or visible in the neo-liberal university (Hawkins, 2019). However, as our inquiry attests, we do not stop caring because our institutions do not value care. Emer wonders why we don't make care a more visible aspect of our work. She suggests as Westacott *et al.* (2021, p. 109) do, that "the student is potentially short-changed as care is interpreted and applied in an inconsistent way". Westacott *et al.* (2021, p. 110) hold "that care should be celebrated by the institution as being essential to good practice", describing their pedagogy, not as something they do because it is somehow innate or comes naturally but because they have trained, reflected, and researched their practice. We need to talk about care, to think about care, and to recentre care as an essential aspect of good teaching and learning in higher education.

During our gathering, Eamonn shares significant research that highlights the importance of care for students in Irish higher education. This National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2019) research asserts that the quality of teaching in higher education has a profound impact on student learning.

Students surveyed describe exceptional teachers as;

> *Entertaining-interesting, kind, and caring, supportive, inspirational,*
> *passionate, and approachable. They are helpful, encouraging, generous*
> *with their time, and go 'above and beyond'. They help students to learn, to*
> *develop, to progress, to be successful.*
>
> (National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
> in Higher Education, 2019, p. iii).

The report goes on to suggest that;

> *If we are genuinely concerned with student success, we must be entirely*
> *committed to validating, valuing and celebrating good teaching.*
>
> (National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
> in Higher Education, 2019, p. iii).

And care is a core aspect of good teaching, according to these students. Care is good pedagogical practice, not just something that is the 'icing on the cake', but a core ingredient to successful teaching and learning.

The Ontological Foundation of Care

The sense I get from my colleagues is that formation is an important aspect of their understanding of their role as educators. This concept emerges across all my conversations; we are shaping professional identities, not merely delivering content. Claire feels that we must model a core level of respect for the students:

> *Claire: If we're teaching them anything, it is teaching them how to work*
> *with other people...If we want people to care, should we not model care in*
> *the first place?*

For Claire, education is about creating respectful, caring people, echoing Gloria Dall'Alba's views too, if we wish to educate our students to care "we must demonstrate

this care convincingly in our encounters with our students and surroundings" (2012, p. 116).

Helen's original inspiration to teach in higher education was to shape the emerging Youth work professional. Yvonne and Nora see their role as influencing future professionals. They agree that as they are in a process of formation as social care professionals, they must surely model the values of care we wish our students to adopt in their practice. Deirdre is passionate about forming community development practitioners. Both Leo and Eamonn outline forming secondary school teachers; for Emer, it is the early childhood educator. For Pat now, it is forming the creative professional as he has moved to his new role in the Art and Design department.

Eamonn tells his students;

> **Eamonn:** *We can help you develop to be the best you can… that you have some sense of the talents that you have or the wholeness of your being.*

Nora tells her students *they* are the greatest tool. Yvonne emphasises;

> **Yvonne:** *In order to be a really effective practitioner, you have to bring as much of your personal self to the role.*

There is a foregrounding of ontology over epistemology evident in these descriptions of practice, aligning with Barnacle and Dall'Alba who contend that "epistemology must be in the service of ontology" (2007, p. 686). We are concerned about shaping the person, becoming whom they have the potential to become.

Barnacle and Dall'Alba suggest transforming knowing as something merely intellectual "to something inhabited and enacted: a way of thinking, making and acting. Indeed, a way of being" (*ibid,* p. 682). They contend that higher education usually privileges the intellect and overlooks the role of the body and embodiment in knowledge. They also ask that we recognize that knowledge is "socially constructed in relation to specific knowledge interests" questioning the notion of "an unproblematic knowledge transfer or

acquisition" (*ibid*, p. 680). They argue convincingly that we need to re-orientate our curricula, pedagogy, assessment, and evaluation of our teaching and learning.

Third-level educators should ask the question 'what does it mean to become?' What does it mean to become a social care professional, for example? This is different from having the knowledge or skills to be a social care practitioner. This should be addressed explicitly in our programmes, as both Eamonn and Nora suggest. Our early childhood education and social care students are not only learning *about* caring but also learning *to* care. We are not just teaching the academic study of care; we also want our students to embody caring relationships with those they will work with. This calls for a different kind of pedagogy that would enable these caring 'professionals-in-formation': a care-centred pedagogy.

Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007) call for a different educational approach where our students are transformed into people;

> *who enact ways of being in the world appropriate to the practice in*
> *question that are also responsive to changing practice contexts.*
>
> (Dall'Alba and Barnacle, 2007, p. 688)

Dall'Alba and Barnacle demand "educational approaches that engage the whole person: what they know, how they act, and who they are" (*ibid,* p. 688). Care conceived as an affective and embodied praxis requires the integration of epistemology and ontology. Dall'Alba (2012) suggests that ontology can be interweaved with epistemology through developing the capacity to care.

During our gathering, Eamonn mentions what we refer to colloquially as the 'head, hand and heart' controversy in our department. A couple of years ago, the Ballylacken team proposed adopting this tripartite as a signature pedagogy for our department. There was strong opposition from our colleagues based at Central institute. It was abandoned. There was a resistance perhaps to espousing a particular pedagogy, to make a commitment to the heart, to care.

Barnacle and Dall'Alba's (2007) proposition capture what our team sought to articulate with our "head, hand, and heart" philosophy. We seek to educate the whole person; what they can know, what they can do and how they might be in the world. A pedagogy that seeks to help our students *become,* what Freire (1970, 2011) might term a humanizing pedagogy, should be centred in care, when we take the view that care is a mark of personhood, as much as the traditional notion of Cartesian rationality (Noddings, 2005). If we want to enable our students to become more fully human, we must embody care in our classrooms. And as Gloria Dall'Alba (2012) suggests, third-level educators need to work *together and differently* to create citizens who care, rather than simply to deliver knowledge and skills. I think this group of educators achieved this aspiration over our years of working and teaching together.

Finding Presence

Luigina Mortari (2016, p. 456) lists the pedagogical practices which might underpin a commitment to care: cognitive and emotional availability, empathy, and attention towards our students as well as being reflective and encouraging others toward self-awareness as important practices of care. This "careful affective awareness and practice" (Motta and Bennett, 2018, p. 636) can also be conceptualised as 'presence' (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006). When I revisited all the transcripts of our inquiry conversations, I began to notice these practices reverberating across the pages. All my participants describe teaching moments that are redolent of Rodgers and Raider-Roth's (2006) definition of presence;

> *A state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and group in the context of their learning environment and the ability to respond.*
>
> (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266)

Last year Eamonn described starting with a new group of students. He tells them at the outset of their pedagogic encounter;

> **Eamonn:** *I'll do the absolute best I can do. We'll check in as we go, and I expect the same from you as well. If we put in the effort collectively, this*

> *can be a really phenomenal experience, a growth experience for yourself,*
> *and an educational one.*

He proceeds to differentiate between teaching and lecturing;

> **Eamonn:** *In lecturing, it's one way and we don't know what's going on*
> *intra-personally for them when we're lecturing. But when I'm really*
> *teaching and it's like that Martin Buber concept of the I Thou; that's when*
> *the golden stuff happens.*

If we are present to each other and engaged in the subject matter, education can be a transformative experience as described above by Eamonn. For Nel Noddings (1984, 2005) care is fundamental to teaching, and an attentive presence is an essential component of care. To be present to our students, we must first tune into our students and their learning.

Claire rejects the unattuned "old-fashioned lecturer, where they just stand up and disseminate what they know". We must bring our full attention and awareness to the learning encounter. Eamonn outlines how he engages with the groups he teaches: "If I am not feeling an energy, I stop and check in". Yvonne, in describing her teaching as being "completely switched on", echoes Rodgers's (2020, p. 1) description of presence as "the experience of bringing one's whole self to full attention so as to perceive what is happening in the moment". To be present in our classrooms, we must first be able to reflect and respond.

Helen suggests;

> **Helen:** *You've got to be able to read a group, you might realize people are*
> *not with you and you've got to be able to read the group and react.*

Helen reads the group, suggesting a more cognitive dimension to her engagement. Leo speaks about 'feeling' that the class is not with him, typifying an emotional attunement with his students. In our conversation, Leo outlines his approach to a group;

> *Leo: If I go into a class and I feel they're not with me, I'll just stop and say, 'let's play a game' or I'd say, 'let's just reflect for five minutes or let's take a short break'.*

For Carol Rodgers (2020) this process of reflection-in-the-moment embodies the notion of presence. Everyone in this inquiry demonstrates the ability to be present to the other and allow space for learning to emerge. Relating a story about teaching online, Deirdre outlines how she teaches in 20-minute blocks, and then uses the chat function, breakout rooms, and discussions. She describes the joy of "the interaction, the connection and watching them getting the aha moment, the growth". She details "tuning into" her students, which we might also conceptualise as being present.

Claire tells me;

> *Claire: You're trying to get to know them and get to know what they know… and to connect the moving forward with what they already know.*

She goes on to detail "getting a sense" of the class, what they know and how to make those connections with new learning. She is very present to the student's learning and their engagement with the subject.

> *Claire: When you have engagement in the classroom, then you're giving them a chance to connect what they know to what you've taught about…they can chat or discuss or engage with it in that way…. you learn from the students; you watch them and how they react.*

Claire's description here is redolent Dewey's concept of 'aliveness' (1935, as cited in Rodgers, 2020). A teacher is in a state of aliveness when they are attuned to their students *and* the learning that is happening in the moment. Rodgers draws on John Dewey to distinguish between a surface recognition of our students and a deeper perception, meaning to study and "take in" (Dewey, 1935, p. 53, as cited in Rodgers, 2020). Perception requires engagement and forming connections and relationships with our students. Rodgers (2020), leaning on Dewey, contends that the teacher must be alert to her students' sense-making; puzzlement, conflict with older understandings, and new

connections being formed. The object of the teacher's attention needs to be on the student and their encounter with the subject matter, which both Claire and Deirdre describe.

Eamon too regularly checks in with students as they progress in their studies which enables him to stay present and attuned to his students and their learning. He has "become much more attentive to those kinds of things that are around our whole relationship with each other".

Presence entails being receptive and responsive to our students. It is relational; it presupposes an openness to the other and the world (Rodgers, 2020). It also offers the possibility to be moved and changed by our pedagogic encounters. Leo recounts his early experience in teaching where he became much more conscious of the student's needs. He realises that teaching is about the students, not about the teacher.

Noddings (1984) asserts the importance of receptiveness and responsiveness for a caring pedagogy. Receptiveness is listening and paying attention to understanding the needs of the other. Responsiveness is meeting the other's needs reliably and confirming their worth. Mortari (2016) suggests that responsiveness;

> *is to confirm that person's worth and the importance of what he/she thinks and feels when someone is recognised, then he/she realises that he/she exists.*

> (Mortari, 2016, p. 457)

Presence offers our students a sense of feeling seen and understood, feeling safe to discover oneself in the context of the larger world. Deirdre stresses the importance of welcoming people by name when they join her online classes. This simple practice sends the existential message that 'it matters to me that you turn up'. Nora proceeds to elaborate that as well as "tuning in", you also have to be responsive to the groups' needs and be "able to drop the agenda", i.e., the learning outcomes or plan for the class, if needs be. We discuss a particular group that experienced the bereavement of a classmate in their first year in college. Nora was attuned and responsive to their needs, supporting them through a difficult time.

Nora feels that modelling care involves "being fully tuned in". She tells me that "you need to have that ability to tune into all the other elements that are going on for people". For Rodgers (2020) presence entails being 'wide awake' to our student's mental and emotional states. This 'tuning in' is an awareness of the students as not just heads to be filled, but with emotional, embodied selves that we must attend to. Presence is also evident in Eamonn's description of a teaching moment;

> **Eamonn:** *You see the faces and you just know there's a light-up moment,*
> *or sometimes you might see something that's difficult for somebody, a*
> *moment of awareness.*

Here he is describing attuning to the emotional register in the class, he is paying attention to embodied experiences in the classroom. Noting the students' reactions to him and the content, he describes these as "magical moments", he pays attention to the "golden stuff" of emerging insight and awareness for the students. Leo too recognises the power of embodied learning, using drama and role play, where the students "can really touch on emotions and touch on ideas that they might not necessarily do in an academic text".

Reflection and Respect

Reflection is the cornerstone of presence. Many of my participants remark on the importance of reflective practice. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) suggest that presence is to be in relation with and connected to, our students *and* oneself. The relationship teachers have with their sense of self, and the strength of their relationship with students is "nurtured or jeopardized by the teacher's relationship to herself" (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 271). Foundational to the pedagogy expressed in this inquiry is a connection to, and awareness of, our students. Implicit in many of our conversations is self-awareness too. Nora speaks of the importance of "tuning in to when I need to take a step back if my resources are down". Yvonne values "space for reflection, regrouping and regathering yourself". Emer, Eamonn, and Leo too, value reflection as part of their practice.

As well as being reflective about our practice, we also encourage our students to be reflective. Leo feels that a fundamental part of the team's pedagogy is to build reflective

time into our students' learning. Helen encourages a process of critical reflection for her students, telling me;

> **Helen:** *It's about critical reflective practice … I would get them to think about their own personal philosophy; their own worldview.*

Nora encourages students "to tune into their whole person" because ultimately this will make them safer social care practitioners. Yvonne tells me that sometimes her students struggle with the idea of reflection: asking her "*why is this so important or why do I have to reflect so deeply? Why do I have to know myself?*" She feels that reflection is a vital aspect of becoming a social care professional and is therefore vital to our work as educators. I hope that we are instilling a core foundation of reflection that will enable our students to be future professionals, who can be present in their work.

A culture of respect shapes how we are with each other and also how we teach. Respect is a core principle of care (Tronto, 2013).

Deirdre emphatically states;

> *Deirdre: You wouldn't dream of teaching/treating the students badly. We treat them with such respect, like peers, not like empty vessels.*

This respect extends to our expectations of our students too. We expect them to participate and to co-create their learning. For David Hawkins (1974, 2002) mutual respect is essential to teaching – respect for what the learner brings and respect from the student for the teacher. Eamonn creates an environment where it's safe for the students to explore their lived experiences, and to engage in dialogue around issues they are curious about. Claire and Deirdre emphasise that respect must be at the heart of all our pedagogic relationships. Claire describes "the high and mighty" approach of some lecturers; she hopes she is "accessible" to her students.

For Claire, "the overall thing is the fundamental respect for a student. Students pick up respect too". And as Carol Rodgers (2020) outlines, respect is essential for presence.

Claire's description of the learning process displays serious respect for our students and highlights the mutuality of the learning process. She recognises and respects what Rodgers (2020, p. 37) describes as the "unknown territory that is the experience of the learner".

> *Claire: I do see teaching or whatever it is I'm doing as a co-created learning experience, I suppose ... I mean, over the years, I've learned as much from students as they've ever learned from me, probably, realistically ... But I've always learned from them because I think they have lived experiences that I never had. Whatever it is, it happens to be, they have perspectives that I never had.*

Respect and empathy are central to Leo's pedagogy. He is interested in and attuned to his students. Here is describes the pedagogic encounter;

> *Leo: At the heart of it is students who want to learn something and respect you enough and have a relationship with you, then they're very likely to want to learn with you ... When an issue comes up, I'm always really interested in hearing what students have to say about something.*

Underneath all these interactions is a deep attunement and respect for our students, to what they might learn but also how we might be touched by the education encounter.

High Standards and Care

In our conversation, Eamonn emphasises the importance of care alongside "subject knowledge and its scholarly commitments". I ask Helen what are the key things she has learned that she would pass on to a new staff member. She recommends "engaging your passion" around your subject area. Leo too tells me; "I am very passionate about my subject. I can't teach something I don't care about."

Claire suggests that;

> *Claire: Care was often about being the best professional you could be in order to properly prepare and present the knowledge that you've got but in a co-created space.*

We achieve mastery over our subjects through an ongoing process of developing, deepening, and expanding our repertoire. This competence then allows us time and energy to focus on our pedagogy and the relationship with our students (and ourselves). John Dewey (1933, p. 275) stated that "the teacher's mind must have mastered the subject matter in advance" to give full attention to the pupils' reactions. This mastery involves module content, resources, activities, and readings to scaffold the student's learning, attending to our 'scholarly commitments'.

Helen told me in our conversation last year;

> *Helen: I care about the experience students get. That makes me want to do a good job, both for myself and for them.*

But this becomes very difficult based on how modules have been re-assigned to members of this team over the last two years. Modules are distributed, not based on competence, but based on moving staff around like units on a spreadsheet. Under market logic, we are viewed as units of 16 or 18 hours – not as professionals who have built up and invested years of scholarship in discipline areas. This has caused significant distress in the period of this inquiry.

Mastery of our subjects enables us to focus on the relational aspects of our teaching and to be present. This might help explain why the process of module allocation feels so stressful. If our modules are continually changed and/or we are teaching in areas outside of our competence, it detracts time and energy from being present. This helps me understand my feeling of disconnect in the classroom over the last year. As I struggled to gain some competence in a raft of new modules, I was barely present to myself, let alone my students and the learning that may or may not, be happening in my classroom.

We have high expectations about our scholarly commitments, but Deirdre's advice is that; "you don't need to know everything" either. Carol Rodgers (2020) believes that a learning stance lies at the heart of presence, including a willingness to see our learners but in turn to be seen by them. It involves mutual visibility and vulnerability. It means adopting a not-knowing position, a learner stance.

> *Eamonn: I think vulnerability would be another value too. I would be far more aware of this as I've become more experienced and older. I think we were sometimes taught in classroom management modules to have a stiff upper lip and to put on a bit of an act. It's been a lifetime process of letting go of all that nonsense.*

Relational Pedagogy

I begin to notice how each of my participants documents a sense of an evolving pedagogy and identity. Yvonne is new to teaching and recognises the journey she will undertake in terms of her teaching. Helen tells stories about how her practice has changed too over time, as she describes;

> *Helen: I've learned that from seeing other people do it. I feel that as I've gotten older, I feel a little bit more like I can do that.*

Leo too recognises his approach to teaching and learning as emerging over time. Eamonn details letting go of the "nonsense" of earlier messages about the teacher's authority. Presence, Carol Rodgers (2020) tells us, involves a willingness to see our learners but in turn to be seen by them, it involves mutual visibility and vulnerability. This positions me as an educator-learner, a potentially subversive stance to the traditional concept of teacher authority.

David Hawkins (2002) posits that teacher effectiveness is embedded in the relationships she/he can build with their students. Assuming a relational stance in our pedagogy entails being attuned to our students, emotionally and cognitively. Presence involves being both receptive and responsive to our students. It entails mutual respect. Presence offers our students a sense of feeling seen and understood, feeling safe to discover themselves in the

context of the larger world. All the participants in this inquiry demonstrate presence in their teaching, it would appear that it is a cornerstone of our care-centred pedagogy.

Claire talks about the importance of this team in terms of encouraging our evolving pedagogy;

> *Claire: Because we have colleagues who have been talking about learning from the students, you watch them and how they react ... And you learn from how the colleagues you work with and what happens and how people respond to all of us and what way they respond to all of us and in what way we encourage responses to us. And we generally, as we were always saying, we generate the kind of world you want, or you generate by your presence what it is.*

We create the kind of world we want by our presence – presence embodies care. The Ballylacken 'energy' and the climate of care we experience, coupled with a strong foundation of personal and professional values, enables us to be present to our students and to enact a care-centred pedagogy. For David Hawkins (2002) educators need to be present to 'I, thou, and it' relations of the pedagogic encounter: the I-thou relates to the teacher-student dynamic, and the 'it' relates to our subject area. Ball and Forzani (2007, p. 531) extend this and argue that it is the dynamic relationships between the I, thou, It, and the broader context, that is the core of the educational process.

The contexts that we teach in, affect how we teach, and also how we form our identities. Rodgers and Scott (2008) suggest that teacher identity is reliant upon and shaped within multiple contexts, social, cultural, political, and historical forces. They maintain that our identity is formed in relationship with others; it is multiple and not fixed, and changes as we construct meaning over time. As Claire told me last year, each institutional iteration changes your identity as an educator, "you become a different person". Carol Rodgers's (2020) work on presence highlights the importance of the teaching communities that we work in. What this inquiry highlights is the importance of the Ballylacken community of care, which enabled us to continue to be caring, attuned, and present to our students.

Holding Care

Motta and Bennett (2018) and Noddings (2012a) contend that pedagogies of care also pay attention to the affective and embodied elements of teaching and learning and foster feelings of safety and belonging. Motta and Bennett (2018) conceptualise care as recognising the complexities and wisdom of our students, of their lived experience. They also suggest, and Mariskind (2014) agrees, that we cannot separate students' personal lives from their ability to engage and develop their educational capabilities. Drawing on research from Bennett and Burke (2017) they argue that students can feel disconnected from overly fast learning activities. Mortari (2016) too suggests that we pay attention to the rhythms of our students' learning. This attentiveness, or presence, entails an awareness of practices that are "conducive to co-creating inclusive and participatory learning spaces and relationships" (Mortari, 2016, p. 642). These practices involve creating encouraging spaces for dialogue, questioning, and participation in our classrooms. Mortari (2016, p. 459) also suggests that a caring educator cultivates "positive and healthy sentiments", like hope and self-confidence in their classrooms. I am struck by the pedagogical significance of hope to a caring pedagogy and reflect further on this in Chapter 8.

Mortari (2016) also draws on Winnicott's (1987) notion of holding/giving security as an important aspect of care in education. This entails scaffolding our students and also the reliability of the educator to respond adequately to the students. Harriet Hawkins (2019, p. 817) describes her role in higher education as "creating and holding the spaces, atmospheres and practices for caring for students and colleagues". I am drawn to this description of 'holding care'.

To Care in the Academy

There are many stories of care across this inquiry. Deirdre tells a story that demonstrates care in relation; a student reveals a family bereavement, and she goes to the canteen with her after class. Helen described care as the high standards she has for her work. During our gathering, she was also vocal about care as defiance, as a way to resist neoliberalism. Pat prompts me to think about care as a way of being and being-with, in the university.

Leo locates care centrally in his heart, it is fundamentally ontological for him, a way of life.

Yvonne details care as core to her practice as a social care educator. Nora teaches me about 'pockets of care' -the places and spaces where we find care to enable us to keep caring. Emer questions why we are so quiet about care in our practice, asking why we are not making it more visible. Claire raises the idea of the 'tough care' that our students sometimes need. Eamonn espouses tough care too but will always 'err' on the side of care. For Eamonn, care is inseparable from education: inspired perhaps by the etymological roots of Educare – meaning to care *and* to educate (Lynch *et al.*, 2015).

Claire told me previously;

> **Claire:** *We're all unique. We're not all the same. So, everybody's doing it differently. I'm not the same as you and I don't teach the same way as you and you don't teach the same way as somebody else.*

Everyone enacts and embodies care differently. Last year Claire questioned whether we need to care on an emotional level or a cognitive level?

> **Claire:** *Where does it come from? Does it come from a heart space or a headspace? Does it come from (for me) a logical thing or does it come from a heart place where I actually fundamentally care about the students as people?*

My understanding of care emanates from what I have learned from everyone, over the inquiry, but also over a long career working alongside these caring educators. I also draw on the scholarly community of care theorists to scaffold my understanding. So, eighteen months later, I would now answer Claire by saying;

> **CA:** *For me, care requires an emotional engagement. It can be understood as a cognitive process too, we need to be able to conceptualise and be responsive to care needs. But it surely must be embodied and enacted from an affective space and from a deep understanding of the profound*

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interdependency of human beings. It is a way of being and also a way of being-in-relation. It cannot be a purely cognitive process; we must be somehow moved emotionally by our connections and our need for care.

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fischer (1990, p. 40) tell us that caring is "a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible". So, to borrow and extend their definition to higher education, care is everything that is done from the institutional level to the individual level to create a climate of learning so that staff and students can flourish. I now conceptualise care as an ethos, a practice, and a pedagogy. Care as an ethos is ontological, recognising the fundamental interdependence of human beings (and non-humans). It recognises the epistemic role of emotion in teaching and learning and as part of our integrated being in the world.

A care-centred pedagogy is a relational practice, with mutual trust and respect at its core, whereby we are present to our students, both emotionally and cognitively, responding competently to their learning needs. A care-centred pedagogy is a set of values and practices which places human relationality at the core of teaching. It is also a commitment to a socially just and inclusive learning experience for all of our students.

Care is a collective, communal practice. Parker Palmer tells us that community is "an *ontological reality*, an *epistemological necessity*, a *pedagogical asset*, and an *ethical corrective*" (2010, p. 25) [emphasis in original]. This team embraces an ontology of care and interdependence, an epistemology that gives primacy to the relational, and ways of working based on an ethic of care. The climate of care we experienced as part of this team and the felt sense of connection to the 'Ballylacken energy', is what enabled us to continue practising a care-centred pedagogy. Care conceived as a set of practices, an ethic, and a pedagogy, allows us to collectively offer an alternative to the neoliberal narratives prevalent in our third-level institutes.

Harriet Hawkins (2019, p. 817) describes her role in higher education as "creating and holding the spaces, atmospheres, and practices for caring for students and colleagues", essentially creating a climate of care. I like this idea of 'holding' space for care. We are holding this care-full space at a time when our students need even more care, as recent

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research from the Economic and Social Research Institute attests. This report highlights the significant deterioration in young people's mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic (Smyth and Nolan, *2022*).

I agree with Harriet Hawkins (2019, p. 831) that to care is to create and hold "spaces, practices and communities of hope". This group of educators held the space for care. Care, as Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 13) suggest, can offer "a roadmap to an otherwise". I hope that this chapter offers a roadmap to a more caring university. As Nora outlines;

> *Nora: I have individual care with my students, but then we have course care, each year care, and we have the care of the staff and the care of each of the departments and the team. And all of that needs to filter the whole way down to create a holistic containment; organizational containments … That idea of the importance of holistic containment; creating that holding atmosphere.*

We need to have not just micro-climates of care in our universities, but whole ecosystems of care.

In this chapter, I have shared the resonant threads, the "echoes that reverberated across" our inquiry (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). Drawing on Clare Mariskind's (2014) work I discussed pastoral and pedagogic care, suggesting that this binary is not useful when understanding our students' experience in higher education. I have shared my understanding of care as an ontological commitment, one that is core to higher education pedagogy. I have theorised and conceptualised presence as the cornerstone of a care-centred pedagogy. Chapter 8 moves forward with this inquiry to revisit the original motivations for this study.

What is it To Care?

As I am composing this chapter Pat sends me this poem. I email to ask if I can share his poem in my thesis- he replies that this is *our* poem; drawing from our discussions, Pat has curated the care that we express and embody in our practice.

What it is to Care

So,
what is it to care?
Is it a thing?
A feeling,
Or a way of being?
Where does it begin?
In the hand, the head, or the heart?
What sets carers apart?
Meekness?
Perhaps weakness.
Or a willingness to seek the good in people.
To speak as people should
To difference and to power.
Not to hesitate,
For an instant,
At the smell of human shit.
Nor blink,
When another person
Swings to hit you
Just because you are there.
You care,
When you take the time to listen,
To consider
And to share
Their stories told.
Or to hold them in your heart.
You care
When you fight
For someone else's rights.
And that is rare.
And that is precious.

(Pat, 2021*)*

Chapter 8: How This Story Ends

For One Who Is Exhausted, a Blessing
Be excessively gentle with yourself…
Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

(O'Donoghue, 2008)

Introduction

This inquiry invited the reader to 'wonder' alongside myself and my colleagues as we enacted care in a higher education institution in Ireland over a period of two years. I hope to have created a research text which allowed you "to engage in resonant remembering" as you place your experiences alongside the inquiry experiences (Clandinin, 2013, pp. 50-51). I began with a feeling of exhaustion. I stop off here, as I contemplate what my next semester in Ballylacken will feel like. I am only teaching two modules in Ballylacken, the remainder is on the Central Institute campus.

When we commenced this inquiry, the office was packed, housing 10 colleagues, who worked and cared together. As part of the original restructuring in 2021, Emer moved department. Last January, Pat moved to another faculty located on a different campus. Leo retired. Eamonn moved into another faculty. Deirdre has been seconded to work in an external agency next semester. Claire is not teaching in our department in the upcoming semester. Neither Yvonne nor Nora will be in the Ballylacken office regularly, as the majority of their classes are on the Central Institute campus. After over 21 years with the institute, Helen resigned. I do not have to worry about the "Hollywood effect" of manufacturing happy endings in research (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000, p. 181). This is no happy ending. The Ballylacken team no longer exists.

Our inquiry took place in an interregnum; in that space whilst we were still an Institute of Technology, but with the new Technological University on our horizon. We could see what was before, and what is coming into view. Last year, Claire and I discussed our impending designation as a Technological University. Each institutional change to date

has changed her identity as an educator; she asserts that "you become a different person" for each different organisation. Gloria Dall'Alba (2012, p. 120) suggests that academics should focus on "how we are to be" in the University. How will I be when I return to a permanently changed office in September?

A narrative text is "about what has been, what is now and what is becoming" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 146). In this chapter, I trace my journey from exhaustion to hope, as I navigate the changes that happened to this team over the course of our inquiry. I aim to distil what I have learned and what I might offer to lecturers who wish to reflect on their practice as careful educators. This inquiry offers a cautionary tale to institutions; that care is fragile and can be easily lost, if not valued and recognised as an essential element of third-level education.

'The Politics of Exhaustion'

I came to inquire because I worried that I was becoming a less caring educator. I imagined that hearing about the experiences of my colleagues would help energise me. In articulating and better understanding care I hoped that I could sustain my care-centred practice. As I come to write this final chapter, I spend some time visiting my research journals. I find a piece I wrote as I was re-storying my initial inquiry conversations.

> *I am thinking too about the burnt-out colleague that both Yvonne and*
> *Claire allude to in our research conversation. I wonder if I will become*
> *that person too, detached, and demoralised. I remark to Claire in our*
> *conversation; "I don't want to be that person giving out in the corner."*
> *When I think about 'that person' now I am struck that they are usually*
> *railing against issues, but at least they remain passionate about something.*
> *I feel my passion ebbing away, I am retreating towards silence and passive*
> *acceptance. It takes tremendous energy to continuously care about*
> *something. The opposite of care is indifference.*
>
> [Field Text: Research Journal, February 2021]

I came to this inquiry topic because I was tired – as Mountz *et al.* (2015, p. 1245) write, "the effects of the neoliberal university are written on the body". I longed for respite, seeking an imaginary space where I did not have to care, just for a while. I now see that wanting to 'check out', to disconnect, is a symptom of the carelessness of our educational institutions. Although I did not understand this before I began my studies, the broader corporatisation of higher education is fundamentally challenging my pedagogical values. The underlying discourse of neoliberalism (and attendant practices) has caused me huge anxiety during the period of this inquiry (Hodgins and Mannix McNamara, 2021; Ward, 2021).

As I look back over the conversations for this inquiry, alongside my journal and field notes, I can see my distress brewing across the pages of our encounters. The battles of last year with management over module allocation have decimated my sense of agency, leading to a feeling of disempowerment and at times, despair. My journal extracts capture a desire to maintain optimism about my work, whilst acknowledging the erosion of my reservoirs of care. In my practice, care is finite, if it is not replenished or reciprocated.

I feel now that sometimes it is an act of self-care to withdraw/disconnect. Claire, in our conversation last year, discussed an example from social care, recounting an anecdote from her students, whereby they care until 5 o'clock and then go home, echoing what is recognised as an essential prerequisite for survival in the caring professions (Josselson, 1996). Maybe this version of care is more sustainable. Sometimes we have to 'clock out' so that we do not 'burn out'. I need to care for myself to care about my students. Nora reminds me that we must model 'good care' for our students, a care that has boundaries. I agree with Engster (2007) who writes;

> *A person who does not care adequately for himself or herself may*
> *eventually be unable or unwilling to care for others.*
>
> (Engster, 2007, p. 56)

Perhaps then, it is an act of self-care to sometimes care a little less in the careless academy.

Sara Ahmed (2017) tells us that we often only realise that we are worn down retrospectively;

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It might be that in order to inhabit certain spaces we have to block
recognition of just how wearing they are: when the feeling catches us, it
might be at the point when it is just "too much". You are shattered.

<div align="right">(Ahmed, 2017, p. 164)</div>

At times during this inquiry, I have felt worn down, depleted, exhausted, shattered. Initially, I did not want to write about this. It felt like something that I could not openly acknowledge. Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 164) writes that there is "a politics to exhaustion", it can signal the institutional forces we are up against. As Ahmed (2021) documents, what leads to dissatisfaction or complaint in the first place is draining and then actually complaining is exhausting too. Fundamentally, Ahmed (2021) argues, institutions work to protect themselves, which does not always mean caring for individuals within that organisation. I felt my exhaustion was a personal failure, not a systemic issue.

Hawkins (2019) conceptualises the work of care in higher education as holding the spaces and practices of care for our students and our colleagues. This care work "requires energy and investment" and, she tells us, to invest is to be "worn down" (Hawkins, 2019, p. 823-824). For Hawkins (2019), and for me, this type of care work often leaves us exhausted and demoralised. Like Hawkins, I cannot *not* care, but at times during this inquiry, I wondered if I have the energy to keep caring about my institution and trying to advocate for the space to care.

Caring With

I am surprised that once I began to acknowledge just how tired I was, I had more energy. As one of the interviewee's in Sara Ahmed's book Complaint! (2021) contends, "being able to name what is happening to you is very powerful". I realise that, as Ahmed (2017) suggests, we can feel less depleted, and more energised, when we share these feelings with others. Ahmed (2017) describes the energising experience of working *on* the institutions we work *in*. Mountz *et al.* (2015, p. 1249) are interested in how to develop structural resistance to neoliberalism, contending that: "collaborative, collective models of community and solidarity work can resist neoliberal regimes and their framings of our daily lives".

I now see that we need to speak as caring and careful subjects against the neoliberalised carelessness of higher education (Motta and Bennett, 2018, p. 644). In June, Helen shared the image as we sat in the circle together; we are a circle but each of us is facing outwards now. Although we are no longer working together, the care that we shared is portable, it is not rooted just in the Ballylacken office. We share friendships and collegial relationships with those who are still working in the institute. And these relationships can continue to nourish and sustain a care-centred practice.

The neoliberal version of self-care positions it as an individualised, self-oriented activity. We are encouraged to do yoga, a mindfulness course, get a massage. Preferably spend money or consume more, to feel better. We are not encouraged to critically question the forces that are draining and depleting us. Mountz *et al.* (2015, p. 1251) argue, we need to take care of ourselves; "*But we must take care of others*" (emphasis in original).

Joan Tronto (1994, 2013) suggests that we must view care as a collective responsibility. Instead of individual caring teachers, we see ourselves as embedded in, and responsible to, caring communities or collectives. I understand that the process of self-care must involve our collective care in the academy. Sara Ahmed (2012) conceptualises self-care as the ordinary, mundane work of looking after ourselves *and* each other. This is what I have learned about care from my colleagues. They enacted care as a collective process. This is how I intend to practice self-care too.

Turning to Care

At the start of this story, I wrote about wanting to find allies, those who work from similar values and who might question the power and reach of neoliberal thinking. Hegemony, according to Gramsci can be understood as either 'common sense' or the dominant way of thinking in a particular time and place. But Raymond Williams (1977) argues that dominant ways of thinking are not absolute; there is always an inner dynamic by means of which new formations of thought emerge. 'Structure of feeling' refers to the different ways of thinking vying to emerge at any particular time. Williams contends that residual cultures are "still active in the cultural process" (1977, p. 122).

Fergal Finnegan (2019) suggests building alliances and dialogue between groups who draw from this residual culture. There is a lot of refusal of dominant narratives – on an individual level by lecturers in their classrooms but also by various 'movements' if we could call them that. There is momentum building. I need to find care allies and build collegial alliances with those in my university and beyond who champion care. In this way, I might also keep my care reservoirs replenished.

Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 1) declared optimistically that "care has reentered the zeitgeist". Perhaps there is evidence of a 'care turn' in academia, as the academy has begun to take care seriously in terms of theorising, generating knowledge about and generally taking more care of care. Care ethic theorists are expanding research on relational pedagogies and the role of care in higher education (Gravett *et al.*, 2021; Rodgers, 2020; Walker and Gleaves, 2016). Care about our students and for one another is being articulated and lauded (Barnacle and Dall'Alba, 2017; Bovill, 2020; Burke and Larmar, 2020; Felten and Lambert, 2020; Hawkins, 2019; Kinchin, 2020).

Alison Black and Rachael Dwyer's (2021) publication, *Reimagining the Academy*, seeks to reposition care as central to academic life. Recent publications such as *Researching with Care: Applying Feminist Care Ethics to Research Practice* (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022) foreground an ethic of care in our research practices. We need more research models that are rooted in the concept of care (Denzin and Lincoln, 2001). All of this research and scholarship is recentring care as an essential aspect of our teaching and learning processes and our universities.

Collectives like CareVisions (2020), a multi-disciplinary research group, and the Care Collective (2017) are researching and writing about care from different perspectives. The Care Collective published *The Care Manifesto* (2021) suggesting that care should be at the heart of everything, all our societal institutions, contending that care is fundamental to the flourishing of all human and non-human life.

The Covid-19 pandemic also amplified the centrality of care in a profound way (Lynch, 2022; Tronto and Fine, 2022). It offered us the opportunity to expand our care for others and become much more attuned to the emotions and life experiences of our students (Corbera *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic emphasized the reality of our students' lives –

moving online for classes meant that we could see their kitchens, their bedrooms, their siblings, their parents, their pets, their humanness. They are not just brains to be filled, but people with complex lives embedded in relationships. The public and private collided and awoke academia to the lived experience of our students.

Gray (2022) tells us that there is space for care everywhere in our higher education institutions: in our pedagogies, in supervision relationships, in student services, in formal and informal pastoral care, and in staff support. We need to develop a shared language around care. That is what I would hope to suggest to anyone reading this work – speak up for care, make it visible, and give it the privilege it deserves in our universities. It is very significant that Eamonn's work on a 'Pedagogy of Care' now features as one of the Pillars of Teaching and Learning for our new Technological University. Our team also published a collaborative piece on enacting a pedagogy of care during the Covid-19 pandemic. At an exam board for another university, in my role as an external examiner, I noted how the academic staff discussed individual students and their particular circumstances. I recognised and documented this 'ethic of care' in my official report to the University. Amplifying care like this is a crucial aspect of reclaiming the language of care and putting it on the agenda in our universities. Making care visible might make it more difficult to dismantle the climates of care or the "pockets of care" as Nora termed it, in our institutions.

The decimation of the Ballylacken team tells its own story. Care and collegiality are not valued, and are perhaps even disrespected, by our institutions. And it is relatively easy to dismantle a caring community. If I could rewind time, I would be more vocal about our 'climate of care' and care-centred pedagogy in the official fora of our university. I would have made it more visible so that it could not have so easily been destroyed. I can vividly recall what Nora said at our gathering, when our values are at odds with management or our organisation, we either let our values go, or we go. As Sara Ahmed writes: "The knowledge we acquire from being in a situation can sometimes require that we leave a situation" (2021, p. 7). Unfortunately, some of my participants have left our department and some have left the institute too.

To Care

Reclaiming the concept of care in higher education offers a significant alternative to the neoliberal Institution. Deirdre tells me;

> **Deirdre:** *Really the work you're doing is so important. Recording everything that was done, as you say, as against all the other practices and thinking.*

This inquiry points to shifted institutional and pedagogic narratives and gives voice to care conceptualised as a core pedagogic practice. Our team represented an alternative ontology: that care, and connection, are essential elements in our learning relationships and educational encounters (Grummell, 2017) and that we are emotional as well as rational beings (Tronto, 2015). There is a different worldview – where care is central, where people are not just economic actors, but "*homines curans*/caring people" (Tronto, *2017*, p. 39).

We also need to recognise the ability to care about what matters, as a mark of personhood (Dall'Alba, 2012; Noddings, 2005). As well as developing our student's ability to be rational and independent, we should also be teaching them about their interdependence, and develop their "responsive attunement" to the world (Dall'Alba, 2009, p. 68). This echoes Gert Biesta's (2015) ideas;

> *Knowing then is not an act of mastery or control … but can perhaps better be described as a process of listening to the world, of having a concern for the world, of caring for the world.*
>
> (Biesta, 2015, p. 239)

Noddings (2005, p. 19) too argues for an education that develops the capacity to care. Knowing as a process of awakening our caring responsibilities is a very different view of epistemology than the prevalent view in our higher education institutes. I have begun to understand that care conceptualised in this way connects us to the deeper ontological purpose of our care (Noddings, 2012b). Care is a way of being (with ourselves) and a way of being-with-in-relation (with our colleagues and our students).

Last year, Leo declared that "for me, the classroom is where my heart actually is". His passionate assertion captures something profound. This is very different to the dominant Cartesian view of higher education. Leo's philosophy might be strongly contested by those who view education as capable of measurement and standardisation. It centres care and relationality at the heart of pedagogic encounters. It recognises our profound interdependence and communality (Palmer, 2010, p. 27).

As Tronto (2017, p. 27) states, "care stands as a major alternative way to the neoliberal paradigm". Our values and commitments allow us to "escape, circumvent and tactically adapt" the dominant logic (Finnegan, 2019, p. 155). Care conceived as a set of practices, an ethic, and a pedagogy, allows us to collectively offer an alternative to the dominant narratives prevalent in our third-level institutes.

Hope is a Resource of Care

The contemporary university, Henry Giroux declares, is "a space devoid of hope" (2015, p. 20). Sometimes, institutional structures and dominant discourses can feel like immovable forces. This can lead to an immobilising sense of hopelessness. I smiled wryly when I read Malcolm Tight's (2019, p. 280) discussion on whether academics should despair or attempt to resist neoliberalism. Despair or moaning, he writes, will not achieve anything except perhaps irritate our colleagues and students! I remember my conversation with Yvonne when I referred to team meetings where I was angry and frustrated. It feels much more productive to begin to understand larger forces at play and perhaps how and where I can subvert these discourses. When we understand our values, pedagogy, and way of being as acts of refusal, this gives a sense of agency and diminishes the feeling of impotence.

We can also avoid inertia by focusing on and maintaining hope. I am heartened by Áine Mahon's (2022) assertion that by maintaining hope we can foreground our values and solidarities in the university. Hope is an act of resistance, which we can view as an "everyday resistance to everyday power" (Ball, 2013, p. 148). Hope makes me think that I can keep on doing this. I can continue to care. Hope is a resource of care. Raymond

Williams (1989) suggests that we need to make hope possible. The stories of care contained in this inquiry make hope possible.

Michael D. Higgins, the President of Ireland, during a speech in 2021, argued that we are now at "a perilous juncture in the long history of the academy". President Higgins (2021) calls on universities to;

> *reclaim and re-energise academia for the pursuit of real knowledge [...]*
> *and the enrichment of society.*
>
> (Higgins, 2021)

According to Higgins (2021) the role of the academic is to actively disturb the status quo and to critique the dominating ethos of its institutions. I feel it is also our role to be more explicit about care, and also to adopt a more critical stance towards care. Positioning care as central to our work in university, would privilege care, in the same way, that Cartesian rationality has historically been privileged in academia. Care needs to count more in our universities (Hawkins, 2019). We need to become care ambassadors or "care advocates" in our universities (Mariskind, 2014, p. 313). If academics do not speak up for care, who will?

Changed Practice

As I reach the end of this dissertation, I am reflecting on how my practice has changed. At times during this inquiry, I questioned whether I could even call myself a caring educator. I compared myself to Nora, who hugs profusely and radiates warmth. I am not caring in that sense. I have a different understanding now about how I enact care in my teaching. In the research carried out by Anderson *et al.* (2019) higher education students describe caring teachers as attentive, open, aware of students' lives and other commitments, responsive to students' learning needs and invested in students' well-being and learning. I think this describes me (on a good day). But it is not the warm and affectionate type of care that some of my colleagues embody. Care is a multifaceted construct, each one of us enacts and embodies it differently: with "individual caring teachers constructing a complex web of intention and actions" (Walker and Gleaves, 2016, p. 66).

Motta and Bennett (2018) contend that there is not one approach to care or the ideal caring teacher. Furthermore, Nel Noddings (2012a) writes that what constitutes or is received as care differs, depending on who we are, and where we are in the world. As Clare Mariskind (2014) notes, care is culturally constructed; how it is enacted will depend on what is meant by care and how it is valued, and also on who does the caring. I understand now that how I *do* care, depends on the institution I work in, along with my experience and formation in this team (Dowie-Chin and Schroeder, 2020). And each one of us on this team cares in their own unique way.

I have also become aware of the pedagogical power of presence in my teaching. I conceptualise presence as an ontological orientation; viewing it as a way of living out a care-centred pedagogy. Presence, and care, are ways of being with our students and colleagues. I am bringing a more embodied, sensitive attuning to the context of and process of my students' learning. I have become much more present to my whole self, to the affective as well as cognitive aspects in my research. I am beginning to value the place of emotions in my own learning journey.

Talking about his teaching, Leo tells me;

> **Leo:** *I have to feel it. I have to believe it. It has to come from in here [pointing to the heart space]. It's not good enough just to come from up there [pointing to the head].*

Parker Palmer (2010) suggests that the heart is;

> *the core place in the human self where all our capacities converge: intellect, senses, emotions, imagination, intuition, will, spirit, and soul.*
>
> (Palmer, 2010, p. 20)

Centring care in our teaching is about integrating all the aspects of ourselves; it offers the possibility of a truly humanizing pedagogy, as Freire (1970) describes.

I have renewed energy to 'hold care'. I have the language and theoretical understanding to support this commitment. I am clearer on why I care. If we want to foster a 'care orientation' in our students, as Maeve O'Brien (2014) contends, we must explicitly articulate a care frame as central to our programmes and the student experience in university. I care because I wish to give our students an experience that I hope they will replicate in the world, agreeing with Nel Noddings (2005) that our treatment of our students may have a profound influence on how they behave in the world.

When we model care in how we work and interact with our students, we create a climate of care (Noddings, 2012a). Thus, hoping to influence how our students become empathic or caring people. A pedagogy that hopes to shape or form subjectivities calls for connection and relationships with our students. Noddings (1992) states that;

> *we do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating*
> *caring relations with them.*
>
> (Noddings, 1992, p. 228)

I hope too that our students will subsequently adopt a caring attitude in their professional and civic lives (Noddings, 2012 p. 779). A care-centred pedagogy is also a commitment to creating a socially just world, as Maeve O'Brien's (2014) contends, a caring praxis should lead educators and students to work towards a more just world.

I have become much attuned to the concept of creating a 'climate of care' in our university classrooms and lecture halls. Nel Noddings (2012) suggests that this climate must be underneath everything we do as educators. She tells us that when "that climate is established and maintained, everything else goes better" (2012, p. 777). This also creates an inclusive and accepting classroom. We might also view ourselves as "care facilitators" (Mariskind,   2014, p. 312), as we help students form caring relations with each other. This form of community building is a key aspect of creating a climate of care. Many of my participants list specific practices that encourage a climate of care: taking the time to know our students' names, regular check-ins, setting out clear assessments and providing timely feedback. Also, allowing some discretion with coursework submission dates, whilst also providing that 'tough care' or good boundaries to which Eamonn and Claire refer.

I have become an advocate for care, one who can confidently make the case that we need to recentre relationality in our higher education institutions. Although it is generally under-researched, Walker and Gleaves (2016, p. 66) suggest that the limited literature that focuses on care in higher education supports the idea that a relationship-rich pedagogy is critical for student learning. Nel Noddings contends that care is the "bedrock of all successful education" (1992, p. 27). Students will "listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter", (Noddings, 1992, p. 35). Recent research from New Zealand by Anderson *et al.* (2019) confirms this; echoing Noddings (1992) – students reported that they cared more about learning in courses where teachers seemed to care about them. Students in Anderson *et al.*'s (2019) research conceptualised good teachers as those who cared about them, their teaching, and their discipline. Research from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (2019), drawing on data from over 4,000 higher education students in Ireland, lists caring as a key component of excellent teaching. These reports are making care visible. Disseminating this information is a crucial aspect of highlighting the essential care work of university educators.

I care about my students. I think care needs to be a mutual interaction between educators and students. Noddings contends that "both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of caring" (2012b, p. 772). Noddings (2005) discusses the place of reciprocity in a caring teaching/learning relationship; student acknowledgement is an important aspect of the caring pedagogic encounter. I need to care about my students, but they, in turn, need to care about me and the subject area.

It is difficult to care when my students do not seem to care. Care that is reciprocated in some manner is generative. How do students show they care? This role is "simple and crucial", according to Noddings (2012, p.772). Students show they care in their interpersonal interactions with us, in engaging and asking questions and in pursuing their learning enthusiastically. This captures an ideal day in my classroom. This idea of reciprocity is important, I need to remember to build in time to explain to my students why I care, the hoped-for outcome of that care and my expectation of their engagement with me and my modules.

Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2007) write that we need to examine what, how, and why we are teaching what we are in universities. I know *how* I will be with my students, and I feel that I have returned to my *why,* my values. It is *what* I am teaching and how we are assessing this that is going to be problematic. Understanding education as an ontological endeavour will clash with the more prescriptive learning outcomes, standardised assessments, and encroaching surveillance, now required in my institution. My new awareness will feel disconcerting at times. In some ways, like Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 37) suggests, "when you expose a problem you pose a problem". Now that I am questioning my practice like this, it has become awkward for me to continue to teach as I have been in recent years. Ahmed uses the metaphor of a garment to describe how we become habituated when working in institutions. As I have become aware of the forces that constrict and constrain a care-centred pedagogy, this 'garment' does not fit me anymore. I feel uncomfortable. I cannot go back to a state of unknowing. I do not know how I can become comfortable again in my own institution.

Stepping off

This inquiry followed a small group of educators as we lived and worked on a rural campus in Ballylacken. I cannot make any grand claims on our behalf. Knowledge developed in a Narrative Inquiry "is textured by particularity and incompleteness" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 14). This thesis does not offer ready-made theories or formulas for a care-centred pedagogy. It is less about generalisations and theories, more about wondering and "imagining alternative possibilities" (*ibid,* 1990, p. 14). I hope that this inquiry helps us take more care of care. It has created space "to stop, reflect, reject, resist, subvert", whereby we might hope to "cultivate different, more reflexive academic cultures" (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1249).

The possibility exists that we will find ways to shift the culture towards a more care-full future (Mountz *et al.*, 2015, p. 1253). This research is part of a process of giving voice to caring subjects. My participants refuse the neoliberal exemplar of the competitive, care-free, self-interested academic, and instead value care as a collective process of collegiality and connection. This dissertation is a form of resistance, it is also a form of self-care. Writing about care has been an act of self-care and also collective care, as it sheds a light on the invisible spaces of care in the academy.

A Narrative Inquiry involves coming alongside with wide-awakeness, to our lived experiences and then re-storying these experiences (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). But our story does not end with this inquiry, it is situated in our ongoing stories. The story continues long after the final word in this thesis, through our relationships with each other and what we bring forward as we face outwards on our various trajectories within and outside Ballylacken institute. In relational research, stories are mutually interpreted by research participants, the researcher, and also by the reader of the final research text (Clandinin, 2013). And as Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 51) tell us, "final research texts do not have final answers".

In one sense, the reader will choose how this story ends. I hope that this inquiry might nudge the academy to value care and maybe fight more for care-full spaces in our Institutions. It may prompt us to think about how care can be enacted more in higher education pedagogy. It also suggests that care should form part of the purpose of higher education. Aine Mahon (2022) contends that the university has a unique potential for connection, inspiration and even joy. The university also has great potential to care. Academics have the agency to choose what our institutions look and feel like (Westacott *et al.*, 2021). I feel that we must surely choose to care with each other and care well. Care matters. The alternative spectre of a completely careless institution is indeed a dystopian tale.

Stories and endings are complex and full of tensions (Caine and Estefan, 2011). Lives continue (Clandinin, 2006). Tensions remain. This is a stepping-off place for now. I feel more connected and supported through navigating this inquiry. Colleagues have become friends as I feel the substance of support for me professionally and personally. As quoted at the start of this chapter, John O'Donoghue (2008) counsels us to be excessively gentle with ourselves if we are suffering from exhaustion. "Gradually, you will return to yourself", he consoles us. This inquiry has given me the space to return to myself, to my values, to what brought me to teaching in the first place. I am paying attention to and being more present to, the affective and embodied aspects of my teaching and research. I have renewed energy to advocate for care in our higher education institutions. By amplifying what care can look like in the academy, I hope that I have created more space for care.

Postscript June 2023

A position in the newly established Teaching and Learning centre in Central Institute was advertised in the Spring. Eamonn emailed to nudge me to apply. I was successful and am starting in the new role as the Summer rolls in. So, I too, am leaving the Ballylacken campus. I feel excited and optimistic. This inquiry has filled my care reserves. It has confirmed for me the importance of the support of colleagues in fostering care, particularly when the space for care is being constricted by the systems and structures of the university. Care in higher education is best expressed as a collective and collegial endeavour. I am hopeful that care can indeed survive in the academy. In our inquiry we articulated and amplified the 'pocket of care' that our team had created. In my new position, I can nurture and promote more 'pockets of care' across the university. In this way, we might ensure that care can flourish in higher education.

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Appendix 1: List of Participants

Leo	One of the original members of our team, Leo and I joined Ballylacken at the same time. His whole career has been in education. He plans to retire soon.
Yvonne	The most recent appointment to Ballylacken campus. Yvonne worked as a Social Care professional before moving into higher education.
Deirdre	Joined Ballylacken in 2000, coming from a Community Development background. Deirdre has a strong commitment to social justice and development issues.
Helen	Helen started work in Ballylacken in September 2000. Her interests are in Social Policy and Youth work.
Nora	Nora joined the team in 2019. Her background is in Social Care practice and Social Work.
Claire	Claire joined Ballylacken in 1999, she and Eamonn were the original members of the Institute. Accompanying one more intake of first years will see her to retirement.
Eamonn	Eamonn has spent a long career in education, in secondary and subsequently third level education. He started working in Ballylacken in 1999.
*Emer	Emer worked in Early Education and Care before joining Ballylacken. She does not appear in Chapter 3 or 4, but she was part of many inquiry conversations and features in Chapter 6, in the account of our group gathering.
*Pat	Pat joined Ballylacken in 2000. He has a deep commitment to social justice and praxis. Pat does not appear in Chapter 3 or 4, but he was part of many inquiry conversations and features explicitly in Chapter 6 and 7.

Appendix 2: Policy documents that framed our inquiry landscape

Collins, T., Crowley, U. and Quinlan, K. (2020) *Review of Lecturing in Institutes of Technology/Technological Universities: International Review Module*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

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Appendix 3: Information and Consent Form for Research Participants

The purpose of this study.

I am Catherine-Ann O Connell, a doctoral student in the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for my Doctorate, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. David McCormack. I want to engage in a narrative inquiry with lecturers in higher education who identify with a caring and relational pedagogy. A narrative inquiry is based around a 'wonder' or curiosity. I am curious about our team, how it is we continue to value and teach in a holistic, relational, connected, and caring way with our students. I wish to unpack our teaching philosophy of engaging the 'head, hand, and hearts' of our students. I am hoping that we can 'amplify' a different narrative in higher education that challenges the 'care-less' institution.

What might the study involve?

The study will involve collaborating with me, in our workplace, during work time, commencing in September 2020 and ending in June 2021.

The inquiry process will be collaborative and emergent. I understand narrative inquiry "as a negotiated research practice" (Caine et al. 2013). I want to allow significant room for all of us to decide how we conduct the research. If everyone on the team agrees to participate, then the inquiry can happen as part of our on-going team meetings and processes. If some members on the team choose not to participate, then I will facilitate a process whereby we create a separate process for the participants to meet and discuss the themes of the inquiry.

It will involve at least one individual and one group conversation with me around the theme of care and how you enact and embody care in your work. It may include keeping journals if this emerges and is of interest to you. It may include peer observation – again if that is something that emerges, and you are willing to do.

I think it is important to emphasise that I see this process as collaborative. We will negotiate time commitments and processes at every stage. I will work in a deeply collaborative way, at each step of the process checking back with you to ensure you are still on the journey with me and agree with where we are going. I will negotiate, compose texts, negotiate, and then recompose texts again. At all times my priority is on the relationship between me and you and on this being a generative, collaborative approach to inquiry and to crafting our individual and collective stories together.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University and Limerick Institute of Technology's Research Ethics committees. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part?

Narrative Inquiry is a way of thinking about human experience, inspired by the view in which humans lead storied lives. Narrative inquiry will allow me to reflect and represent our experience as caring educators in HE. I will inquire into how we enact and embody care in our team. I wish to amplify a different narrative in HE, focusing how one can be

a caring educator, working with students to engage their "head, hand and hearts". I hope to explore this aspect of pedagogy in HE. I believe that you might also be interested exploring these themes.

Informed consent

As a narrative inquiry is a fluid and dynamic process, I cannot map out the research design in detail. It is important therefore to be aware of the limits of informed consent at this stage, by this I mean that as I not mapping out every step-in advance it is difficult to fully consent at this stage. Therefore, it is important to know that you are free to withdraw at any time, without explanation from participating.

I will check with you regularly for verbal consent as the inquiry process continues. Should the inquiry deviate substantially from my original Information and Consent forms I will obtain consent again from you. This is a collaborative, iterative process. You will be able to see your transcripts and input on an on-going basis. I will check back with you regularly regarding the inquiry process. I would ask you;

- How does this account compare with your experience?
- Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel is appropriate?
- Do you wish to remove any aspect (s) of your experience from this text?
- Please make any other comments you wish. (McCormack 2000).

I believe that the field text that I will collect will belong to you at every stage. Your rights are pre-eminent in every instance, if you ask to remove or edit information I will do so. However, as I move from field to research text your story becomes a co-constructed text. I believe that a co-constructed text is what emerges from the inquiry process. The final research report is not about you as such but about my own meaning-making. The researcher's self, the participant's self, and the interaction between us is captured and construed in the research text. Everything is mediated through my own subjectivity-whatever narrative emerges is the construction of the interpreter. Josselson argues that "in being written about, one has become an illustrative character in the researcher's text" (2007 p. 551). However, if you have any issue with what is presented in the final report, I will respect that and rescind any information you wish.

Do you have to take part?
No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information at any time up to the research being submitted. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with me.

What information will be collected?

I hope to have at least one individual and one group conversation with you exploring the theme of care. I would like your permission to audio record and take notes during these conversations. I would also like to document our group processes over the academic year. With your on-going permission I will take photographs of any artifacts we create as part of our group rituals. I will check each time I take a photograph that it is acceptable to do so. At any time, you can request that I do not document an issue or a circumstance, for whatever reason you wish.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All data will be kept on the MU server. In line with best practice, hard copies of data including consent forms, will be scanned, and uploaded to MU server and original hard copies destroyed. All electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU server and will be accessed only by Catherine-Ann O'Connell. No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

Please note regarding the limits of confidentiality:

"It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent" (Maynooth University Ethics 2020).

Anonymity

As we work in a small organization and are potentially identifiable to others in our Institution, I will check with you at all stages of the research, until thesis submission, that you are comfortable with what is documented. I will redact any information that you feel personally identifies you or others. I will also pay attention to those who are unwitting characters in the texts. Our institution may be identifiable and therefore we will navigate any critiques that may arise with the sensitivities of the staff involved. In the end if I think it will cause harm, I will not use the material. I am researching care; therefore, I will embody the ethics of care in my inquiry.

I will take all reasonable efforts to protect your anonymity by:
- Personal identifiable data collected be irreversibly anonymised.
- Personal identifiable data be protected through the use of pseudonyms and/or codes.
- The key to pseudonyms and/or codes will be held in a separate location to the raw data.
- All identifiers including keys to link pseudonyms or codes back to individual participants are destroyed.

What will happen to the information which you give?

All data will be kept on the Maynooth University server. In line with best practice, hard copies of data including consent forms, will be scanned, and uploaded to MU server and original hard copies destroyed. All electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU server and will be accessed only by Catherine-Ann O'Connell. On

completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After 10 years, all data will be destroyed by me. Electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten.

What will happen to the material gathered?
The research will be written up and submitted as a Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education to Maynooth University. I also intend to use your data, in an anonymous format, to present at conferences and publish articles based on the inquiry. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?
I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. However, at every point in the process you will have the option to disengage from the inquiry if you wish to. I do not feel that you will be distressed above the normal workplace stresses. You can access the LIT Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) should you need support. All LIT staff can avail of the organization's EAP should you so wish or need to. The EAP is a confidential counselling service available to you 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It provides professional support and information on a wide range of topics. Phone 1800 995 955 or Email eap@vhics.ie.

What if there is a problem?
At the end of our conversations or team meetings/processes I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. De-briefing and checking-in with you will form part of the inquiry process. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr David McCormack, (email address) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries: If you need any further information, you can contact me:
Catherine-Ann O'Connell, (telephone number) (email address)
If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Consent Form

I……………………………………agree to participate in Catherine-Ann O'Connell's research study titled: A care-full year in Academia – conducting a narrative inquiry with Higher Education lecturers as they enact and embody a caring pedagogy.
Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I am participating voluntarily.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I agree to take part in individual conversations with Catherine-Ann around the themes of the inquiry.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I agree to participate in group discussions as part of this inquiry.   ☐

I give permission for my individual and group research conversations, agreed in advance each time, with Catherine-Ann O'Connell, to be audio recorded.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I give permission for CA O'Connell to take photographs, agreed in advance, of artefacts created as part of this process.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

<div align="right">☐</div>

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to submission of the thesis.

☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.

☐

I understand that Catherine-Ann OConnell will preserve my anonymity according to best practice as outlined in the Information sheet.

☐

Catherine-Ann has discussed with me the limits of anonymity.

☐

Catherine-Ann has outlined that she will redact any information/unwitting characters in the text should I so wish.

☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects if I give permission here.

☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in subsequent publications if I give permission here.

☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in conference presentations and proceedings if I give permission here.

□

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my research conversations.

□

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from research conversations.

□

Signed……………………………………. Date……………….

Participant Name in block capitals …………………………………………...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed……………………………………. Date……………….

Researcher Name in block capitals: CATHERINE-ANN O'CONNELL

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth

University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.