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A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS FROM SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Ro Aitken

This thesis is submitted to University College Dublin for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Social Sciences and Law

MAY 2023

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ABSTRACT

The lack of diversity in the teaching population in Ireland is now a focus of national policy initiatives, including widening participation for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Little is known, however, about the experiences of this cohort of students once they access ITE. The aim of this study was to remedy this omission by providing an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of a cohort of 23 students from lower socioeconomic groups across three consecutive years of a PME programme. This was facilitated by a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and a reflexive thematic analysis of 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Three themes were generated from the data analysis: Difference as Deficit; Outsiders on Privileged Territory; and Survival: Hiding and Protecting the Self. The findings suggest that earlier educational inequalities, particularly the hegemony of middle-class norms in education, shaped the educational pathways and fragile learner identities of many of these students, which in turn impacted profoundly on their experiences in ITE. Also revealed was the role that social class played in positioning these students as outsiders culturally and socially both as undergraduates and in ITE, resulting in many students feeling alienated and isolated. Survival in the world of ITE and school placement often meant changing, hiding or disguising who they were in order to become more acceptable in these middle-class worlds, with students favouring school placements along class lines as a form of protection. Success in becoming teachers was seen to come at a cost, with many students now positioned as outsiders at home, caught between two worlds and not belonging fully to either. Meaningful inclusion calls for an understanding of how socioeconomic background is actually lived by students in ITE in the hope that those following in their footsteps can feel the same legitimacy of belonging as their middle-class peers.

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When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

Albert Einstein

Sometimes life provides unexpected opportunities for change and this PhD has been a transformative opportunity for me. None of this could have happened without the support and encouragement of many people. First of all, I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Professor Judith Harford, for her unfailing support and encouragement, for the trust she placed in me, and the freedom she provided to explore this topic. For my wonderful family, Tim, Gillian and Lydia, for walking so much of this road with me and for allowing me the guilt-free space to follow my dream. Thank you also to my loyal group of friends for their thoughtfulness and kindness throughout. I am so grateful to each one of you. Finally, to all of the remarkable 23 students who participated in this study, thank you for allowing me to tell your stories. I hope that I have done them some justice.

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and was not submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree to any other university.

_____

Ro Aitken

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LIST OF ABBRIEVATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NAP	National Access Plan
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate course
PME	Professional Masters in Education
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland

Chapter 1 *Introduction*

1.1 Introduction

Despite a desire for a more diverse teaching population in Ireland, and a focus in recent years on increasing access to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Higher Education Authority, HEA, 2022), there is still 'almost nothing' known, to date, about the experiences of those students from disadvantaged backgrounds who enter ITE (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch, 2018, p.72). This study aims to redress this research gap.

Understanding the lived experiences of this cohort of students is essential if we want to shed light on what it means to be a student in ITE from a non-traditional social background. This study gives voice to the experiences of a cohort of 23 socio-economically disadvantaged students on a post-graduate programme in Initial Teacher Education in Dublin, examining some of the social, cultural, financial, and educational issues that shaped the students' experiences in post-graduate Initial Teacher Education. Chapter One will provide a brief outline of how educational inequality can impact life pathways for students who are from lower economic backgrounds. It also looks briefly at widening participation, social class, and access to higher education for students from this underrepresented group, and the implications for these students in ITE. It concludes with a rationale for the study, an acknowledgement of why this research was undertaken, and the research questions, aims, and objectives.

1.2 Educational Participation and Inequality

The patterns of inequality which manifest in the small number of disadvantaged students who manage to access ITE in Ireland, are many and complex. They are historical, social, educational and familial. They are evident in the differential social, economic, and cultural capitals of families; in parental education; in unequal access to schooling; in the

different participation and attainment levels at primary and post-primary levels; in the daily processes of selections and eliminations present in schools; and at key educational transition points (Clancy and Wall, 2001).

Before accessing ITE, students must first make it as far as higher education. There is a growing recognition among researchers that inequalities in relation to higher education participation do not appear at the point of entry but are apparent much earlier in the life of a young person from a socio-economically disadvantaged background, specifically during the various stages of primary and post-primary education (Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011b). Disadvantage starts early in life. A Report by McKeown, Hasse and Pratschke (2014), shows that children experiencing social and economic disadvantage have significant gaps in their language and cognitive skills by the time they start pre-school. In 2010, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs introduced the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) in Ireland with a view to providing care and education for children prior to starting their primary schooling. The home experience for the three years prior to starting pre-school was shown to be a key predictor of children's skill levels during their time in pre-school. The language and cognitive gaps that McKeown et al. (2014) identified in children coming from more disadvantaged backgrounds remained the same during their Free Pre-School Year, with implications in terms of positive transitions and readiness when starting their formal education. The education system itself has been shown to be one of the 'fundamental mechanisms through which inequalities are perpetuated' (Atkinson, 2015, p. 122). In a world where education has become an important commodity, especially for the middle-classes (Bourdieu, 1996), and where educational credentials are 'competitively acquired positional goods' (Lynch and Crean, 2018, p. 142), the correlation of participation at higher level with particular social groups is not only unjust but has serious implications for individuals' life chances and for society generally (Smyth and McCoy, 2009).

Disparities in higher education participation are evident in the number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, variously classified as 'disadvantaged' or 'working - class', relative to 'middle-class' or 'professional' (McCoy and Byrne, 2011, p. 153), who progress to higher education. Only 3.8% of the students categorised under the 'Unskilled Group' heading, and 0.3% of those termed 'Agricultural Workers' go on to higher education (HE), in comparison to 19% of those students who come from the 'Employers and Managers Group' (Higher Education Authority, HEA, 2018). Only 10% of students in higher education come from disadvantaged areas (HEA, 2022, p. 5). Of the general population, only 10% progress to post-graduate education and an even smaller number of students from educationally disadvantaged groups is successful in making it as far as a Masters in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Widening participation was seen as the solution by many, and is discussed in the next two sections.

1.3 Widening Participation

In the 1960s in the UK, less than 10% of the available age cohort of 18-year olds attended university (Reay, 2002), and most of those students were male, middle-class and white (David, Parry, Crozier, Davis, Ertl et al, 2009). These patterns of participation were reviewed under the chairmanship of Lord Robbins and some of the main recommendations from this UK Higher Education Report (1963) stipulated that university places should be available to anyone who wished to and was qualified to pursue a higher level of education, the Robbins' principle. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, participation rates in the UK had reached 35% (OECD, 2000).

In Ireland, in the latter half of the twentieth century, following the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967, there was a remarkable expansion in education by international standards (OECD, 2013), when numbers entering higher education rose from

about 15,000 in 1980, to 42,000 in 2013 (HEA, 2015, p. 14). However, although the participation rates in higher education had risen from 20% in 1980 to 46% by 1998, it was clear that higher education expansion does not, in itself, reduce social class inequalities (Weis and Dolby, 2012). For two of the eleven social groups, Unskilled Manual and Semi-Skilled Manual Workers, less than 25% of the relevant social population went on to higher education at this time, whereas 75% or over of the relevant population for Farmers, Employers and Managers, went on to higher education (Clancy and Wall, 2001). As was the case in the UK, educational expansion in Irish higher education did not result in the 'reduction of *relative* social class inequalities' that many had hoped for (Lynch and Crean, 2018, p. 141), and many class relativities were still evident from the 1980s to the early 1990s (Byrne and McCoy, 2017; Harford and Fleming, 2018).

Despite the good intentions of the Free Fees Initiative in 1996, which abolished tuition fees for first-time full-time students in higher education who met specific eligibility criteria, the initiative had little impact on the reduction of social class inequalities in higher education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). Research shows that the abolition of fees did not improve the chances of students from low socio-economic backgrounds progressing to university (Denny, 2014). In 2000, an Action Group on Access to Third Level Education was established by the Minister for Education, Michael Woods, with particular focus on the promotion of access to third level by socio-economically disadvantaged students, as well as mature students and students with disabilities. The ensuing report (DES, 2001) highlights the State's commitment to the elimination of educational disadvantage and emphasises the benefits of widening participation, both personal and societal. The Report's definition of access, taken from the European Access Network encompasses 'not only entry to higher education but also retention and successful completion' (p. 14). The Report also draws attention to a key objective of the 1998 Education Act which is to promote not just equality of access and participation in

education, but to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education. The Act defines educational disadvantage as 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'.

1.3.1 Widening Participation and Social Class

Socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, particularly in relation to education, are embedded in social class. Considerable evidence shows that there are many impediments to higher education for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Tomaszewski, Perales and Xiang, 2017; Ianelli, 2011; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Finnegan and Merrill, 2017), and that there is an unequal distribution of educational achievement by social class (OECD, 2013). While there is little agreement on a single definition of social class (Delaney and Brown, 2020), the reality is that those from lower socio-economic groups face more barriers in accessing higher education, socially, economically and culturally, relative to more privileged social groups (Reay, 2017).

The vision of the National Access Plan (NAP) for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-2028 (HEA, 2022) is to ensure that those entering and participating in higher education reflect the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population, and reflects a sector where a student's background does not have a bearing on their 'ability to attend and flourish' (p. 4). In addition to targeting students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the latest NAP has identified specific cohorts of students, including those from disadvantaged areas, who are underrepresented in higher education (ibid.). Formalised widening participation schemes at undergraduate level, such as the HEAR (Higher Education Access Route) scheme for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or the DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) scheme, for students with a disability, aim to achieve more

diversity of access to higher education for these underrepresented groups. The increasing focus on widening participation and diversity at an undergraduate level highlights the strong correlation between social class and participation in higher education, and the underrepresentation of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE.

1.3.2 Widening Participation and Initial Teacher Education

For many years, widening participation in Ireland focused solely on increasing access to higher education at an under-graduate level but not at post-graduate level (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018). This is in contrast to international widening participation policies, which have included post-graduate education for some time, especially in relation to the professions (Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles, 2015). In 2002, research on progression to postgraduate study for students from underrepresented groups was considered to constitute 'a very new and under-explored' area of focus in the Irish context (Keane, 2013, p. 35). In relation to ITE, there was a recognition that, from an equity of access viewpoint, the homogeneity of the teaching profession needed to be addressed. The lack of diversity in the teaching profession in Ireland is significant, with Irish teachers being predominantly white, middle-class, Catholic and female (Heinz and Keane, 2018; O'Donoghue, Harford and O'Doherty, 2017). These demographics are in stark contrast to the diversification witnessed in the Irish school population, with greater diversity evident in Irish schools in comparison to any other country in the EU (Keane, 2013). In 2002, the Advisory Group on Post-primary Teacher Education (DES) recommended that ITE programmes for the National Universities of Ireland (NUI) should 'accommodate a greater diversity of entrants' (p. 16). These recommendations were reflected in similar statements from the Teaching Council (2011a).

Despite the importance of equity of access and the benefits that accrue from having a more diverse teaching population, student teachers from more disadvantaged backgrounds

continue to be ‘underrepresented’ in ITE in the Irish context (Heinz and Keane, 2018, p. 139), and little research has been done in relation to those students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have managed to access ITE programmes, (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch, 2020).The following section looks at some of the ways that students from a socially and economically disadvantaged background may experience higher education as a classed space, with particular implications for ITE.

1.4 Higher Education: A Classed Space

Changes in widening participation and expansion evident in a more diverse tertiary population across Europe have not found the same accommodations in higher education institutions and practices in England and Ireland (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). Higher education remains ‘a contradictory and highly classed space’, where class is central to the identity and experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (ibid. p. 22). Traditionally, universities were not for the working classes (Manstead, 2018) and research continues to suggest that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds post-entry, experience ‘significant socio-cultural disjunction’ (Keane, 2011a, p. 450). In fact, attending higher education is still a ‘risky business’for these students, with many becoming ‘marginalised outsiders within’ (Reay, 2003, p. 320).

Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in university, an environment that represents the epitome of ‘middle-classness’ (Reay, 2001, p.338), can experience their difference as deficits. These students lack the ‘psychological ease’ and self-assurance of the middle-class students (Reay, 1998, p. 523), but are aware of how their lives have been impacted by a lack of economic and cultural resources and by a sense of not fitting in to middle-class spaces (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017).

Academically, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds have already demonstrated resilience and success in attending university, yet almost all of the working-class students attending elite universities in Reay's study (2009) experienced a deep lack of confidence and real anxieties in adapting to middle-class norms and unfamiliar fields in order to achieve academic success. However, academic success can pose as many problems as academic failure, particularly when 'becoming educated' (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p. 320) creates new social and psychological identities (Callender and Dougherty, 2018) that may be rejected by friends, family and community (Reay, 2001; 2005). If success is perceived as removing these students further from their authentic self, this can lead to feelings of ambiguity about their academic achievements and to the students experiencing 'success as failure' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 51).

The socio-cultural disjunction experienced by disadvantaged students in higher level can result in feelings of being 'subserviently positioned' (Keane, 2011, p. 450) in a habitus at odds with their own (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). These students often experience confusion about the kind of self they are looking for once in university (Reay, 2018) and can find it challenging negotiating a balance between their new and old identities and an authentic self (Reay, 2011). Previous experiences of exclusion can mean that working-class students at higher levels of education often self-exclude (Reay, 2018), lowering their expectations and retaining a strong awareness of one's place (Bourdieu,1993). These self-segregating, 'closure' behaviours (Keane, 2011a, p. 462) limit students from developing strong social networks and reveal a self-concept that does not 'fully align' with other college students (Hannon, Faas, and O'Sullivan, 2017, p. 1238).

1.5 Initial Teacher Education and Social Background

The diversification evident in the school-going population in Ireland did not reach as far as the teaching profession (Keane and Heinz, 2015; 2016; Heinz and Keane, 2018). Age and sex have been regularly researched in ITE, but little attention has been paid to other aspects of diversity such as social class or the experiences of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who managed to access ITE (Keane and Heinz, 2015). Consequently, little is known of how social class is understood or enacted in the teaching profession (Keane, 2023), or in the 'daily lives' of teachers (Maguire, 2005b, p. 428). What is known is that there is an under-representation of students from lower socio-economic classes in ITE in the Irish context (Heinz, 2013b). Researching entrants into ITE in 2006, 2013, and 2014, Keane and Heinz (2015) found that the Unskilled group increased from 1.8% in 2006 to 7.5% in 2013 and decreased to 2.2% in 2014. In their study, Keane and Heinz (2015) found that the move to a two year, more expensive ITE programme witnessed a significant decrease in participation rates from the unskilled group from 2013-2014 and an equally significant increase in NUI entrants from Employers and Managers, the highest socio-economic group, for the same period. This would suggest that there was a more negative impact on those students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups in accessing ITE.

Students from underrepresented groups in ITE not only navigate the world of higher education but also the world of teaching. Research in the UK (Maguire, 2005b) suggests that while social class is structural 'it is also struggled over, contested and reconfigured', (Maguire, 2005b, p. 429), and working-class students can experience challenges fitting into the middle-class world of teaching, where they lack confidence and feel inferior, marked or identified by their accents or dress (p. 429). Despite a continued emphasis in the Irish context on facilitating entry into the teaching profession by underrepresented groups (Teaching Council, 2011a), very

little is known about how students from lower socio-economic groups experience ITE and teaching (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018).

The benefits of inclusion in the teaching profession for underrepresented groups are many. Inclusion benefits the individual teachers who have had to navigate their way into the profession, but inclusion also benefits the schools and the pupils (Santoro, 2013). Teachers from lower socio-economic backgrounds are often seen as role-models or 'cultural translators' for other minority groups, both inside and outside the classroom (Villegas and Irvine, 2010). The little research that exists in the area suggests that working-class teachers may have a positive educational impact on pupils from similar backgrounds (Keane and Heinz, 2015), encouraging positive attitudes towards education and learning for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Devine, 2011). Other research has emphasised the more socially just orientated teaching motivation evident in students from lower socio-economic groups (Keane, 2017). However, there have also been caveats about placing a burden on these teachers to be the representatives for 'students like them' (Heinz and Keane, 2018, p.525).

Increasing diversity in the teaching population, particularly the inclusion of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, involves more than the admission of those students into ITE. What is needed is a better understanding of how ITE is experienced by students from of socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and a better understanding of 'how social class is actually lived…of how it informs our inner worlds …and how it shapes our life chances in the outside world' (Reay, 2005, p. 913). We also need to understand what it means to be seen and to have value and worth in the eyes of others (Bourdieu, 1990a; 2000).

1.6 Rationale

The importance of facilitating accessibility to the teaching profession for students from disadvantaged backgrounds has been echoed in much research (Conway, Murphy, Rath, and

Hall, 2009). In 2016, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), established a fund of 2.4 million euro to help bring about diversification in ITE, including increasing access to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (HEA, 2015).

Despite the provision of funding and an emphasis on diversification in ITE, research tells us very little about the actual experiences and perceptions of student teachers from disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE in Ireland once they access teacher education programmes (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018). Consequently, little is understood about the day-to-day lived experiences of these students on a programme such as a Professional Masters in Education (PME), or what may have shaped their experiences, or what may have helped them navigate their way through.

The paucity of research on this subject is a glaring omission. At the core of this study, therefore, is an intention to remedy this imbalance by providing a more fully rounded, in-depth understanding of how ITE is experienced by three different cohorts of students from similarly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and from three consecutive years on a particular PME programme. The study aims to explore some of the contextual influences that shaped the pathway to ITE for these 23 students and which may have impacted on their experiences. Most importantly, this study would like to give voice to those whose voices have previously gone unheard.

1.7 Why choose this area of research

My interest in students and how they experience their social background was influenced by over three decades teaching in a school in a socio-economically disadvantaged area, and almost fifteen years teaching and supporting students in ITE, many of whom come from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds. As a teacher, and a professionally accredited counsellor who worked for many years with people from disadvantaged communities, and as Director of

Student Support on a Professional Masters in Education (PME) programme, I am in a unique position to see the challenges students experience in ITE, and to be able to offer support to those who struggle with any aspect of the programme.

For many of the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds on the PME, problems of 'not fitting in', or of 'not being good enough' (Maguire, 2005a; 2005b), frequently came up in conversation. Lack of self-confidence, socially and academically, was frequently mentioned by the students, both on campus and on their school placements. The challenges that came up for many PME students echoed similar issues that I came across when teaching at second level, where suggestions of progression to higher education were often met with a list of obstacles and barriers, at the core of which was a belief that higher education was not for people like them (Reay, 2017).

Education matters because not being educated matters. This was very evident for many of the pupils and their families in the school in which I taught. I understood some of the barriers that these children had to overcome if they wanted to go to higher education, and witnessed how many filtered their life experience and opportunities through the limiting lens of their social backgrounds (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). I could see, at first hand, the unfairness and inequality of social class (Savage, 2015), mirrored in the inequalities of the education system (Atkinson, 2015). The ranking and assessing of these children in school meant that many experienced their education as being more about failure than success (Reay, 2011). But not all failed.

Those students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who make it to ITE are, by definition, successful academically. Yet, universities remain highly stratified places (Callender and Dougherty, 2018), and social class can impact on the experiences of students in higher education, on 'who they are and how they see themselves' (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p. 321). The focus of this research is on understanding the real experiences of a particular

cohort of socio-economically disadvantaged students on a post-graduate programme in ITE in Dublin. Do they, as Reay (2005) contends, feel out of place with their family, friends and community, experiencing issues of belonging *vis a vis* their new identities? What role, if any, did their backgrounds play on their pathway to ITE, and while participating on the programme? Were there emotional and psychic costs? Did the students feel that they belonged and fitted in, given how important this is for students from a disadvantaged background whose prior experiences in education may not have been positive (Reay, 2017)? Or perhaps this cohort of students experienced none of these challenges and their background played little or no part in how they experienced being a student in ITE. The fact is that we know virtually nothing about the real experiences of these students in ITE and it is important that this lack of knowledge is addressed.

Positionality as it relates to ethics is discussed in chapter 4 on methodology. The approach deemed best for understanding the students' experiences of ITE is discussed in the next section, along with the aims, objectives and research questions underpinning the research.

1.8 Research Questions and Approach

The methodological starting point for this study is guided by both the research questions and the philosophical perspectives from which the questions are to be explored. The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of ITE for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including what shaped their experiences, and what helped the students navigate their way through. Phenomenology was chosen as the most appropriate means though which an 'authentic understanding' of human experiences can be discovered (Usher and Jackson, 2014, p. 194). Creating meaning, together with a depth of understanding of these lived experiences, is facilitated by hermeneutics, a qualitative research method with

its own history and philosophical orientation, defined as the 'art of interpretation' (Kakkori, 2009, p. 22).

The first two research questions are:

1. To understand the phenomenon of Initial Teacher Education for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. To explore how the students navigated their experiences of ITE.

Acknowledging the impossibility of separating individuals from the world in which they live (Heidegger, 1927/1996) provided a third research question which helps contextualise the first two questions:

3. What prior educational experiences helped shape the students' experiences in ITE?

The objectives of the study are to gain valuable insights into the impact of social background on the lived experiences of students from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds in initial teacher education; to explore some of the social and educational obstacles and inequalities the students may have experienced on their pathway to ITE; and to gain an understanding of the impact of these experiences on the students. The thesis structure now follows.

1.9 Structure of Thesis

Chapter One provides a broad overview of the rationale for this research, including the context, the methodological approach, the aims, the objectives, and the research questions. Chapter Two explores some of the social and educational issues relating to social background that contextualise the experiences of students from socio-economically disadvantaged

backgrounds in ITE, including key aspects of their schooling, social class, and inequality. Chapter Three looks at similar themes in higher education and Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Chapter Four provides an historical overview of the study's methodology, locating hermeneutic phenomenology within its interpretive paradigm, and considers the practical methodological concerns of participant recruitment and selection, data generation and analysis. Also included are the ethical considerations, which form the foundation of all good research. Chapters Five, Six and Seven, present the findings of the study, a discussion of these findings and a conclusion, reflecting on any understandings that are generated through the research.

The central aim of this study is to provide insights into the ontological question of what it is like to be a student from a disadvantaged background on a post-graduate programme in ITE. This study has the potential to contribute, not only to the limited amount of research and scholarship that is available in this area, but to make a positive contribution towards understanding the lived experiences of these students in ITE, and the aspects of educational inequality that contextualise their experiences. It is also hoped that this study can provide some insight into how these students can be supported in ITE, with implications for student success and retention in teacher education, and a focus on encouraging others from similar backgrounds to join the profession. This study may also help in informing ITE policy, improving processes and creating a basis for further research.

1.10 Conclusion

This study is motivated by both a personal and a professional interest in understanding the lived experiences of ITE for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It explores the impact and influence of social background and educational pathways on the students' experiences in ITE, and how these experiences are managed.

The phenomenological lens used in this study offers an opportunity to understand these experiences, while a hermeneutic approach facilitates an interpretation of these experiences. I believe that this research can contribute to the understanding of all educators who work with these students by providing valuable insights into their real-life experiences and what it means to be a student teacher from an under-represented social background in ITE.

Chapter Two explores the issue of educational inequality, social class, and schooling.

Chapter 2 *Inequalities in Education: Social Class and Schooling*

2.1 Introduction

The central aim of this research is to understand the lived experiences of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), about whom there is little known to date (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018). The experiences of this group of students are best understood if looked at in the context of the odds against them ever reaching this educational level in the first place. Inequalities manifest across all levels of the education system (Smyth, 2018; Savage, 2015), but are most pronounced in the significant under-representation of lower socio-economic groups in higher level education (HEA, 2015) and ITE (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018). Entry into ITE is the final step in a much longer educational pathway, and any understanding of the experiences of these students in ITE needs to address the constraints and barriers for individuals from under-represented groups at all stages of this journey (Heinz and Keane, 2018), including primary, post-primary and higher education. An understanding of the experiences of students in ITE, therefore, calls for an explication of some of the issues that may have shaped and influenced their experiences on their educational journey into the teaching profession.

This chapter explores some of the practices and processes that underpin educational inequality. At the core of this inequality is a complex web of social, cultural, and economic disadvantage which manifest eventually as 'barriers to equal access and participation' in higher education (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998, p. 473). The chapter starts with a brief overview of the importance of education, followed by an analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's theories in relation to class and education. The chapter then looks at social class, before moving on to the central

discussion of the inequalities in operation at primary and post-primary education. Chapter Three explores similar themes in higher education and Initial Teacher Education.

2.2 Why Education Matters

Education is perceived as a social good and it is therefore desirable that there should be equality 'of access, participation and outcome within it' (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998, p. 454). A concern with the issue of access to higher education for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is justified because equity and fairness matter, and because the alternative, a lack of higher education for these students, really matters.

Being deprived of education is not only a personal and social loss but a negation of a fundamental human right (Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). In recent years, education has gained importance as a key player in both economic growth and social advancement (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). Education is of value, not only in its own right, but as a 'strong predictor of adult life chances' (Smyth and McCoy, 2009, p. 2). Inequalities in educational outcomes for young people from working-class backgrounds manifest across a multitude of areas including lower literacy and numeracy scores; lower exam grades in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations; and early school leaving (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). The Leaving Certificate examination has now become the minimum qualification needed for entry to many higher education courses (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). The lack of educational qualifications, viewed as valued credentials (Clancy, 1999), have a significant impact on individuals' employment opportunities, their financial standing, and even their health (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Having an education allows individuals to develop competencies and capabilities that help mitigate against other social, cultural and economic disadvantages. Education also allows individuals to exercise choices and to realise other rights, including economic, social and cultural participation (Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

Understanding the experiences of an under-represented socio-economic group in ITE necessitates some understanding of the conditions that led to this group being so much smaller relative to other social groups in higher education and in ITE, as well as understanding why those who do succeed in accessing higher education 'face difficulties in participating equally with others' (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998, p. 451). According to Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), there are three major constraints within the educational system that impact on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in particular, which they identify as economic, institutional and cultural. They maintain that economic constraints, although separate from education in terms of original source, impact directly on individuals' educational decisions; that institutional constraints arise from the way that schooling and the education system itself are organised; and that cultural constraints come about from the conflict between the students' own cultural practices and the cultural practices of the schools as social institutions.

The complex ways that social class, education and inequality intersect are explored in the following sections, starting with a discussion of social class and following with a more detailed exploration of schooling and higher- level education.

2.3 Social Class

2.3.1 Introduction

The subject of social class is highly contestable and open to a variety of interpretations. Although discourse on social class had waned by the end of the twentieth century (Weis and Dolby, 2012), a renewed interest in the meaning, relevance and scholarship of social class is evident in this century (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017; Savage, 2016; Smyth, 2018). It would appear that not only is social class still shaping and influencing individual outcomes (Olmeda and Cruz, 2012) but the gaps between social classes are becoming wider, not narrower (Manstead, 2018). Although socially constructed, social class has the power to organise the

social, cultural and material world in extremely powerful ways (Weis, 2008). Different interpretations and understandings of social class terminology adds to the complexity of arriving at any uniform definition of social class.

2.3.2 Defining and Categorising Social Class

Defining social class is 'fraught with difficulties' (Drudy, 1991, p. 21). Atkinson (2015) states that the word 'class' (from Latin, meaning a 'summoning') was first coined in the sixth century BC and originally served the purpose of categorising the Roman population as a means of determining voting rights. However, according to Atkinson (2015), it was the ancient Greeks who placed an emphasis on ranking people hierarchically, often in terms of honours conferred, or lineage. Atkinson goes on to contend that the old hierarchies and the power to rule have now been replaced by a 'state elite' (p. 8), whose levels of education and training legitimises their power (Bourdieu, 2004). Regardless of how political and economic developments may have reconfigured the traditional class system, inequalities still persist (Savage, Devine, Cunningham, Taylor, Li, Hjellbrekke and Miles, 2013).

Different perspectives on class yield different interpretations of what constitutes class. When viewed from a social justice perspective, class is seen as a socially constructed categorisation of different social groups, where exclusion or privilege is predicated solely on social group and where there is 'almost always a history of injustice' (Adams and Bell, p. 108). Manstead (2018), however, maintains that the key components of social class relate to the inequality of wealth and ownership distribution. In the UK, for example, Manstead (ibid.) reveals that the top one-fifth of households own 40% of the national income, with the bottom one fifth having just 8%.

Thompson (2019) also includes wealth and income in his analysis of social class, but puts forward the idea of class as an amalgam of education, language and consumption, which

includes where we were educated, how we dress, speak and enjoy ourselves; all of which act as signifiers to others about our background of origin. This perspective on social class echoes that of Bourdieu (1984) who acknowledges the important roles that wealth, power, and income play in social class, and the various systemic inequalities and injustices that underpin class, but emphasises the critical importance of the cultural, social and symbolic dimensions of class domination.

2.3.3 Terminology

Irrespective of class interpretation, the reality is that contemporary approaches to the classification and categorisation of class are complex (Thompson, 2019; Drudy, 1991). This complexity is even more evident when exploring what precisely is meant by 'working-class', 'lower class', 'blue collar', 'disadvantaged', 'middle-class', 'privileged', 'advantaged', and 'upper class'. Individuals' interpretations and understanding of these concepts varies. **'**Working-class', 'lower socio-economic' and 'disadvantaged' are often used interchangeably, even though not everyone from a working-class background is economically poor (Skerritt, 2020). Some individuals may choose to describe themselves as 'disadvantaged' as a substitute for 'working class' (Finnegan and Merrill (2017).

Geographical differences can also affect class terminology. The term 'working-class', for example, tends to be used more by European researchers than 'lower class', which is used more by US researchers, but are also used interchangeably. Similarly, middle-class and upper-class are often used interchangeably in US research, even though 'upper class' in Europe has connotations of landed aristocracy that do not pertain in the US (Manstead, 2018).

Drudy (1991) points to the difficulties in cross-study comparisons when using different social classifications and argues that the forms of social classification used most frequently are those used by the state in the production of official figures. The 'Occupation' classification

used in the Irish census is modelled on the UK Standard Occupational Classification, modified to reflect more accurately conditions in the Irish labour market, and was first used in the 1996 Census (The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2017, Appendix 2, p.106). The CSO differentiates between two groups: Socio-economic Group and Social Class.

a) The Socio-Economic Group. For the 2016 census, the whole population was classified into one of ten specific socio-economic groups, first introduced in 1996, with a further category added where there were insufficient details provided (CSO, 2017, Appendix 2, p. 106). The aim was to combine individuals with 'similar social and economic statuses on the basis of the level of skill or educational attainment required' (p. 106). The groups used in the census are as follows:

A. Employers and managers
B. Higher professional
C. Lower professional
D. Non-manual
E. Manual skilled
F. Semi-skilled
G. Unskilled
H. Own account worker
I. Farmers
J. Agricultural workers
K. All others gainfully occupied and unknown

b) Social Class. The entire population is also classified into one of the following social class groups, introduced in 1996, which are defined on the basis of occupation.

1. Professional workers
2. Managerial
3. Non-manual
4. Skilled manual
5. Semi-skilled
6. Unskilled
7. All others gainfully occupied and unknown

In this classification of social class, people with similar levels of 'occupational skill' are grouped together, as far as possible, but no other differences, such as education, have been taken into account (CSO, 2017, Appendix 2, p. 107).

This study acknowledges the complexity of social class as a concept (Reay, 2017). However, some understanding of the concept is needed if we are to gain insight into what it is like to be a student from a socio-economically disadvantaged background. While the classifications mentioned above are important, not everyone fits neatly into these classifications (Lehmann, 2012) and they do little to explain how people's lives and experiences are impacted by their social backgrounds (Cook and Lawson, 2016). The terms 'socio-economically disadvantaged', 'lower socio-economic groups', 'working-class' or 'disadvantaged' are used interchangeably in this study and denote socio-economic, cultural and educational difference relative to 'middle-class', 'privileged' or 'advantaged', with no implication of any deficit that needs 'improving'. Meaning rather than measurement underpins this study.

The relational aspect of social class is central to this study. The Education Act (1998) states that when unsatisfactory educational outcomes can be linked to social background, that disadvantage exists. However, the reality is that educational disadvantage can only be 'fully understood in terms of the advantage of others' (Lynch and O'Riordan,1998, p. 470). Inequality in education, according to Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), is the result of some enjoying better resources, more money, more access to wealth and power, which in turn allow them to avail of better educational opportunities. Although terminologies about what precisely constitutes 'working-class' or 'middle-class' may differ, Skerritt (2020) argues that it is still the middle-classes who possess the economic, cultural and social resources to secure, maximise, and maintain advantageous positions for their families. Whatever the nomenclature, the reality for various social groups remains unchanged. The impact of class is not just about economic divisions and categorisation, however, and the next section explores how class is experienced and lived affectively (Reay, 2017), and the multiple ways that class plays out within these divisions and segregations (Young, 1990).

2.3.4 Class and People

Social class is not just about differences in rankings, wealth, education, employment or power but is also about the 'amount of respect and recognition that one is accorded in society' (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p. 315). Class is about the importance of being seen, and having value and worth in the eyes of others (Bourdieu, 1990a; 2000). Class is filtered through individuals' life experiences every day, determining how one is placed in social hierarchies (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). The schools our children go to; the clothes we wear and the food we eat; where we live and where we feel comfortable are all '*profoundly* classed experiences', connected not only to what we own but to our cultural expectations and how we see the world (Weis and Dolby, 2012, p. 2, italics authors' own).

Class is viewed as central to one's identity and place in society (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017), where individuals' social and cultural capitals play a central role in the construction of self-concept, reinforcing how working-class and middle-class people think and act in different ways (Manstead, 2018). Self-concept is also understood as being influenced by individuals' perceptions of how and where they rank in comparison to others in terms of occupation, wealth and education and the different patterns of class behaviour associated with these (Kraus, Piff and Keltner, 2011). Awareness of class for those who are disadvantaged may also manifest as a sense of deficit or constraint, a recognition of how their lives are impacted by a lack of economic and cultural resources and a sense of 'feeling out place in middle-class spaces' (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p. 315).

2.3.5. Conclusion

It is impossible to discuss class without acknowledging that class and inequality are inextricably linked (Savage, 2015), and influence many aspects of people's lives, including how much they earn, their educational achievements, and their health (Thompson, 2019). The inequalities of social class can do 'terrible damage' but are often condoned and viewed as normative (Reay, 2005, p. 924). Students coming into ITE from disadvantaged backgrounds have been shaped by their backgrounds and class and the profound beliefs about what 'people like me' can hope to achieve (Van Galen, 2010, p. 256). The relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theories to social class and education is explored in the next section.

2. 4 Pierre Bourdieu and Social Class

2.4.1 Introduction

Social class plays a central role in student outcomes at all levels of education, reinforcing opportunities for some and posing barriers for others (McCoy, Smyth, Watson, and

Darmody, 2014). To understand why this may have relevance for the participants in this study, some of Pierre Bourdieu's theories and concepts are worth considering, particularly *habitus*, *field*, and *capitals*. These concepts provide clear basic thinking tools (Burke, Scurry and Blenkinsopp, 2020) for understanding how social class is experienced in the lives of these students. Although many of Bourdieu's concerns are with hierarchies of power, particularly as evidenced in the structures of social class and the role that education plays in its reproduction, he is equally concerned with the importance of subjective experiences within these structures (Grenfell, 1996). Bourdieu's work coherently explicates the central role of schools in changing and reproducing social and cultural inequalities from generation to generation (Harker, 1990). Exploring Bourdieu's work helps contextualise and understand the deeply ingrained experiences, predispositions and perspectives of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in ITE.

2.4.2 Capitals

Bourdieu's metaphor of different capitals (economic, social, and cultural), which are accrued over time by each social class and which are attached to different values, is useful in explaining the many class distinctions experienced by the students in this study. For Bourdieu, economic capital refers to an individual's material assets and resources; social capital includes an individual's network and connections; and cultural capital refers to the appropriation of symbolic wealth that is deemed to be socially worth seeking and possessing (Bourdieu, 1973a), such as education and qualifications; style of speech, accent and clothes; leisure pursuits and patterns of consumption, in addition to different predispositions and ways of thinking (Mills, 2008). Bourdieu viewed capital implicitly as 'attributes, possessions, or qualities of a person or a position exchangeable for goods, services, or esteem' (Di Maggio, 1979, p. 1463).

The middle classes have always sought to distinguish themselves from the working class through a variety of mechanisms such as language, education and aesthetics (Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Eagleton, 1989). The combination of various capitals generated from birth become 'habituated' and embodied, and as in this study, capitals are displayed in the myriad ways that individuals from different social classes talk, walk, dress, and behave differently. Not having access to the same capitals as the middle-classes, those who are disadvantaged have often find themselves being judged as somehow personally deficient, positioned 'beyond value' and with a 'zero sum of culture' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 486). Bourdieu's model has also been used to effect as a way of explaining how the middle classes are so effective in maintaining their advantaged position (Lareau, 2003; Reay, 2017).

2.4.3 Education

Life chances are influenced by the distribution of various capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), and the aim is for individuals to accumulate and maximise as many different capitals as possible (Di Maggio, 1979). The centre of much of this activity is the educational system, which Bourdieu (1973b) sees as stepping in to provide an alternative pathway for the reproduction of social class inequalities and privilege, while obscuring the fact that it does so. Bourdieu (1973b, p. 80; 1974, p. 39) argues that it is the culture of the dominant group, defined by Harker (1990) as those who control the 'economic, social and political resources' (p. 87), which is embodied in schools, and that educational institutions are organised in such a way that those whose cultural capital reflects that of the dominant group are the ones who are accommodated most. In terms of schooling, the necessary requirements for academic success such as understanding the expected language competencies and behaviours, as well as the appropriate values, knowledge and attitudes needed in school, are competencies which the middle classes

already possess, and which they can readily bring with them to school (Henry, Knight, Lingard and Taylor, 1988).

By adopting the dominant culture of the middle and upper classes, schooling positions the already privileged social groups at an advantage (Harker, 1990) so that 'cultural capital is added to cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1973b, p. 79). The cultural capital of the dominant group is transmitted by schools in the form of 'codes' that are familiar only to those who are already advantaged with the necessary linguistic and cultural capital to access them, and which consign those without access, the disadvantaged, to failure (Di Maggio, 1979, p. 1464). The academic success of more advantaged students is misrecognised as 'individual giftedness' or natural aptitudes rather than class-based differences (Mills, 2008, p. 83). Poor academic achievement, therefore, is not inherent in cultural differences, but is an 'artefact of the way schools operate', rewarding those with the right cultural capital and penalising others (Harker, 1990, p. 87). By adopting the culture of the dominant group as the norm and by treating all students as if they had the same access to it, schools reinforce the initial cultural and social inequalities of disadvantaged students and transform social classifications into academic classifications, 'with every appearance of neutrality' (Harker, 1990, p. 89).

Bourdieu called the power to dominate such disadvantaged groups *symbolic power,* or 'the power to constitute the given by stating it' (1977a, p.117), and he referred to the exercise of symbolic power as *symbolic violence* 'the power to impose…instruments of knowledge and expression of social reality…which are arbitrary (but unrecognised as such)' (1977a, p. 115). Thus, by internalising and accepting the inequality of the status quo, symbolic violence is manifested (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For Bourdieu (1990a), even the most disadvantaged students tend to accept what they perceive as natural.

Schools and universities tend to accept the differential representation of students as '*particular* kinds' of students (Gillespie, 2019, p.2; italics author's own), thus perpetuating the

endorsing of the dominant cultural capital among students (Bourdieu, 1977). The success and managed mobility of the small numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students who overcome the odds and access higher education merely serves to legitimise the symbolic violence of schooling, according to Di Maggio (1979), by misrecognising the role played by the imposition of a 'cultural arbitrary' in social and cultural reproduction (p. 1464).

2.4.4 Habitus

The acceptance of such a discriminatory educational system by those who pay the highest price is explained by Bourdieu with the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1971a). Habitus is strongly associated with class of origin, and refers to the 'essence of being of a person' (McCoy et al., 2014, p.4). Habitus works below the level of consciousness, orienting individuals towards patterns of behaviour 'without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 76). However, although habitus shapes our life choices, it does not determine them (Mills, 2008, p. 82). Habitus does, however, limit individual choice (Reay, 1995). It is through habitus that individuals acquire a particular world-view and behave accordingly (Gillespie, 2019, p. 2).

Habitus is core to Bourdieu's work and functions as an important link that mediates the structures of the outside world and each individual's personal history of early childhood socialisation and experience (Di Maggio, 1979). Habitus, therefore, acts as a bridge between the 'objective' realm of social contexts and the 'subjective' realm of individual experience and action (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 171). Reay (1998) sees Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a 'dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective, interiorised and permeating both the body and the psyche' (p. 521).

While no social class is totally heterogeneous, each class has its own individual habitus so although habitus is created at an individual level, the common perceptions shared of the

social world create a 'collective habitus' (Bufton, 2003, p. 212). This collective habitus results in certain experiences that are common to individuals who belong to the same class (Bourdieu, 1977), creating the class differences that constitutes the class habitus. These differentials in social perspectives, marked by varied behaviours, accents, values and beliefs, are 'inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school' (Mills, 2008, p. 80).

The lens through which the students in this study viewed the world was influenced by their personal and class habitus. The concept of habitus helps to explain how this cohort of students acted and interpreted the world in certain ways (Lehmann, 2007b), and provides a way of understanding how their past experiences live on in the present. The norms and values of these students' habitus shed light on their sense of belonging or not belonging in certain social contexts, and allows us a glimpse into these students' 'emotional underworld' (Reay, 2015, p.22). Habitus also delineated the perceived boundaries of these students' expectations, their 'field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110) and influenced how they negotiated and navigated certain social spaces. Habitus also explains how more privileged students with middle-class cultural capitals felt more like 'a fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127), than the disadvantaged students, many of whom felt like fish *out* of water when trying to navigate a world that was so different to their own. These students all faced varying degrees of challenge in integrating into the middle-class environment of higher education.

2.4.4.1 *Bodily Hexis*

The manner in which social class is physically embodied and shaped during childhood is described by Bourdieu (1977) as 'bodily hexis', and is seen in the different ways that people walk, talk, sit, and use cutlery; in the way someone speaks and their tone of voice; in the 'tilt of a head' or a facial expression (p.87). Hence, the inequalities of social class are clearly marked in a class habitus where 'strictly biological differences are underlined and symbolically

accentuated by differences in bearing, differences in gesture, posture and behaviour which express a whole relationship to the social world' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 192). Bodily hexis encapsulates the manner in which class mediates the connection between different social groups and their social background (Bufton, 2003). How language is used, in particular, denotes membership of a common social category of speakers because it is the outcome of common social conditions and language acquisition (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and in higher education, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds often find themselves trying to acclimatise to unfamiliar ways of language use which the more privileged students do not have to contend with (Bufton, 2003). In this study, a working-class habitus in the form of accent in particular, was seen as stamped in the bodily hexis of the students and became 'an instant marker of social class and, by proxy, of level of intelligence and stock of cultural capital' (Bufton, 2003, p. 220).

2.4.5 Field

The third of Bourdieu's concepts that is relevant to this study is that of 'field', the space where habitus and capitals interact to 'direct practice' (Burke et al., 2020, p. 1713). In order to navigate a field successfully, an individual needs a combination of habitus and capitals that are aligned with the norms of the field and which influence the rules and expectations associated with the field (Burke et al., 2020). For Bourdieu, every field is hierarchical, even fields as diverse as art, science and religion, all possessing the potential for comparison and conflict (Bourdieu, 1971a). Social life itself is 'is a constant struggle for position' as individuals strive, both consciously and unconsciously, to overcome the various social structural constraints that inhibit them (Di Maggio, 1979, p. 1463). These social contexts or fields intersect and are vigorously contested to gain or maintain dominance by means of the capitals available (Mills,

2008), and naturally, those who are in a dominant position assume a position of 'conservation' in terms of their capitals (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222).

Education is another field. The habitus and capital that the students in this study brought with them into all aspects of education, including ITE and their school placements, did not align with the middle-class norms of this field. Part of the challenge is that the rules of the field are not always explicit, and those who know the tacit rules, the middle classes, can navigate more successfully than those who are outsiders (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). While field is seen as a structured social space with its own recognised codes and practices (Bourdieu, 1993), habitus is the power that drives individuals both *in* the field (Wacquant, 1989) and *into* particular fields, by shaping beliefs and expectations (Delaney and Brown, 2020, p. 97). The beliefs and expectations that the students in this study brought with them played a central role in terms of how they experienced the field of higher education.

While habitus focuses in the main on the subjective, generative codes underlying individuals' practices, these practices occur in social contexts and are not the product of habitus alone but of 'the *relation between* the habitus…and the specific social contexts or fields within which individuals act' (Thompson, 1991, p. 13, italics author's own). Field focuses, therefore, on the objective (Grenfell and James, 1998), with the interaction between habitus and field capable of producing a strong union (Reay et al., 2009), in which:

> …social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

A habitus that reflects the dominant culture of a field equips individuals with a feel for the game (Bourdieu, 1990) and allows individuals to move easily within certain familiar fields, feeling comfortable and at ease (McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2014). The class habitus for

participants in this study is at odds with the dominant habitus of a university setting, whereas the class habitus for the middle-class students is like a 'second nature, a view of the world (and a position in it) which they accept with ease and informality' (Wilkes, 1990, p. 127).

2.4.6 Bourdieu, Class and Opportunity

Acknowledging the crucial role that economic, social and cultural capitals plays in higher education pathways means understanding that some students are advantaged more than others both structurally and socially (Reay, 2018). Having experienced external boundaries and limits in their lives, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, like the students in this study, can exhibit an anticipation of and acceptance of limitations and a deep sense of 'one's place' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471). Familial habitus is key in shaping people's expectations of what is acceptable for 'people like us' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64), which plays out in higher education with disadvantaged students' behaviour being governed by what it is 'reasonable to expect' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 226).

Transitions into higher education for disadvantaged students are often about relationships with 'class others' and can be characterised by lack of confidence and doubt, and by 'anxieties, set-backs, reversals and negative responses' (Reay, 2018, p. 533). Despite exhibiting resilience and success in accessing university against the odds, and managing the tension between their habitus and field from early childhood, many of the students in this study from disadvantaged backgrounds transitioning into higher education still experienced significant challenges and difficulties in university (Reay et al., 2009).

2.4.7 Conclusion

Bourdieu's theories and concepts allow for an analysis of how middle-class educational institutions weight their practices, policies and processes 'strongly in favour of middle-class

values' (Nesbit, 2006, p. 177). When disadvantaged students lack access to different types of social and cultural capital that are prized by dominant social groups, limitations are placed on their educational outcomes (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). By internalising dominant social and cultural beliefs that are valorised in a particular habitus, individuals become shaped by these beliefs (Gillespie, 2019). The manner in which these theories unfold in the lives of the students in ITE from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is core to this study. Having looked through a Bourdieusian lens as a way of understanding how this cohort of students may have made sense of their experiences, the next section returns to education and social class, and the many ways that they intersect.

2.5 Education and Social Class

Education and social class are inextricably linked to one another, and both have inequalities at their core (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Given the central role that education plays in individuals' life opportunities and outcomes, alongside its societal benefits (Smyth and McCoy, 2009), it would seem crucial that everyone should be given the chance to be educated, and that 'arbitrary circumstances' should not be a barrier to acquiring an education (Madden, 2017, p.104). Education itself, however, plays a key role in legitimising generational inequalities (Atkinson, 2015), and reproducing generational advantages for dominant social groups, exposing the close relationships between education, inequality and class (Bourdieu, 1996).

International research indicates that family background continues to play a central role in pupils' educational performance and subsequent life opportunities (McCoy, Smyth, Watson and Darmody, 2014). Pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to perform poorly in school, with almost one in five pupils across OECD countries lacking a minimum level of skills to function effectively in society (Schleicher, 2014). This

echoes Atkinson's contention (2015) that the two main determinants of life outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged individuals are social class and education, with social class being a key factor in predicting educational achievement (Ianelli, Smyth and Klein, 2016). A disproportionately high number of those who are without second-level or higher-level education, are concentrated among the socio-economically disadvantaged (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017; Ianelli, 2011; Lynch and Lodge; 2002), contributing to many enduring social inequalities (Reay, 2017; Savage, 2015). Pupils from more advantaged social backgrounds, on the other hand, perform better academically when compared to more socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, with pupils whose parents have a professional occupation faring significantly better than those pupils whose parents have a manual occupation (Lewis and Demie, 2015). In the UK, young people from the wealthiest 20% of families are almost three times more likely to go to university than the poorest 20% (Anders, 2012). Pupils in the UK attending private schools are 55 times more likely to gain access to Oxbridge than those pupils on Free School Meals (Sutton Trust, 2010c). Free School Meals (FSM) is frequently used as proxy for the poorest and most disadvantaged pupils in the UK and is linked to a 'long tail of underperformance' academically in England amongst the most disadvantaged pupils (Greany, 2018, p.6). Academic challenges can often result in difficulties around educational completion (Reay, 2006), reinforcing and perpetuating inequality in society (Schleicher, 2014). Similar issues are to be found in an Irish context.

2.5.1 Social Class and Education: the Irish Context

The circularity in the relationships between social background, lack of economic resources, and student academic achievement, is highlighted by Smyth and McCoy (2009). Students whose mothers left school before reaching Junior Certificate had a standard reading score of 215 compared to 286 for those whose mothers who had a post-graduate qualification.

This difference is even more pronounced when examining attainment patterns at second level, with students from higher professional backgrounds having a mean literacy score of 43 in comparison to a score of 28 for those students from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds and a score of 25 for those where both parents are unemployed (ibid. p. 7). Educational inequalities related to social class have increased in Ireland since the 1970s and differential access to financial resources is core to the inequality, according to Reardon (2011), so that a 1% rise in household income, by the time a child is 13, predicts a 6.5% increase in verbal scores and a 5.2. % increase in numerical scores.

These lower literacy and numeracy scores often manifest in lower grades in State examinations, an important factor in the Irish context, where educational outcomes have a significant impact on individuals' access to the labour market, and to the quality of their future employment, and without which economic disparities and life outcomes are reproduced for generations (Smyth, 2018). In terms of higher education, success in the Leaving Certificate examination is seen as the strongest predictor of progression (Mooney, Patterson, O'Connor, and Chantier, 2010). Of the three Leaving Certificate programmes, the majority of students sit the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) or traditional Leaving Certificate. A smaller number take the LCVP or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, which is similar to the LCE but with a vocational component added. The smallest number, approximately 7%, take the Leaving Certificate Applied or LCA, which was developed to meet 'the needs of those students who are not adequately catered for by the other programmes', many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds (Keane, 2013, p. 7), and who are precluded from directly accessing higher education with this qualification.

In the course of a national survey on access to higher education in Ireland carried out by Clancy and Wall (2001), the source of educational disadvantage was identified as being embedded in the different social, economic and cultural capitals of families, including unequal

opportunities in relation to pre-school, primary and post-primary education. Three critical school transition periods at second level were outlined in which the effects of social backgrounds were noteworthy, with particular implication for higher level education. The first concerns issues of retention, where students from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to complete senior cycle; the second concerns academic attainment whereby students from more disadvantage groups are more likely to achieve considerably lower grades in their Leaving Certificate examination; and the third concerns the likelihood of those from more disadvantaged backgrounds with average grades in the Leaving Certificate examination progressing to higher education at all, unlike those students from more advantaged backgrounds with similar grades (DES, 2001, p.34).

It is clear that participation and achievement in school are strongly correlated to socio-economic background (Keane, 2013), with language and literacy skills playing key roles (Bernstein, 1977). Non-transition to higher education for students from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds is not a 'natural attribute' of these students but rather the outcome of differential educational pathways (Danic, 2015, p.83), which are inextricably linked to social and educational inequalities (Reay, 2017). The focus on academic performance as a measure of worth, and the inbuilt bias towards middle-class norms at the core of the education system, ensures that those children who are disadvantaged are placed in an inferior position educationally relative to their middle-class peers, and participate in a race that is unequal from the start (Lynch, 2022). These students pay a price, not just in terms of life and educational opportunities (Smyth and McCoy, 2009), but affectively in terms of occupying an inferior and 'devalued' position educationally (Reay, 2017, p. 183). Many of these students have no real sense of belonging on what they perceive as middle-class educational territory (Hargreaves, 2020), and strive to cope with the psychic costs of always being positioned as academic failures (Bourdieu, 1984). The following section explores social and educational inequality and policy.

2.5.2 Policy and Educational Inequality

Historically, a concern with educational inequality can be dated to 1966 and the *Investment in Education* Report (Harford, 2018; Smyth and McCoy, 2009; Smyth, 2018). The Department of Education, in conjunction with the OECD, commissioned this report, exposing for the first time the systemic social inequality in educational participation in Ireland. The report revealed relatively small numbers of fifteen-to-nineteen-year-olds engaged in full-time education, and reflected rates of participation 'that were highly socially structured' (Smyth, 2018, p.117). The report also provided evidence that pupils from higher professional backgrounds were 4.7 times more likely to be in full-time education than the pupils from the semi-and unskilled backgrounds. However, although overall levels of educational participation in Ireland increased during the 1970s and 1980s, relative inequality remained (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). It was during the 1990s that the term 'educational disadvantage' came to the fore (Smyth and Hannon, 2000) emphasising a new focus reflected in the Education Act (1998), which defined educational disadvantage as 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'.

Several schemes have been adopted since the 1990s, including the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (1984); Breaking the Cycle (1997;) and Giving Children an Even Break (2001), providing extra funding for targeted schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students These and other similar schemes are now incorporated into one programme, the School Support Programme (SSP) under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). The SSP is now known in common parlance as DEIS (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). The DEIS programme was initiated in 2006-2007 and updated in 2017 (Department of Education and Science, 2005; Department of Education and Skills; DES, 2017).

The DEIS scheme in 2019-2020 catered for '890 designated disadvantaged schools, including 693 primary schools (334 urban and 358 rural) and 198 post-primary schools' (DES, n.d.). The 1998 Education Act, which defines disadvantage in terms of learning outcomes as well as the socio-economic factors, was used by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), under the DES, to rank schools in terms of disadvantage (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). Depending on levels of assessed disadvantage, urban primary schools are divided into two bands: Urban Band 1 and Urban Band 2, with Urban Band 1 having a higher concentration of students from lower socio-economic groups, thereby qualifying for more supports.

In addition to monitoring aspects of the implementation of the DEIS programme, the ERC is also responsible for monitoring student outcomes. A 2016 evaluation by the ERC (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018), found that while there are positive results in levels of achievement and retention for students in DEIS schools, significant educational and social inequalities remain. It was found that the social context of the school had a 'greater impact on outcomes in 2016 than in 1998', and that being in a school with a high concentration of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds 'has a substantial negative effect on achievement' (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018, p. 24).

2.5.3 Conclusion

Educational inequality is inextricably linked to social class (Lynch and Lodge, 2002), and a lack of education and educational attainment, particularly at higher level education, has serious life implications for those who are unable to access it (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). All but one of the students in this study are first generation college students, with the odds heavily weighted against them making it to third level education. The many ways that those odds are exacerbated rather than ameliorated through schooling, are discussed in the next section.

2.6 Education: Choice, Processes and Inequality

2.6.1 Introduction

The purpose of an equitable education system is to be 'fair and inclusive', supporting students to reach their academic potential without barriers being erected or expectations lowered (Schleicher, 2014, p.19). The objective of equity in education is to provide a basic minimum level of education and skills for every student, regardless of personal or socio-economic circumstances (Lynch and Crean, 2018). However, Ireland demonstrates high levels of class inequality in education (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017), and despite various attempts to tackle educational inequality, social class still remains an issue today (Jay and Muldoon, 2018). One key area underpinning the close relationship between education, social class and inequality, is school choice (Bourdieu, 1996).

2.6.2 School Choice

The school a student attends plays a crucial role in educational outcomes and accessing and participating in higher education (Iannelli, 2004), making the subject of school choice an important one when looking at under-representation of certain groups in third level education. School choice, a somewhat contentious issue in recent years, has featured in various reforms across OECD countries since the early 1980s (Schleicher, 2014), allowing parents greater choice in the schools their children will attend. In the UK, government policies on education continue to emphasise the role of parental choice in their children's schooling (Reay, 2007). In Ireland, the importance of parental choice is enshrined within the Irish constitution, whereby parents, as the primary educators of their children, are free to choose the schools that best serve their children's needs. However, allowing parents to choose the school that best serves their children's needs is not class neutral and school choice may lead to 'unintended racial/ethnic or socio-economic segregation among schools' (OECD, 2014, p. 55).

School choice creates the right conditions for social class to emerge from the shadows, according to Olmedo and Cruz's study of middle-class educational choice (2012). These researchers found that middle-class parents create educational strategies that ensure their class privilege is transmitted to their children, and it is in the area of school choice that these strategies 'become visible' (p.163). Middle-class parents have the necessary skills, confidence, know-how, cultural and social capitals, and access to 'rumour circuits' to inform their decision-making relating to school choice, where they can find 'people like us' (Olmeda and Cruz, 2012, p.171).

The emphasis on individual choice and opportunity can conceal the impact of such choices on issues of equality, where middle-class parents are more likely to exercise that choice (Reay, 1996). Being able to choose schools constructs parents within a consumerist paradigm (Smyth, 2014, p.956), and results in schools that are decidedly class differentiated and where children are marked as being distinctive and different from 'others', with middle-class students being perceived as 'normal' (Olmeda and Cruz, 2012, p. 164). The importance for parents of making the 'right' choice educationally, with education being viewed as the 'door to future success and happiness' (ibid. 2012, p. 164), thus becomes the privilege of the middle-classes and highlights the hollowness of parental choice in the Irish Constitution where every parent is 'free' to choose the schools that best serve their children's needs. In fact, private education is one of the main mechanisms through which the relative educational advantages of the middle classes are reproduced and perpetuated (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). Schools have thus become linked to the neo-liberal principles of the market place, and in this marketized world of school choice, only those who can afford it are free to choose (Schleicher, 2014).

2.6.2.1 *School Choice and Social Mix*

Without the wherewithal to avail of school choice, most parents who are themselves disadvantaged, tend to send their children to the nearest school (Schleicher, 2014), the majority of which will be designated disadvantaged in 'deprived' areas. The impact of this 'choice' is not class neutral. There has been much international debate on the impact of the school attended, its social make-up, and the implications for student outcomes (Smyth, 2018; Bourdieu, 1998). While differences in educational performance are evident in all schools, differences between schools can be explained largely by the social mix found in the schools, with 'striking' differences in academic achievement (Schleicher, 2014, p. 87). Attending schools that are designated disadvantaged (DEIS), raises questions concerning the effect of social mix on student achievement, and point to significantly lower scores in literacy and numeracy for students attending disadvantaged schools (McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2014).

Even if academic success is achieved, McCoy et al., (2014) found that students who had attended DEIS were more likely to be unemployed than students in more middle-class or socially mixed schools, 'even taking account of grades, gender and individual social class' (p. 188). In addition to performance, the social mix of a school has serious implications with regard to retention rates, impacting on the numbers accessing higher education (Smyth et al., 2015). School intake can also predispose schools to adopt particular practices and processes that shape pupil outcomes in relation to higher education (Donnelly, 2014). The reality is that many disadvantaged schools do not have the means to countermand the negative impact of pupils' socio-economic backgrounds (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Ultimately, inadequate resources mean that disadvantaged students, like the participants in this study, are unable to participate on equal terms with others within the education system (Lynch and Crean, 2018).

It is interesting that once socio-economic status is accounted for, 'private schools do not perform better than public schools' (Schleicher, 2014, p. 106), thus indicating that a greater

number of private schools, or more enrolment competition between these schools, do not benefit the educational system as a whole. In Ireland, the system of government funding for elite fee-charging schools reinforces class inequality in clear and noticeable ways (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). However, despite socio-economically disadvantaged schools striving to overcome their many social class disadvantages, they are unable to 'eliminate the competitive advantage of the most advantaged' (Lodge and Crean, 2018, p.155). Students in these schools are not in a position to access the extra educational resources such as grinds, educational-related travel, or computers that could offer them a better chance of accessing higher education (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). Ultimately, privileged parents will do whatever they can to advantage their children in a society that is 'economically unjust' (Lynch and Crean, 2018, p. 154).

The many ways that school processes, organisation and expectational climate perpetuate social and educational inequalities, particularly in accessing higher education (Smyth, 2018), are explored in the next section on primary and post-primary schooling.

2.6.3 Schooling

This section examines how inequities in the education system manifest from an early age in the differential social, cultural and economic advantages and disadvantages, selections and eliminations, processes and policies, that contribute to the later under-representation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in higher education (DES, 2003; McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly and Doherty, 2010a; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011b). Both primary and post-primary schooling in Ireland are explored, with the main focus on post-primary education.

2.6.3.1 *Primary School and Inequalities*

Middle-class children possess a 'readiness' when starting school, and a familiarity with the world of learning that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds do not have (Ianelli, 2013, p. 908). Children experiencing social and economic disadvantage have more gaps in their language and cognitive skills starting school than more privileged children (McKeown et al., (2014). Using data from the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal study of primary school children, McCoy, Quail and Smyth (2014) use a range of measures, including parental education, income and social class, to analyse these differences between designated disadvantaged schools and other schools. Schools serving disadvantaged areas, as would be expected, were found to 'have an overrepresentation of children from semi/unskilled manual and non-employed backgrounds' (p. 326), with 40% of children from non-employed and semi-skilled backgrounds to be found in Urban Band 1 schools (the most disadvantaged). The rural schools had lower levels of income but higher levels of the cultural resources absent in urban disadvantaged schools. The study emphasised that children's academic performance in reading and mathematics was 'significantly influenced' by their 'social class, household income, maternal education *and* number of books in the home' (McCoy et al., 2014, p. 327, italics authors' own).

A more recent GUI study by Smyth (2018), which is of relevance for many of the students in this study, highlights the marked differences in language use (for both communicating and thinking) and in attitudes towards schooling found in these young children. These differences, according to Smyth, are determined both by parental social class, based on occupation, and the mother's education, with the 'lowest language scores and least positive attitudes found among those from non-employed households, where parents have only lower secondary education or less' (p. 118). By the age of nine, the GUI study found significant

differences in reading and mathematics, again aligned with social class groupings and parents' level of education (Smyth, Whelan, McCoy, Quail and Doyle, 2010).

Certain language varieties gain more respect than others in society and these are the 'standard varieties, which are linked to the written word and are the medium used by the government, the professions and the education system' (Molloy, Murtagh and McAvinue, 2016, p.215). Children from more socio-economically advantaged backgrounds possess a language register that reflects the more academic language found in schools (MacRuairc, 2011a). The familiarity of middle-class children with more formal academic language codes contrasts with the discontinuity experienced by working-class children who possess a more informal, restricted language code (Molloy et al., 2016; Bernstein, 1977) with implications for more disadvantaged children in engaging with the school curriculum and developing literacy skills. The bias towards middle-class norms (Lynch, 2022) in terms of language is clearly evident here. Differences in numeracy and literacy scores also have major implications for pupils accessing third level education. Lower levels of literacy and numeracy at primary level have an impact on both the retention of pupils and academic performance at second level (Weir, McAvinue, Moran and O'Flaherty, 2014) and on access to higher level education (HEA, 2014).

2.6.3.2 *Performative Agendas and Ability Grouping*

Attempts to equalise these educational discrepancies frequently take the form of raising the educational achievement levels of working-class children by various assessment processes which focus on 'fixing the failure in the working classes' (Reay, 2005, p.916). This approach can have powerful emotional costs for children, according to Reay, whose study revealed how children can perceive their futures as inextricably tied to their academic achievement (Reay, 2005).

Placing children in ability groupings has been put forward as an acceptable practice for meeting the needs of the most marginalised children in the Irish educational system by the Department of Education and Science (2009). McGillicuddy and Devine (2020) see ability grouping as a 'symbolically violent process' that has a negative impact on how children perceive themselves (p.553). In addition, children placed in lower ability groups are unable to access the same positive teacher-pupil relationships and positive teaching approaches as their peers in the higher ability groupings (McGillicuddy and Devine, 2018). The working-class ten-year old girls in Reay's (2005) study had experience of assessment and subsequent placement in one of the lower -class groups, and had already internalised and pathologised their failure. These children inhabited what Reay termed the 'psychic economy of class', one that is characterised by fear, anxiety and unease, where the children's low placement in the ranking system was somehow reflective of their own individual failure, and where the girls saw themselves as 'nothing' (Reay, 2005, p. 917). The affective nature of this fear and anxiety can lead to a sense of resignation and acceptance of the limiting boundaries placed on children's horizons, academically, socially and in terms of children's learner identities (McGillicuddy and Devine, 2020). These selections and eliminations compound inequalities for these young children, and the earlier the selection, the stronger the impact (Horn, 2013).

Selections and eliminations also reinforce Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) contention that it is the already-advantaged middle-class children who are more likely to benefit by being assigned to higher ability groupings, while those who have most need of these resources continue to be penalised. These early social, cultural, economic and educational differences that emerge strongly at primary level are part of the cumulative web of inequalities that continue on into second level education and manifest most clearly in the under-representation of pupils from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education. Many of the students who manage to overcome these barriers and successfully access ITE, have personal experience

of these selections and eliminations at primary level and carry the impact with them into each subsequent phase of their education. How these processes continue to reveal themselves at second level is discussed in the next section.

2.6.4 Post-Primary Education and Inequalities

Understanding how post-primary schools can be complicit in reinforcing social class inequalities, with particular consequences for accessing higher education, is initially puzzling, especially if viewed through a meritocratic lens. Schools are proclaimed proudly as meritocratic institutions where achievement is based on hard work and effort rather than class advantage (Manstead, 2018). However, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue, the values and norms promoted in school systems are those of the middle-classes and are familiar to children from similar backgrounds, thus reproducing social inequalities by conferring a slew of advantages on the already advantaged. Inevitably, the advantaging of one socio-economic group over another at second level leads to unequal educational outcomes with significant implications for accessing higher level (OECD, 2013).

It is at post-primary level that issues of opportunity, equity and access are engaged with in a very real way and where, at an individual level, the pathway to future life opportunities and possibilities are to be found (Weis and Dolby, 2012). It is at this level, too, according to Weis and Dolby, that individual student's social and cultural capitals, along with differences and stratifications in educational institutions, begin to interweave, and while many more students internationally may now have access to post-primary education, equity of educational opportunity is not always assured.

Exploring second-level educational processes, procedures, choices and cultures helps in understanding how these earlier experiences can impact students at later stages of their educational pathways.

2.6.4.1 *School Processes*

School processes are key contributors to the inequality that manifests in pupils' educational outcomes at second level (Smyth, 2018), with important implications for accessing higher education (McCoy et al., 2014)**.** These processes are operationalised in the many daily expectational, selecting and elimination processes, as well as in curricula studied; subject levels chosen; ability groupings assigned; and post-school pathways made possible. The inequalities and hierarchies of social class are normalised and reflected within these 'legitimised' codes of discrete selections, examinations and streaming (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 38), and serve to strengthen the social difference evident in educational outcomes (Smyth, 2018). The education system legitimises the hierarchical intersections of social class, education and economics by 'manipulating differences' that have been identified as socially important (Danic, 2015, p. 83).

Many education policies are shaped by the concerns and needs of middle-class families (Ball, 2003). According to Reay (2011), fear of failure has always been a strong motivating factor for more privileged parents as they strive to maintain and reproduce their middle-class advantage through the education of their children, unlike the experience of education for the working-classes which has always been about failure. She contends that the acceptance of middle-class norms of success and failure in educational systems automatically problematise the working-classes instead of exposing middle-class conceptions of meritocracy, and deconstructing what educational success and failure look like. This sense of failure for working class students is compounded and reinforced by the continuous processes of selections and eliminations that characterise much of a child's second-level schooling, further disadvantaging the already-disadvantaged, and creating a habitus that is middle class (Olmeda and Cruz, 2012). Bourdieu argues that by extending and spreading out these processes, 'the school system turns

into a permanent home for potential outcasts', what he refers to as 'outcasts on the inside' (1993, p. 422). Some of these choices and selections are explored in the following sections.

2.6.4.2 *Ability Grouping*

Streaming involves using student performance on a test or metric as a means of allocating students to different classes based on their assessed ability (Smyth and McCoy, 2011), where they are ranked from lower to higher and remain in their allocated class for all subjects (Smyth, 2018). In Ireland, grouping students by ability has been put forward as an appropriate practice for those students attending DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools (DES, 2009). Despite an overall reduction in rigid ability grouping, streaming is 'twice as likely' to be found in DEIS schools serving more working-class student populations (Smyth, 2018, p. 134). Streaming can be driven by both the size of the school, being more likely in large schools, and also in line with levels of literacy, being more common in schools with 'more than 30% of the student intake' experiencing such challenges (Smyth, 2018b, p. 42). Attending schools where streaming is incorporated into school policy, results in working-class students, the most disadvantaged of whom are more likely to be allocated to the lower streams, having a ceiling placed on their achievement potential, (Smyth and McCoy, 2011).

The choices made by teachers in schools about where to place a child in an unjust ranking system has critical implications for the child's educational future (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Reay (1998) contends that the hierarchical ordering of students appeals to middle-class educationally aspirant parents who hope to locate their children in the highest streams. Being placed in a higher stream matters as there is a significant differential in academic achievement of 'more than two grade points per subject' between the higher and lower streams, with concomitant implications for students accessing higher education (Smyth, 2018, p. 124). Inequalities evident in the streaming of students are compounded by other inequalities.

Working-class parents, for example, may lack the cultural capital required to comprehend the consequences for their child of low-stream placement and the potential impact on his or her future learning and life opportunities. Streaming also has a profound impact for students' self-concept and learner identities, as evidenced in Smyth's (2018) study, where students were keenly aware of their place in the pecking order and labels such as 'dumb' or 'smart' were applied to different class groups. These labels were, in turn, reinforced by processes such as adopting a slow pace of instruction; having lower teacher and student expectations; coping with disruptive behaviour in the classroom; and the poorer quality of interaction between the teachers and the students.

Streaming has been found to disproportionately reinforce and perpetuate social inequalities in educational outcomes (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). In addition, the perceived benefits of streaming are groundless as the grade point average of higher streamed classes is, in fact, lower than those found in mixed ability classes, resulting in no educational benefit for the higher stream groups and profound negative outcomes for the students who end up in the lower streams (Smyth, 2018).

2.6.4.3 *Subject Choice*

Subject choice is seen by many, especially middle-class parents, as a way of advantageously differentiating oneself (Iannelli, 2013, p. 907). Tacit knowledge and understanding of the importance of certain, 'valued and valuable' subject choices significantly advantage more privileged families (Ianelli et al., 2016, p. 577). Middle-class families are aware that, in an increasingly competitive educational market, the type of education received is as relevant as the amount in terms of future labour outcomes (McCoy and Smyth, 2011). In Ireland, subjects strongly associated with higher education entry are languages, physics and

chemistry, and those subjects are strongly reflective of social class gaps in that middle-class students are more likely to study them (Iannelli et al., 2016).

The large variation in the range of subjects that schools can offer, alongside the gender and social mix of different schools can impact on the choice of subjects offered, particularly in more socio-economically disadvantaged schools, with important implications for students' higher-level education choices and after-school opportunities (McCoy et al., 2014).

2.6.4.4 *Subject Levels*

Issues of relevance around subject choice may also include the level at which the subject is taken and the number of subjects taken. Middle-class families adapt to whatever the system demands in terms of accessing higher education. Parental social class is key in predicting the probability of students taking higher level, particularly maths, with middle-class parents more likely to guide their children towards a higher level, thus widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). Historically, the more disassociated a subject was from practical usefulness, the more it functioned 'as a marker of social distinction' (Edwards, 2002, p. 532). Curricular and subject choice, and levels, are still constrained or enhanced by social class, reflecting the complex interplay of teacher expectations, school policy and student choice, but with some schools allowing little or no student choice (Smyth, 2018b). A significant gap in the take up of higher-level subjects was found in schools serving more disadvantaged areas which Smyth (2018b) suggests can only partly be explained by streaming. Instead, Smyth (ibid.) maintains that these low levels are more likely suggestive of the strongly different expectational climates for students attending such schools, all of which influence post-school educational pathways and access to higher level education.

2.6.4.5 *Conclusion*

Lynch and Lodge (2002) highlighted how different school practices, processes, and organisation, in tandem with the existence of both private and public schooling in Ireland, have created a two-tier educational system that is both elite and unfair. Today, that educational system has, in effect, become a three tier one, comprising fee-charging, DEIS and non-DEIS. Throughout their schooling, choices, selections and eliminations are made by and for students, the cumulative effects of which have serious implications for their life opportunities (Ianelli, Smyth and Klein, 2016). Rewarding the 'best' students is frequently prioritised over investing in those students with the greatest needs who may be equally 'bright' if afforded the same opportunities (Lodge and Crean, 2018, p. 150). The following section looks at a school's learning environment, as seen in teacher and student expectations and relationships, and the important role they play in how students experience their education, with implications for future life pathways

2.6.5 Expectations and Guidance

Expectations are an important part of any student's educational decision-making and a school's expectational climate is often reflected in its approach to formal career guidance and post-school pathways. There is a much stronger expectational climate in middle-class schools where accessing higher education assumes a 'taken-for-granted' quality (Reay, 2005) and becomes the main post-school pathway. Career guidance teachers' advice in more privileged schools can centre on which course to study rather than whether to progress or not, contrasting with working-class students who can frequently be discouraged from considering higher education at all (Smyth and Banks, 2012).

Teacher expectations have also been found to be highly predictive of whether students would even apply for higher education. In Smyth and Hannon's (2007) study, student

aspirations were found to have formed early in their post-primary education with little subsequent variation. This finding highlights the importance of teachers fostering early high expectations and encouragement for students as a means of enhancing post-school outcomes across all social groups (McCoy et al., 2014).

The role of parental guidance is also a central factor in pupils from working-class backgrounds participating in higher education (McCoy et al., 2014). Despite parental support, parents' lack of tertiary education can mean that they do not have the requisite 'insider knowledge' and cultural capital to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational system and to advise their children on subject choices, subject levels, college application processes, financial eligibility and supports available. Parents with 'outsider status' in terms of the education system lack the resources and information to 'intervene' in their children's education in the same way as 'insider' parents (Lyons et al., 2003, p. 355). Working-class parents and students, therefore, rely far more on school-based guidance for information on post-school pathways to higher education. The reduction of guidance allocation in the 2012 government budget, therefore, had a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students (McCoy et al., 2014). In addition, the scarcity of guidance resources allocation means that most post-primary students do not have access to any form of guidance counselling until they are in their final year in school, despite the fact that an orientation towards higher education emerges as early as junior cycle, if not before (McCoy et al., 2014). Proper guidance is key in shaping students' choices and educational outcomes. When teachers, schools and guidance expectations are low, and when information is not easily accessible, working-class families often have 'nowhere else to turn', unlike middle-class families who have support networks and the private education market to turn to (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998, p. 471).

2.6.6 Conclusion: Chapter 2

Some of the key challenges which working-class students encounter in the education system include lower academic achievement, and higher academic disengagement; higher levels of absenteeism and lower levels of retention and completion (Keane, 2011b); more likelihood of experiencing ability grouping and being placed in lower streams; and lower teacher expectations (Smyth and McCoy, 2011). These students are also more likely to have career guidance teachers who fail to promote higher education as a possible option, a factor contributing to their under-progression into higher education (Smyth and Banks, 2012), and to come from families with lower levels of academic attainment who are more reliant on their schools for information regarding higher level options. Again, these challenges highlight how the odds are 'heavily stacked' against students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the students in this study, ever making it as far as ITE (Van Galen, 2010, p. 255).

Given that higher education has now become the cultural norm in Ireland (McGuinness, Bergin, Kelly, McCoy, Smyth, and Whelan, 2014) and the dominant post-school pathway (OECD, 2013), and that higher education is now the main gateway to career and life opportunities, difficulty in accessing higher education can have serious implications for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in particular. Not having qualifications can position the uncredentialled as a failure or not quite finished in some way (Reay, 2017). Even if students from lower socio-economic groups do have a Leaving Certificate qualification and the possibility of participating in higher education, strong social differentiation is still evident in the fact that these students are less likely to go directly onto higher education with this qualification than students from professional (salariat) backgrounds (McCoy et al., 2014).

The attitudinal barrier evident in the 'deficit discourse', where the locus of responsibility for non-progression is placed on the individual (Hannon et al., 2017, p.1227),

rather than on the structural and systemic inequalities which are at the core of the injustice (Lynch and Lodge, 2002), can be hugely problematic for disadvantaged students. In this deficit discourse, socio-economically disadvantaged students are somehow always perceived as coming from behind and having to 'catch up' on their middle-class peers or having to become more 'middle-class' if they wish to succeed. Care needs to be taken that any focus on 'improving' the cultural and social capitals of socio-disadvantaged students is not portrayed in terms of students' own social and cultural capitals somehow lacking legitimacy, when this 'lack' is of relevance only in the middle-class norms prevalent in all levels of education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

All of the PME students participating in this study have experienced some of the socio-economic, educational and cultural inequalities outlined in this chapter. They have all been through an education system and despite the challenges, have successfully navigated all levels of education up to and including post-graduate Initial Teacher Education. The aim of this research is to understand these students' experiences of ITE. Contextualising prior educational experiences at primary and post-primary level provides a framework for understanding the experiences of these students in ITE, seeing how their experiences in ITE have been shaped or influenced by prior educational events and circumstances.

The various economic, social, cultural and educational constraints that impact on disadvantaged students' opportunities for participating in higher education and ITE do not work independently of each other but interact in complex ways (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998, p.473). Some of these complexities are explored in the next chapter on higher education and Initial Teacher Education.

Chapter 3 *Higher Education and Initial Teacher Education*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the higher educational challenges for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, with a view to understanding the implications for the few who continue on to ITE. Despite the many obstacles less privileged students can experience on their educational pathways, they still see the value of higher education, particularly when research has shown that, at its best, higher education can contribute to personal fulfilment and the general good of society (HEA, 2015). The more educated people are, the longer they are likely to live; the healthier they are likely to be; the more likely they are to have stable families; and the more able they are to provide better life opportunities for their children lives (HEA, 2015, p. 23).

Despite the important personal, social and educational benefits associated with higher education, universities have not traditionally been 'places for the working class' (David et al., 2009, p. 74), and higher education still remains a highly classed environment (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). There is a significant correlation between socio-economic background and entry to higher education (HEA, 2010, p. 60). Universities are highly stratified and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are 'no more likely to enter the most prestigious universities than they were a decade ago' (Callender and Dougherty, 2018, p. 22). The creation of non-elite universities, as was evident in the UK post 1992, does not lead to greater equality if the most privileged universities remain exclusive (Finnegan and Merrill. 2017). Reay (2018) reveals that of the poorest category within the British working-classes, those on Free School Meals (FSM), 'just 0.9% go to attend elite universities', unlike students who are privately educated and are '55 times more likely than FSM' to secure a place in either Oxford or Cambridge (p. 530). Similar inequality is evident in Irish Higher Education Institutions where 32% of those with

the highest grades in 2019 came from the most economically advantaged families, with only 3% coming from the most disadvantaged (HEA, 2018).

The next section examines widening participation (WP) in higher education, defined by Budd (2016) as 'strategies that seek to improve the access to, and participation of, a wider range of students at university, specifically those from disadvantaged backgrounds' (p. 112).

3.2 Widening Participation in Higher Education

England and Ireland have not demonstrated the same accommodations of diversity in their third-level population as other countries in Europe (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). Despite the large increase in educational participation in schools in the UK beyond the compulsory school age, between 1985 and 1994, access to higher education still remains stronger for the middle-classes (Ball, 2003), reflecting an earlier time when universities were not for the working classes at all (Manstead, 2018). While educational opportunities have increased significantly for a diverse range of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK, the widening of participation rates for disadvantaged students have not led to equality of access to equivalent kinds of higher education (David et al., 2009), and greater educational equality has not always resulted from greater educational expansion (Shavitt, Arum and Gamoran, 2007).

In a study by Ertl et al., (2009), applicants to higher education from students coming through the Vocational Education Training route (VET) in the UK, were generally male, from lower socio-economic groups and were over-represented in the newer, less prestigious post-1992 universities and under-represented in the older, more elite universities. A hierarchy of higher education social and economic ranking emerged which was normalised in the various policies and practices associated with widening participation in the UK and is still visible today in the fine-drawn differences between pre and post 1992 universities (David et al., 2009). It is sobering that even with the same grades, middle-class students in the UK are three times more

likely to go to a high-status university than working-class students (Jerrim, 2013), with working-class students more likely to attend post-1992 universities (Reay, 2018).

3.2.1 Widening participation: the Irish Context

The latter half of the twentieth century in Ireland saw various initiatives and policies aimed at encouraging widening participation in higher education for students from non-traditional backgrounds. The benefits of widening access were emphasised, including individual and societal well-being, advancing human rights, strengthening democracy and improving the quality of the educational system. In the years following the introduction of free education in 1967, Ireland witnessed a remarkable expansion in education by international standards (Harford, 2018; OECD, 2013). Numbers entering higher education in Ireland rose from about 15,000 in 1980 to 42,000 in 2013 (HEA, 2015, p.14).

The vision of the National Access Plan (NAP) for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-2028 (HEA, 2022) is to ensure that there is diversity and social mix in in higher level education, including students from socio-economic backgrounds who have traditionally had lower participation rates in higher education (Clancy and Wall, 2001). The Free Fees Initiative, introduced in 1995/1996, removed university fees for first-time full-time students who met certain criteria. However, despite the good intentions of the initiative, the removal of the higher education tuition fees in 1996 had little impact on the reduction of socio-economic inequalities in higher education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017). Other ways of supporting disadvantaged students centred on providing alternative routes into higher and further education, some of which are discussed in the next section.

3.2.2 Access Programmes

Several alternative entry routes into higher education currently exist for those students who are not in the 90% of new entrants who access higher education directly from the school system (Mooney et al., 2010). These alternative routes include Further Education (FE), via Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (formerly known as FETAC: Further Education and Training Awards Council qualifications), in addition to specific pre-entry access or foundation courses developed by the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) either individually or in partnership with one other (Keane, 2013). The main aim of these courses is to prepare students for Higher Education, and they typically take one academic year to complete.

These access programmes have made notable improvements in relation to widening access for under-represented groups in higher education (Murphy, 2008). The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme reserves places in HEIs for students from lower socio-economic groups with reduced Leaving Certificate points, and usually provides financial, academic and personal supports. The scheme is currently operating in 25 Irish HEIs (IUA, 2020). Until 2010, eligibility to the HEAR route was only available to those students who had attended DEIS schools but the scheme has now been extended to include all post-primary schools in Ireland, acknowledging that many students outside DEIS schools may also be educationally disadvantaged (Keane, 2013).

The majority of students participating in this study come from DEIS schools, with 16 out of 23 coming through Access programmes. However, the need for these schemes in the first place points to significant social class disparities which still exist in relation to access to higher education (McCoy and Smyth, 2011). Higher education expansion, although associated with many benefits, does not, in itself, reduce social class inequalities in higher education (Weis and Dolby, 2012). Social class is still a ‘significant predictor’ for students participating in higher education (Byrne and McCoy, 2017, p. 64). Although the numbers of those with a

third level qualification in Ireland increased from 13.6% in 1991 to 42.0% by 2016 (CSO, 2016), only 10% of those attending higher education are from disadvantaged backgrounds (HEA, 2019). In terms of socio-economic groups, data from 2017/2018 (HEA, 2018), reveals that 19.0% of students come from the Employers and Managers Group, whereas 4.5% are from the Semi-Skilled Group; 3.8% from the Unskilled Group; and 0.3% are from the Agricultural Workers Group. The fact that participation rates in higher education are correlated so strongly with particular social groups is not only unjust but has important implications for the future life pathways of these students, as well as for society in general (McCoy and Smyth, 2011).

As in the UK, the hoped-for decline in *'relative'* social class inequalities associated with higher educational expansion has not materialised (Lynch and Crean, 2018, p.141, italics authors' own), with many arguing that the gap has indeed widened (Manstead, 2018). For those disadvantaged students who are successful in accessing university, the illusion of university choice is discussed in the next section.

3.3 Choosing a University

Choosing the university that best meets the needs of an individual is complex, and the limitations placed on more disadvantaged students exposes the 'messy reality' of higher education choice and the underlying inequalities which pervade the whole process (Reay, 2018, p. 528). Making an informed choice necessitates students with vastly differing resources having to find their way through and decode a wide range of complex educational fields, highlighting the societal inequalities that underpin these stratified choices (Callender and Dougherty, 2018; Reay, 1998; 2005). Prior knowledge of the higher education system confers advantage on those who have insider information and disadvantages the rest. However, even if students are aware of the differences between various higher education colleges and universities, they still may not be in a position to make a choice (Callender and Dougherty, 2018).

Factors such as finance, job constraints, geographical location, and family commitments have been identified as playing an important part in higher level decision-making for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Reay, 2002), but it is often the cumulative processes of intergenerational systemic and educational disadvantage and inequality, obvious at much earlier stages in the educational cycle, that manifest as lack of choice or ability at the point of entry to higher education (Reay, 2018; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Clancy, 2001). Lack of social and academic confidence, often the legacy for many disadvantaged students on completing their schooling, can impact on the type of third level institution many feel comfortable applying to (Reay, 2017).

Unlike middle-class students who have a better understanding of the nuances of choice, 'choosing' a third level institution is not a straightforward process for disadvantaged students. Widening participation in higher education in recent years has tested the exclusivity and status of having a third level qualification, necessitating a shift in focus from how much education one has to the type of education that best aligns with labour market outcomes (Byrne and McCoy, 2017; McCoy and Smyth, 2011). Obtaining a degree is no longer enough. It must be the right kind of degree, from the right kind of institution, with the 'right kind of social and cultural capital' (Brennan, 2002, p. 77). Choosing the right kind of higher-level institution implies a certain agency, whereas freedom to choose is relative and choices are shaped by both classed and personal factors (Reay et al, 2005), so that 'choice' for disadvantaged students is often a process of discovering what they cannot have (Reay, 2002).

The centrality of class to student identity in higher education is explored in the next section.

3.4 Class Identities and Experiences in Higher Education

3.4.1 Introduction

Class is central to the identity and experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education, impacting on how students perceive themselves in relation to their peers (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). Savage (2000) maintains that social class identities are to be found in the different practices of class, which Reay (2005) argues impact on how someone feels and thinks.

Students from lower socio-economic groups have demonstrated resilience and academic success in making it as far as university, and yet many still experience considerable difficulties and challenges, particularly in their first year (Reay, 2009). Almost all of the working-class students in Reay's 2009 study, as in this research, experienced anxieties in adapting to middle-class norms and unfamiliar fields, and in a habitus significantly at odds with their own (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). The challenge of managing new identities is now explored.

3.4.2 New Identities

Unlike middle-class students, working-class students can experience a lot of confusion about the kind of self they are looking for once in university (Reay, 2018). When they do access higher education, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often find it difficult negotiating a balance between their new identity and their old one (Reay, 2011). Academic success can often be as problematic as academic failure (Reay, 2002; 2005), with many working-class students feeling conflicted about 'becoming educated', so that issues around belonging in relation to family, friends, and the self, can emerge (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p.320). There is always the fear that succeeding in university, particularly if away from home, will result in the rejection of their new identities by friends, family and community (Reay,

2001; 2005; Reay et al, 2005; Reay et al, 2010). Moving away either geographically or culturally from your family of origin can manifest in great anxiety and feelings of 'loss, guilt and fear' (Reay, 2005, p.921). Working-class students may consequently feel ambiguous about their achievements, particularly if they perceive success as removing them further from an authentic self, what Bourdieu called the 'feelings of being torn that come from experiencing success as failure, or, better still, as transgression' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 510).

Risk and fear are implicated in these new social and psychological identities (Callender and Dougherty, 2018), and for many working-class students at higher level, finding yourself can all too often feel more like 'being found out' and being revealed as having 'very little value' (Reay, 2011, p. 343). Academic failure can also be added to the burden that students have to carry, and just as in school, can often become internalised as a personal failure (Reay, 2018), rather than a failure of the system (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). In contrast to the fears of working-class students, the cultural, social and academic capitals that middle-class students bring to university serve to alleviate feeling of guilt or shame (Reay, 2018). In fact, the feelings that middle-class students experience in university are 'overwhelmingly optimistic' (Reay, 2005, p.922). The anxieties of working-class students, are often compounded by the knowledge that the cultural capital that they bring to the middle-class habitus of university is not perceived as of equal legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984). Reay (2017) also contends that the more negative responses of the working-class students are as much about the attitudes and behaviour of the middle-class students as they are about the working-class students' responses. Possessing a different class identity and cultural capital to the middle-class students can often manifest in a strong awareness of 'one's place' in the social hierarchy, a concept which is now discussed in a little more detail.

3.4.3 Knowing One's Place

While working-class students in university are privileged compared to their peers outside the system, they can become 'marginalised' once in higher education (Reay, 2018, p. 532). Despite the numerous benefits, attending higher education is still a high-risk enterprise for working-class students (Reay, 2003). Previous experiences of exclusion can mean that working-class young people in higher education can self-exclude by anticipating and placing boundaries around their horizons and expectations (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; Reay, 2018). It is not surprising that many working-class students tend to stick together on campus in a form of self-segregation, thus limiting students' capacity to build social capital (Keane 2011). Many socio-economically disadvantaged students do not see themselves as truly belonging in the university world, which they perceive to be for more middle-class students, revealing a self-concept that does not align with the middle-class student population (Hannon et al., 2017). The different worlds that both social groups come from is now explored.

3.4.4 Different Worlds

Compared with their working-class peers, middle-class students are better prepared and know what to expect with regard to university. As well as parental guidance, Crozier et al., (2008) found that middle-class students are 'groomed' for university life and success. Once more, Bourdieu's (1990c) contention that the middle-classes have adequate capitals to understand and determine the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990c) is highlighted. Working-class students, once in university, have to learn to cope with adapting to middle-class worlds and the tacit rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1990a) and often feel overwhelmed and intimidated as a result (Bourdieu, 1990c).

For working-class students, university life is generally not the centre of their lives as they negotiate various demands on their time around employment schedules and commitments

to their families, according to a study by McCoy et al., (2014). This study also identified some of the difficulties that these students experience at higher level, including difficulties with the academic standard expected of them; issues around the course chosen; and difficulties meeting deadlines and managing their workload (ibid. p. 187). An unfortunate circularity also emerged in that those students who had to work part-time, reported more academic challenges than other students, and these challenges led to more difficulties with course completion.

One significant challenge concerns the likelihood of these students remaining and progressing through higher education (Clancy, 2001). The topic of student retention is now considered, exploring some of the issues recognised as being part this challenge: finance, attainment levels, and social segregation and isolation.

3.5 Flight Risk

Student non-completion in higher education is generally understood in terms of a multiplicity of factors (Green and Baird, 2009), however research points to a strong correlation between higher points in the Leaving Certificate Examination and retention in higher education (Blaney and Mulkeen, 2008). Better academic results on leaving school advantage more middle-class students, and reinforce the significant role that educational attainment plays in contributing to a student's success of failure in higher education (HEA, 2015).

The highest rate of non-progression in higher education in Ireland, at 16%, was found among 'Unskilled and All Others gainfully employed or otherwise' and the lowest rate of non-progression was among farmers, at just 8%, with young males less likely to progress than females (HEA, 2018, p. 9). The correlation between socio-economic background, achievement and retention is clearly evident in these stark rates.

3.5.1 Finance

Constrained financial circumstances are understandably more likely to be identified as a reason for non-completion among students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and financial barriers can add significantly to social inequalities in relation to higher education participation (McCoy and Byrne, 2011). Those students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who do participate in higher education are strongly reliant on state grants, with students on the threshold of grant eligibility being particularly disadvantaged and marginalised (McCoy, 2010a). The increased costs associated with participation in higher education, in tandem with commuting and cost of living, frequently result in lower income students choosing to live at home and working during term time, allowing less time for academic and social engagement and a greater chance of withdrawal (McCoy and Byrne, 2011).

3.5.2 Social Isolation

Less time for social engagement, in tandem with differences in cultural capitals, can lead to issues around social isolation for many students coming from more disadvantaged backgrounds (National Forum, 2015). Unlike their privileged peers, the majority of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds attending higher education are often the first member of their family or community to do so, and must manage both the personal and academic transitions without the guidance of family or friends to support them (National Forum, 2015). The lack of a socially valued cultural capital can serve to isolate students socially and reinforce social inequalities (Hannon et al., 2017). Lacking access to these highly valued middle-class social and cultural capitals can also result in more limited educational outcomes for students from lower socio-economic groups (Reay et al, 2005; 2009; 2010), reinforcing the reality that it is middle-class cultural capital that is the currency within the higher educational system (Bourdieu, 1993).

Social isolation can be an important factor in students' decisions to withdraw from higher education (Yorke and Longden, 2008). A sense of fitting in is paramount in terms of retention, and students need to feel that they rightfully belong in higher education and that they are equally valued beyond the academic (Maher and McAllister, 2013). The unfortunate reality is that even the most academically gifted working-class students will experience different and more challenging transitions to higher education than their middle-class peers (Reay, 2018).

3.5.3 Conclusion

Social class continues to shape the experiences of working-class students at higher level with students often speaking of class in terms of respect and the absence of same; of hierarchies of power and culture, and of income disparity when compared to middle-class students (Finnegan and Merrill 2017). Reay (2018) highlights how class plays out affectively for disadvantaged students in the unfamiliar setting of higher education, and how, to varying degrees, these students are plagued with anxieties, insecurities, and a lack of any sense of entitlement to be there. Many students experience an acute sense of being out of place, and a strong feeling of arriving in a place where they do not belong (Bourdieu, 1992). Those who are privileged and have additional resources are able to strategise ways of 'coming out on top' (Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller, 2013, p. 741), whereas students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, like the students in this study, do not have an innate understanding of the rules of the game and are instead confronted with limitations and constraints (Burke, Scurry and Blenkinsopp, 2020).

It is striking that above all the fears and anxieties experienced by disadvantaged students in higher education in Reay's (2005) study, that the strongest emotion associated with working-class disadvantage, was shame; shame of failure, of not being the right sort of person, of being exposed as 'not good enough' (p. 923). It is clear that the systemic inequalities of

social class can manifest just as strongly on an individual level so that social class can infiltrate a core sense of oneself (Reay, 2005, p. 924). The inequalities of social class damage all of us, but they are especially damaging to the most vulnerable, the working-classes, who carry the heaviest loads (Reay, 2005). The next phase of the educational journey is Initial Teacher Education and this is considered in detail in the next part of this literature review.

3.6 Initial Teacher Education

3.6.1 Introduction

Policies on widening participation (WP) in Ireland initially focused on increasing access to under-represented groups in higher level education (HEA, 2004) but did not include post-graduate education (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch, 2018). This contrasted with international WP policies which had prioritised access to the professions at post-graduate levels for some time (Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles, 2015). In Ireland, research on progression to postgraduate study for students from under-represented groups is still comparatively 'under-explored' (Keane, 2013, p. 35). In 2008, 34% of students with a Bachelor's degree went on to post-graduate study (HEA, 2010b) but there is no information regarding what proportion of these students are from under-represented groups (Keane, 2013).

The lack of research on students from lower socio-economic groups in post-graduate education translates into an equal lack of research on students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Initial Teacher Education (Keane and Heinz, 2015). What is known, however, is that these lower socio-economic groups are under-represented in ITE in the Irish context (Heinz, 2013). Despite an ongoing emphasis on including more socio-disadvantaged groups in the teaching profession (Teaching Council, 2011), hardly anything is known of the experiences of disadvantaged students in ITE (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018, p. 72), with no subsequent understanding of how these students actually 'live' social class (Reay, 2005), or how 'classed

practices' impact the lives and identities of teachers every day (Maguire, 2005b, p. 428). The aim of this research is to remedy this omission.

3.6.2 The Need for Diversity

Discourse on better equity of access in higher education has been echoed in the desire for a more diverse and representative teaching profession (Heinz, 2013; Conway, Murphy, Rath and Hall, 2009; Teaching Council, 2008; Zumwait and Craig, 2008). In 2002, the Advisory Group on Post-primary Teacher Education (Department of Education and Science), recommended that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes for the National Universities of Ireland (NUI) should have a more diverse student intake, resonating with similar statements from the Teaching Council (2011a). The desire for a more diverse teaching population reflects a key objective of the Irish National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015-2019, HEA), which is to 'increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education' (HEA, 2015, p. 26). Selection for these education programmes is through a competitive points system (Keane and Heinz, 2015), and demand for places has always exceeded supply (Aitken and Harford, 2011),

ITE in Ireland has undergone substantial change in the past decade. On foot of the Sahlberg, Munn, and Furlong report on the structure of ITE provision in Ireland (2012), nineteen state-providers of ITE were consolidated into six university-based centres. Further change came in the extension of all ITE programmes to four years for all undergraduate programmes and two years for post-graduate programmes (Keane and Heinz, 2015, p. 283). However, these changes were structural and organisational, and were not mirrored in any compositional changes in the homogeneity of the teaching population.

3.6.3 Lack of Diversity in Teaching

The homogeneity of the teaching profession is an international phenomenon (Schleicher, 2014) as well as a national one (Heinz and Keane, 2018). Although data on the ethnicity of entrants and applicants to ITE are not part of the HEA collection base, Keane and Heinz (2016) note a disproportionate representation of White Irish amongst postgraduate and undergraduate ITE entrants when compared to the general population in Ireland and new entrants to universities. Keane and Heinz (2015) point to the lack of information on student teachers with disabilities in Ireland but cite research from the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) conference papers (2012) which note the 'small yet significant' increase in those students with disabilities entering education programmes in the 2013/14 year (p. 285).

In relation to social class and socio-economic groupings, research has confirmed that there is an underrepresentation of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE in Ireland (Heinz, 2013). A survey carried out by Heinz (2013) on student teachers' social class backgrounds found that 69.8% of their fathers and 56.8% of their mothers were professional, managerial and technical or non-manual workers (p.144), highlighting the under-representation of lower socio-economic groups, the privileging of others, and the overall inequality at the core. In Ireland, the lack of diversity in the teaching profession as a whole is significant, resulting in a teaching population that is predominantly white, middle-class, dominant religion and female (Heinz and Keane, 2018; Harford and O'Doherty, 2017; Keane and Heinz, 2015). These demographics contrast strongly with the diversification evident in the school-going population due to immigration and the impact of the 'Celtic Tiger' (Devine, 2011). From an equity of access viewpoint, the homogeneity of ITE populations in Ireland is an important issue.

The importance of having a more diverse teaching profession generally, but particularly for certain under-represented groups such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, was highlighted in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP, 2015-2019, HEA, 2015). A government fund of €2.4 million, administered through the HEA and operationalised through the Programmes for Access to Higher Education (PATH): Strand 1: Equity of Access to ITE) (2017-2020), was established in 2016 to help bring about this diversification in Irish ITE. Various projects connected with this initiative are now underway in many centres for ITE in order to deliver on greater diversification and an increase in numbers from those under-represented groups into the teaching profession. The latest National Access Plan (2022) acknowledges that despite some targets being achieved, 'significant challenges remain' and references the fact that only '10% of students in higher education come from disadvantaged areas' (HEA, 2022, p. 5), a participation rate which has implications in terms of ITE diversity. The small number of participants and the 'largely self-reported evidence base' are recognised limitations of the programme (Keane, Heinz and McDaid, 2023, p. 227).

Despite a focus on greater diversification in ITE, moving from a one year Higher or Professional Diploma in Education to a two-year Professional Masters in Education witnessed a significant decrease in participation rates from the Unskilled Group and an equal rise in NUI entrants during the same period from the Employers and Managers Group, the highest socio-economic group (Keane and Heinz, 2015). The most socially and economically disadvantaged groups would appear to be more negatively impacted in accessing ITE than the more privileged group, with many disadvantaged students having to work long hours off campus, or defer their second year in order to save for fees and living costs, or withdraw completely from the programme (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018).

3.6.3.1 *Benefits of Teacher Diversification*

Keane and Heinz (2015) maintain that there are two important reasons for diversifying the teaching population in Ireland: the first concerns 'equity of access', and the second pertains to the educational and societal benefits that come from having a more diverse teaching population. Much of the discourse on the benefits of including under-represented groups in the teacher profession tend to centre on these teachers being role-models for other minority groups, both inside and outside the classroom (Villegas and Irvine, 2010). The little research that there is in the area of working-class teachers in ITE suggests that teaching pupils from similar backgrounds may have a positive educational impact (Keane and Heinz, 2015; Devine, 2011) However, there have also been caveats about placing a burden on these teachers to be the 'panacea' for other students like themselves (Heinz and Keane, 2018, p. 525). The following section considers some of the challenges faced by many disadvantaged students when they arrive ITE.

3.6.4 Fitting In

Research has shown that many students from lower socio-economic groups who access ITE have had more negative than positive experiences of their own schooling (Keane, Heinz, and Lynch, 2018). Feeling that they belong is extremely important for these particular groups, especially if their experiences of education have been less than positive, and feelings of inadequacy and discomfort are brought with them (Reay, 2011). Although relatively little is known in Ireland about the experiences of student teachers from lower socio-economic groups (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018), research in the UK by Maguire (2005, a, b) has found that students from lower socio-economic groups have to fight their way through ITE, and can experience challenges trying to negotiate this middle-class world of teaching successfully.

Maguire highlighted how many of these students worried about not fitting in, often feeling inferior and lacking in confidence, or feeling marked and differentiated by their accent or dress, while also experiencing a sense of guilt about losing their class culture.

3.6.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the many ways that the cumulative effects of social-economic background and educational inequalities continue to manifest in the experiences of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education and ITE, and that relative inequalities still persist despite more students from disadvantaged backgrounds now attending higher education (Lynch and Crean, 2018), It is clear that opportunities are better for some students than for others (Reay, 2018; McCoy et al. 2014), and that different capitals play a central role in maintaining and reproducing class hierarchies and privilege (Bourdieu,1998), with many disadvantaged students finding themselves part of an 'uncomfortable minority' in higher education (Budd, 2016, p. 116).

The inclusion of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE demands more than providing these students with access into the teaching profession. Research is needed on how ITE is actually lived and experienced by these particular social groups. Given the significant influence that social class has on student teachers' development and on their teacher identities, Jones (2019) maintains that social class should be afforded a prominent position in all ITE programmes, and support should be offered to those who my feel that they are 'constrained by their class' (p. 607). Little is known of what it feels like to be always positioned as part of a minority on the 'wrong' side of the social divide or how this separation is experienced by students. The truth is that how these students experience any aspect of ITE, and how they are affected by their experiences, remain under-researched (Keane, Heinz and Lynch,

2020). The aim of this study is to provide some understanding of what it means to be one of these students.

Chapter 4 *Methodology*

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of ITE for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (**Research question 1**) and how the students navigated these experiences (**Research question 2**). Exploring how the prior educational experiences of the students shaped their experiences of ITE (**Research question 3**), acknowledges the inseparability of individuals from the world in which they live, and contextualises the first two research questions. This orientation towards understanding the richness and complexity of individuals' experiences reflects a particular ontological and epistemological positioning within the qualitative paradigm. Capturing the meaning of some of the 'messiness of real life' and putting a framework and interpretation on it, is what qualitative research is interested in (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 20).

What people say really matters and this focus on words as data is what differentiates qualitative research from quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2018). A qualitative approach to research places an emphasis on what something means from participants' perspectives (Flick, 2015). Participants in a research study come from and live within certain social, economic and cultural contexts and these are acknowledged as relevant in qualitative research. Understanding the experience of ITE for the students in this study means understanding those contexts and how they shaped the students' experiences.

The methodology chapter is divided into two sections. **Part 1** discusses the choice of methodology and its philosophical underpinnings, and **Part 2** looks at how this theory was put into practice. **Part 1** began by restating the research questions, and continues now with an exploration of the interpretive paradigm, within which hermeneutic phenomenology is to be found.

4.2 Approach

As the central aim of this study is thus to provide insights into the ontological question of what it is like to be a student from a disadvantaged background on a post-graduate programme in initial teacher education, and as it is the question asked that determines the methodology used and guides the researcher (Mills and Birks, 2014), phenomenology was selected as the most suitable means though which a genuine understanding of human experiences can be discovered (Usher and Jackson, 2014). Phenomenology is at once a philosophy, a methodology and an approach (Dowling, 2007; Farrell, 2020). Within phenomenology, there are different perspectives and consequently different methods, mainly grouped into two types: descriptive (developed by Edmund Husserl) and interpretive phenomenology (developed by Martin Heidegger), (Sloan and Bowe, 2013). Hermeneutics or the 'art of interpretation' (Kakkori, 2009, p. 22), a qualitative research method with its own particular philosophical orientation and history, was chosen as the most appropriate way to create meaning and gain the depth of understanding needed for making sense of these lived experiences.

4.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology and the Interpretative Paradigm

Hermeneutic phenomenology, the methodology in this study, is viewed as sitting within the interpretive paradigm (Cohen et al., 2018). Paradigms are the fundamental beliefs that guide the action of a research study and reflect the worldview of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The concept of paradigm is drawn from a postscript in Kuhn's book (1970), in which he describes a paradigm as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques....' shared by members of a scientific community (p. 175). Paradigms are the net that captures the combination of epistemology, ontology and methodology (Guba, 1990). Different paradigms have different assumptions about reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology), each providing a framework of shared views about the world and reality. Each of the four main research paradigms, Positivism; Interpretivism; Critical Theory; and Postmodernism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), provides a rationale for the type of questions it can best answer and the various research designs and methods that it uses (O'Donoghue, 2007).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is chosen as the best approach to answer research questions which seek to understand and make sense of individuals' experiences, which in this study concerns disadvantaged students' experiences of ITE. Research is not neutral and choosing this approach says something about the worldview and beliefs of the researcher, both what they believe constitutes reality (ontology), and how knowledge can be 'created, acquired and communicated' (epistemology) (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). The researcher's ontological beliefs about the nature of reality are revealed in their choice of methodology, which in this study is that of multiple realities, individually constructed, where reality is not 'out there' but is 'local and specifically constructed' (Laverty, 2003, p. 5). The interpretivist paradigm, therefore, rejects the notion of a single knowable reality in favour of multiple realities, even for the same person, in favour of realities that are subjectively perceived, revealing a relative ontology (Braun and Clarke, 2014). As reality is mediated by individuals' worldviews, beliefs and backgrounds, there is no one truth or way of knowing, thus revealing an epistemology that is subjective (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016), and reflects the unique ways in which each student in this study constructs their own reality.

Choosing hermeneutic phenomenology also reveals a focus on uncovering and describing 'the internal meaning structures of lived experience' (Van Manen, 2016, p. 10), and was seen as the most appropriate means of generating new understandings of complex social phenomena. Rationality is the belief that things can be made intelligible and that it is possible to understand experiences and each other (Sloan and Bowe, 2013). The researcher believes that the world of the students in this study can be understood subjectively through the eyes of the participants themselves, coming from 'the inside, not the outside' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 17), and within cultural and historical contexts (Creswell, 2009). As the goal of interpretive methodology is to understand social phenomena in the real world, the approach is inductive rather than deductive, with theory deriving from data rather than driving it (Grix, 2004). Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen over other interpretive methodologies such as Ethnography, Grounded Theory, Narrative Analysis and Case Study, as the best philosophy and methodology for understanding and describing the lived experiences of the participants in

this study. The philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics will be reviewed in the next section.

4.4 Philosophical Underpinnings

Given that it is the 'major philosophical foundations' underpinning the various qualitative methodologies that differentiates one from the other (Mills and Birks, 2014, p. 23), an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics is essential before undertaking the actual 'doing' of a phenomenological study (van Manen, 2016).

As a philosophy, the phenomenological movement in Germany is associated with three key philosophers: Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), generally considered the founder of modern phenomenology (Kakkori, 2009), and the person who transformed it (Moran, 2000); Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), his student; and Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2000), who was Heidegger's student. Both Heidegger and Gadamer were seen as central to the development of hermeneutics. Although different, they all share certain beliefs about the human subject and the importance of the lived experience in all its richness (Moran, 2000). This section starts with a look at the contribution of Edmund Husserl.

4.5 Edmund Husserl

Phenomenology is about studying and understanding the individual (van Manen, 2016), specifically 'understanding "phenomena" or "things" as they appear to, or are experienced by others' (Farrell, 2020, p. 2). Husserl's interest was in investigating the richness of these lived human experiences, and he accentuated the importance of trying to 'get to the root' of understanding the uniqueness of human beings 'in their entirety and in their proper context' (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 22). Husserl had an interest in the uniqueness of phenomena, in the essence of what makes something what it 'is' and without which the phenomenon would not be what it is (Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology provides a means whereby the true nature of a lived phenomenon can be studied and understood (van Manen, 2016), captured in Husserl's phrase *Zu den Sachen*, meaning both 'to the things themselves'

(Moustakis, 1994, p. 26) or 'let's get down to what matters', as interpreted by van Manen (2016, p. 184).

Philosophical understandings of the nature and understanding of phenomena vary in their interpretation and emphasis, and Husserl's descriptive or transcendental phenomenology, which sought to 'describe how the world is constituted and experienced through conscious acts' (van Manen, 2016, p. 184), attracted controversy and differences of opinion over the years (Finlay, 2008), including criticisms from Heidegger. For Husserl, understanding phenomena must include an approach that takes how things appear to an individual's consciousness into account. The essential and inseparable role of the subjective experience and consciousness in any full understanding of the nature of knowledge, and in all descriptions of the world, is core to phenomenology (Moran, 2000).

4.5.1 Intentionality

To illustrate how individuals and their world are inextricably connected, Husserl argued that all consciousness or thinking is fundamentally intentional as it is 'always conscious of something' (Mills and Birks, 2014, p. 182). One loves, fears, sees, imagines, doubts, judges, recollects something or someone (Zahavi. 2003). The manner in which people relate to the world is often so fundamental and normal that it is never reflected on. Making visible this domain of ignored taken-for-grantedness and breaking 'our familiar acceptance of it' is one of the tasks of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. xii).

Positivist scientists presuppose this fundamental relationship to the world and thus this natural attitude is never questioned. Phenomenologists, on the other hand, seek to understand and make visible how individuals relate to and experience the world (Zahavi, 2003). This is done by slackening the 'intentional threads that attach us to the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. xvi) and analysing the beliefs, theories, and understandings of the world that are already embedded in our consciousness, before considering the role of consciousness in our understanding of these things (Moran, 2000).

4.5.2 Lifeworld

A key concept of Husserl's was his identification of the 'lifeworld' or *lebenswelt* (Moran, 2000). The idea of the lifeworld as the world of lived experiences (van Manen, 2016), originated from Husserl's text *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1970a) where he described the lifeworld as the world of immediate natural experience, of pre-reflection, before it is categorised or conceptualised through reflection. Husserl used the term 'natural' to denote 'what is original and naïve, prior to critical or theoretical reflection' (van Manen, 2016, p. 182). When an individual is in the flow and act of a lived experience, it is being lived fully. As soon as awareness of the experience comes to mind, the lived experience has been exited and it is being observed from an objective perspective. For Husserl, all abstractions are secondary to the primary, natural lived experience.

4.5.3 Reduction

Husserl maintained that as the foundation upon which science inquiry rested had been taken for granted, and as the assumptions and beliefs of the scientist were never questioned, the very framework of science itself was compromised (Cogan, 2021). In order to provide a solid basis for science, Husserl maintained that we must return to the things themselves, and the procedure whereby this is achieved is the phenomenological reduction**,** which involves a certain reorientation and change of perspective and attitude to the world.

There are two internal, complementary moments in the phenomenological reduction as delineated by Husserl, which he sees as a leading back (a re-duction) and an enquiry into consciousness. One is the epoche **(**Greek for abstention) where we suspend or bracket our unquestioning, taken-for-granted attitude to the world, our natural attitude (Cogan, 2021). This technique is performed in tandem with the reduction proper, which interrogates our assumptions about knowledge, the world and man. It is a recognition that our unquestioned acceptance of the world is, in fact, an acceptance by us. It is the suspension or bracketing of the unquestioning acceptance of the world, in tandem with the insight from outside of ourselves of this acceptance, that leads to a transcendental insight **(**Cogan, 2021).

Husserl saw this new 'seeing' as radical in that an individual's core beliefs, orientation and perspective about the world and the foundation of knowledge, have been radically altered. This new knowing attitude and perspective on the world strips away contaminated knowledge from our old beliefs, values and presuppositions, thus liberating us to access the pure world of the essence (or eidos, Greek for shape), and providing a rigorous foundation for knowledge (Cogan, 2021). The hope for Husserl was that the phenomenological reduction would provide the 'groping entrance into this unknown realm of subjective phenomena' (Husserl, 1936/1970, p. 161).

4.5.3.1 *Phenomenological attitude and reduction*

Discovering the lifeworld of individuals through the phenomenological reduction suggests a phenomenological attitude, a type of thinking that is necessary if this type of research is to be undertaken (van Manen. 2016). The phenomenological attitude involves a 'radical transformation' in approach where we 'strive to suspend presuppositions' (Finlay, 2008, p. 2), and instead question the world and our taken-for-granted understanding of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Phenomenological reduction orientates the researcher to maintaining an attentiveness and openness to the world which in turn facilitates an understanding of the phenomenon being researched (van Manen, 2011b).

The next section looks at Heidegger's contribution to phenomenology and how his approach differs to that of Husserl's.

4.6 Martin Heidegger

4.6.1 Introduction

Martin Heidegger, a student, assistant and colleague of Husserl's at Freiburg University, was unhappy with Husserl's cognitive approach to understanding, and instead saw human beings as busy trying to live their lives, immersed in cares and worries (Moran, 2000, p. 228). Heidegger was less interested in Husserl's epistemological focus on what it is possible to know about the world and more concerned with the ontological question of what it means to actually be in the world (Farrell, 2020). Heidegger considered hermeneutics as a means of

revealing the meaning of Being, of things 'as they show themselves in themselves' (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 58). With his particular interest in hermeneutics, a philosophy originally oriented towards the interpretation of religious texts and scriptures, Heidegger facilitated the development of hermeneutic phenomenology**.** The term embraces both the hermeneutical interpretation of the written text alongside the phenomenological study of being as it is understood through the lived experience.

Heidegger's seminal publication *Being and Time* (1927), critiqued many aspects of Husserl's work. Although the phenomenological focus of both Husserl and Heidegger was to 'uncover the life world or human experience as it is lived' (Sloan and Bowe, 2013, p. 1295), there were important differences between them. Husserl perceived the task of transcendental phenomenology as that of describing the lived-world from a detached observer viewpoint, whereas Heidegger's existential phenomenology emphasised man's being-in-the-world, the inseparability of man and world (Stewart and Mickunas, 1974).

4.6.2 Dasein and Being-in-the-world

A fundamental difference between Heidegger and Husserl arose in their interpretation of where meaning and truth were to be found. Husserl sought to describe the essential nature of the world as experienced through conscious acts (van Manen, 2016), whereas Heidegger's main focus was on 'the question of the meaning of Being', on how to make sense of our ability to make sense of things (Heidegger, 1927/1996/2011, p. 2). He rejected the subject/object Cartesian dualism of Husserl, instead espousing the intrinsic inseparability of the human being and the world, using the hyphenated term Being-in-the-world or Dasein (da sein meaning there-being) to emphasise this inseparability (Moran, 2000). Human beings live their ordinary everyday lives in a familiar, instinctive way, and it is in these ordinary lives that the meaning of existence is found (Heidegger, 1927/2011). Heidegger rejected Husserl's contention that human beings are 'originally constituted' in pure consciousness, and maintained that the starting point for him was not consciousness but 'Dasein, that being which we ourselves are' (Korab-Karpowicz, 2021, p. 3).

The concept of Dasein, or this human being-in-the-world, reflected the notion of a living being as inseparable from being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927/2011). Two modes of Dasein were presented by Heidegger, the inauthentic, unquestioning, socially conforming Dasein and the authentic 'selfhood' or 'self-understanding' Dasein, possessing an awareness and understanding of 'that which is mine' (Horrigan-Kelly et al, 2016, p. 3). Heidegger (1927/2011), maintained that this understanding of Being is itself a definitive characteristic of Dasein's Being (p. 32). Dasein is the being that recognises its own being in the world and the being of others: the being of a Being in its being.

4.6.3 Fore-structures of Understanding

Understanding and interpretation are closely aligned for Heidegger. The world, and everything in it, is not something that people have to consciously think about in order to make sense of it; instead, the world is already meaningful (Farrell, 2020). Interpretation of our being-in-the-world 'always pertains to the whole of Being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1929/1962, p. 194), and therefore is always influenced by the prior knowledge that each individual brings to the interpretation. These presuppositions are our fore-structures of understanding: fore-having (what is already known about the phenomenon); fore-sight (the expectations arising from the interpretation of our fore-having); and fore-conception (a prior conceptuality that is brought to interpretation, which may prove to be final or provisional) (Heidegger, 1927/2011, p. 150).

For Heidegger, interpretation is 'never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given' (Heidegger, 1927, 1996, p. 150). It is through these fore-structures of understanding that an opportunity to explore interpretively the being of a being is found, and for Dasein to 'show itself in itself and from itself' (Heidegger, 1927/2011, p. 36). It can be said of Heidegger that he 'opened the ontological Pandora's Box of interpreting being' (Horrigan-Kelly et al, 2016, p. 4), portrayed as Dasein's awareness of its own being (Heidegger, 1927/2011). Heidegger's radical understanding of meaning as already immanent in the world and not something that is found separate to it, as Husserl had proposed, encapsulates the central divergence between both.

4.6.4 The Hermeneutic Circle of Understanding

Unlike Husserl, Heidegger believed that it is impossible to set aside or bracket the way one identifies the essence or meaning of a phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). Instead, Heidegger maintains that all understanding is circular and that all seeking is guided by what is sought, so that even posing a question necessitates some kind of initial preunderstanding or fore-conception of what we want to find out. This pre-understanding, however, is a very 'average understanding' and is infected by our personal biases, presumptions, preconceptions and prejudices (Moran, 2000, p. 236). Faulty as this pre-understanding is, it is what facilitates the questioning in the first instance, despite having the capacity to distort or conceal an answer. Heidegger resolved the issue of trying to learn something new in terms of what is already known by emphasising that no understanding is possible without acknowledging these prior understandings. Instead of attempting to 'bracket' them out, as Husserl had advocated, these prior understandings should be carefully examined (Farrell, 2020), which would then facilitate entry into what Heidegger termed 'the hermeneutic circle' of understanding. This circle, which is not closed off or vicious, allows for a certain backward and forward movement to take place where our questioning advances our understanding thus enabling further questions to be put in the light of this new understanding (Moran, 2000). This circularity of interpretation emphasises the relation of the parts to the whole, with the interpretation of the parts contingent on the interpretation of the whole and vice versa.

Although other philosophers and methodologists such as Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans- Georg Gadamer and Max van Manen followed on from Husserl and Heidegger, refining the two traditional approaches to phenomenology just outlined, it was the philosophical tenets of Heidegger that facilitated an explication and an understanding of the human lived experience. The contributions of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Max van Manen are explored in the next two sections.

4.7 Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer was a student and colleague of Heidegger's in the 1920s and shared his interest in extending hermeneutics to inquire into the importance of meaning and understanding

as a characteristic of the human experience of the world (Gadamer, 1960/ 2004). Gadamer's central thesis was that it is impossible to grasp the 'subject matters' of understanding objectively as they are always already pre-interpreted by the tradition to which the interpreter belongs (Gadamer,1960/2004, p. 272). Consequently, 'bracketing out' our preconceptions, presumptions and prejudices as Husserl had advocated, is not possible.

Gadamer favoured the concept of 'prejudice' to Heidegger's 'fore-having' and 'fore-conception' (Finlay, 2008), and highlighted the productive power of prejudice as the guiding presupposition that facilitated understanding and rendered something meaningful (Leiviska, 2015). Gadamer argues that it was only with the Enlightenment and its emphasis on methodologically certain knowledge that the notion of prejudice as a false judgement came into being, demonstrating a 'prejudice against prejudice' (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 274). As our past and tradition define the grounds on which understanding can take place, Gadamer contends that rather than suspending or ignoring our pre-judging, we need instead to question and explicate our biases and prejudices. Anyone who believes that he or she is prejudice-free and totally objective in research procedures, 'experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 360).

Gadamer used the word 'tradition' to acknowledge the historical situatedness of our understanding, and to emphasise the impossibility of ever being totally free from our prior understandings, beliefs, values and assumptions. Although Gadamer never provides a 'univocal' definition of the concept of tradition, he uses it in several ways, at least two of which can be affiliated with an act of understanding (Leiviska, 2015, p. 583). The first is the ontological meaning of the concept that sees tradition as a 'medium of being in which we already find ourselves' (Leiviska, 2015, p. 586); and the second sees tradition as a limitless source of knowledge about ourselves and the world (Gadamer, 1924/1960, p.280). Each individual brings some preunderstandings or prejudice from his or her history that affect how interpretations are made. Gadamer uses the term 'effective history' to refer to the contextual aspect of our existence whereby we project onto meaning the traditions of the world in which we find ourselves (Chowdhury, 2016). Each interpretation is influenced by the one that went before, which then itself becomes part of the evolution of tradition. Understanding can be seen,

therefore, as being brought about or effected by tradition, as well as having an effect on tradition and facilitating new interpretations in the light of this new understanding in (Gadamer, 1924/1960, p. 296).

Awareness that these new interpretations are also historically situated, and therefore limited, reveals an 'historically effected consciousness', a mode of being which is conscious of the fact that it is an historically effected being and that full awareness of all the ways in which it is 'preconditioned' is not possible (Leiviska, 2015, p. 586). Because of our historical situatedness, we must find a way to challenge and question our prejudices and find meaning. Gadamer believed that it is through our encounters with others that we can achieve a reflective distance from our prejudice.

4.7.1 Horizons

Gadamer uses the term 'horizon' to represent the particular vantage point that we bring to any understanding. We must extend our range of vision from 'what is close at hand' to a broader, superior, truer, more unified and universal horizon for true understanding to take place (Gadamer, 1992, p. 305). The movement that enables this shift in our own horizon and the horizon of the 'other' (meaning text) to take place, and which in turn facilitates the transformation within which true meaning is to be found**,** is explained by Gadamer using the concept of the 'fusion of horizons' **(**Gadamer, 1992, p. 306).

Encounters with the difference or 'otherness' of texts triggers a forward and backward movement, conceptualised by Gadamer as a conversation or dialogue, between the different perspectives of the interpreter and the text. The goal of this dialogue is to search for the 'truth of the subject matter' (Gadamer, 2024/1960 p. 369). In this dialogue or hermeneutical conversation, both interpreter and text are concerned with a common question, and each questions the other in an attempt to locate the meaning of the text, where the skill of seeing what is questionable is ascribed to **'**imagination' (Gadamer (1976)**.** It is in confronting the otherness of the text and 'hearing its challenging viewpoint' that the interpreter's viewpoint and prejudices, his present horizon, now appear in stark relief, and a critical self-awareness comes into being, which would otherwise have remained hidden (Linge, 1976, p. xxi). This to

and fro dialogue allows the text to show itself 'in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269). The projection of our historical horizon is 'simultaneously superseded' by a new understanding (Gadamer, 1992, p. 305). Emerging from this 'buoyancy in understanding' (Linge, 1976, p. xxii), a new unexplored horizon of understanding comes into being, that neither interpreter nor text could have achieved individually. Therefore, it is only by transcending the limited horizons of both interpreter and text that a more profound truth and meaning is achieved (Gadamer, 1924/1960). It is this process of inquiry that provides a space for the understanding that is the fusion of horizons. Meaning for Gadamer is thus revealed as never fixed but 'always emergent, contextual and historical' (Finlay, 2008, p. 9). Our initial horizon or position is assimilated into this new understanding so that we return home 'like travellers', carrying our new experiences with us, but without ever being able to erase our place of origin (Gadamer, 1924/1960, p. 445).

4.7.2 Language

Hermeneutics attests to the centrality of language in how we engage with the world. It is the use of language and the attribution of meaning to phenomena that makes hermeneutic phenomenology interpretive, with the emphasis on the 'process of discovery and the "seeing" of meaning' (van Manen, 2016, p. 79).

Understanding is always linguistically mediated and it is through language that we encounter ourselves and others, and change and expand who we are (Brogan, 2020). The truth of our lived experience is made visible through the medium of language (van Manen, 2016). Hermeneutics, therefore, has to do with our fundamental mode of being in the world and, for Gadamer, 'language reveals *being'* (Sloan and Bowe, 2013, p. 1294, italics authors' own), thus connecting language to ontology rather than epistemology. Genuine understanding of the other through language requires what Gadamer (1924/1960) refers to as 'a moral bond', an openness and engagement with 'the otherness of the other' in the belief that we may learn something (p.354). For Gadamer, 'this is the essence, the soul of my hermeneutics: to understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us' (1992, p. 152).

4.8 Max van Manen

More recently, Max van Manen has continued the development of a hermeneutic approach to phenomenology, viewing it as a human science which studies people (van Manen, 2016). Aligning with those who went before him, van Manen considers phenomenology as an orientation to the lived experience, with hermeneutics describing how one interprets the 'texts' or data of lived experience (Sloan and Bowe, 2013, p. 1296). However, van Manen's phenomenology, while rooted in the philosophical writings and concepts of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, is particularly interested in the professional and practical application of phenomenology, in actually 'doing' phenomenology. Some of the main concepts of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology such as essence and the phenomenological reduction are combined with features of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, evident in van Manen's assertion that every description involves an interpretation. For van Manen, phenomenology is always, in one way or another, 'descriptive and interpretive, linguistic and hermeneutic' (van Manen, 2014, p. 26).

Just like the philosophers who went before him, van Manen's approach to phenomenology is taken with the question of 'what it means to be human' (van Manen, 2016, p. 12). He is interested in the essence of a person, in what is unique and irreplaceable, without which the essence of what 'is' might not be what it 'is' (van Manen, 2014; 2016). For van Manen, phenomenological questions are always concerned with meaning (van Manen, 2014), and uncovering the true nature or meaning of a lived experience or phenomenon is central to van Manen's approach.

While accepting that there is always 'an element of the ineffable to life' (van Manen, 2016, p. 16), van Manen highlights the requirement for interpretation, understanding and description of these human complexities. This orientation towards lived experience in phenomenological research generates knowledge which must then be interpreted textually. Echoing Heidegger and Gadamer, van Manen (2016) sees hermeneutics as describing how we 'interpret the texts of life' (p. 4). These descriptions, analyses and interpretations have the

capacity to evoke an understanding of the truth of the lived experience so that its essential meaning is revealed.

As with the those who preceded him, van Manen, has a keen awareness of the threads that attach people to the world in which they live, and acknowledges that the influence and impact of researchers' personal experiences in both doing research and interpreting texts, is core to his approach in undertaking hermeneutic phenomenology. The practical application of theory, including the 'methodos' that van Manen puts forward for doing a phenomenological study, is explored in Part 2 of this chapter.

Methodology: Part 2

4.9 Putting Theory into Practice

Moving on from the philosophical underpinnings of this study, upon which the theoretical framework of hermeneutic phenomenology is based, **Part 2** looks at the more pragmatic methodological aspects of the study, including sampling, data generation, collection, analysis and interpretation. A discussion of the quality, trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study concludes Part 2.

4.9.1 Introduction

The philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology greatly influence the practice of phenomenology, both in how to think about research, and the conditions necessary for understanding to take place. To do research from a phenomenological point of view is to be deeply concerned with people and the meaning of their lived experiences, constantly questioning the way we experience the world in an attempt to understand meaning (van Manen, 2016). Understanding another person is only possible if we understand what the other means by something and thus all understanding is contingent on 'clarifying the notion of meaning' (Aspers, 2009, p. 3). The way we experience a phenomenon is bound up in the meaning things have in our experience or in our consciousness (Langdridge, 2007). This point is of relevance not only for the participants in this study but also for the researcher. Some issues centring on

the role of researcher subjectivity are now considered, followed by van Manen's practical guide to doing phenomenological research.

4.9.2 Researcher Subjectivity and Prejudice

The practical application of the philosophical reflections on hermeneutic phenomenology place certain demands on the researcher. Researchers do not bring a clean slate to the world they are researching as they are both in the world and of the world they research and cannot stand outside of this world (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 302). A key issue in phenomenological research is the manner in which a researcher's pre-understandings and assumptions could predispose the researcher to interpret the nature of the phenomenon being studied in a particular light before a real understanding of the phenomenon has been grasped. Reflexivity plays a key role here.

4.9.2.1 *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity involves a researcher's critical reflection on the process and practice of the research and on the role of the researcher within the research (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Reflexivity allows researchers to be conscious of how their position, questions or methods may impact on the data (Langdridge, 2007). Reflexivity is part of all interpretative methodologies and by consciously acknowledging and making themselves known in their research, researchers can access their prior experiences as an aid to the analysis and interpretation of data, adding value to the meanings (Sloan and Bowe, 2013, p. 1297). This stance reflects the practical application of the 'pre-understandings', 'fore-structures' and 'pre-judging' of Heidegger and Gadamer. While advocating the importance of maintaining a strong orientation to the phenomenological attitude by keeping an open, attentive mind, reflexivity also acknowledges the impossibility of 'suspending' totally one's pre-understandings, as Husserl advocated, without losing a sense of the authenticity of the researcher. It is better to make any biases, beliefs, presuppositions, assumptions and theories explicit, according to van Manen (2016), so that we can acknowledge them and try to 'hold them at bay' (p. 46).

4.9.2.2 *Researcher's bias and prejudice*

For the researcher, there is a personal and professional history that preceded this study but which informed every aspect of it. My choice of research topic was not neutral but reflected long-held beliefs, assumptions and prejudices about what constitutes inequality and unfairness, socially and educationally. It has always proved problematic for me to remain objective in the face of what I perceived to be some of the gross inequalities that I witnessed at different times throughout my professional career.

I find that I am drawn to the many ways that people struggle emotionally and psychologically with life experiences, particularly those linked to inequality. I have spent decades trying to understand and unravel what lies at the root of these inequalities, while also attempting to make sense of my own history and how it could prejudice and influence my understanding. As a teenager working as a 'gofer' in Dublin's Four Courts, I saw inequality first hand in the number of defendants from a particular class coming before the judges, contrasting with my five years in Trinity College Dublin, where I met very few students who were socially or economically disadvantaged. However, a significant influence in shaping my worldview was teaching teenagers who came from a different background to my own privileged one, because this time it was personal. I could see up close the pain and the struggles of many of these children and their families. Several of the students that I met at third level faced similar challenges, as did many of the clients I counselled. I have yet to find an answer regarding the extent to which my own life experiences and class guilt shape the lens through which I view the world.

I have worked to remain conscious of my prejudices and biases throughout this study, particularly in reflecting on and being open to the experiences of others (Husserl (1936/1970b). I could see that a shared background in education might be an advantage in empathising with the participants in this study. At the same time, I was aware of my own 'leanings' and the importance of not seeing the students solely through the 'professional' eyes of a teacher, therapist or teacher educator. While understanding that no researcher in a hermeneutic phenomenological study is a detached observer, and that subjectivity is valued and embraced

(Finlay, 2008, p. 29), I also acknowledge the importance of being open and transparent about my own beliefs, prejudices and biases as a central component of a quality thesis.

4.9.3 A Guided Pathway for Phenomenology

The fundamental assumptions and characteristics of the theoretical or philosophical framework for this study have been explicated, revealing an overall orientation to life; a particular view of how knowledge is generated; and an awareness of what being 'human' means, all of which are affiliated to a particular research method (van Manen, 2016, p. 27). The methodology thus provides the theory behind a chosen method, where *logos* means the 'pursuit of knowledge' and *hodos* means 'the way', with a certain "*mode"* of inquiry implicit in the idea of 'method' (van Manen, 2016, p. 28). While a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to interviewing and analysing transcripts may reflect many of the procedures of other human science approaches, it is underpinned by a very different methodology.

Despite assertions that the method of phenomenology is that there is no method (Gadamer, 1927/1975), van Manen (2016) acknowledges that a pathway is necessary for researchers who wish to undertake a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Accordingly, van Manen turned to the knowledge of those thinkers who have gone before him as a means of providing an acceptable foundation for human science research. Using these philosophers as a base, van Manen provides a description of some methodological themes and features from which he hopes the researcher can select the most appropriate methods, techniques and procedures to suit a particular research question. A 'methodos' in the form of a set of six guidelines is put forward by van Manen, which Munhall (2012, p. 117) describes as 'the most consistent with phenomenology as a philosophy'. These guidelines are not intended as a linear, stepped framework for inquiry but as guides and recommendations that form the basis of a principled approach to inquiry, which van Manen (2016) sees as a 'dynamic interplay among six research activities' (p. 30).

A summary of the six guidelines that van Manen believes could be a 'methodological ground' (2016, p. 30) for phenomenological research are now outlined, followed by a more detailed exploration of each.

1. Turning to the nature of the lived experience
2. Investigating experience as we live it.
3. Reflecting on essential themes
4. The art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and orientated relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

4.9.3.1 *Turning to the nature of the lived experience*

The starting point for any phenomenological research, according to van Manen, should be the identification of a phenomenon, something that people experience, that truly interests the researcher. This interest is driven by a strong desire to understand the lived experience and reveal its meaning. Understanding this experience, however, is not merely a recalling of the experience but a recalling that captures the essential aspects, essences, or meaning, of this experience. The task of phenomenological research, then, is to creatively construct a feasible linguistic interpretation of the nature of a specific human experience while accepting that it is only one of many possible interpretations.

The orientation towards understanding the lived experience of a study's participants addresses the question of what something is *really* like and involves questioning something phenomenologically. The question at the core of this study is what is it really like to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE. Phenomenological questions are concerned with meaning, specifically gaining 'a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of our everyday experiences' and explicating them (van Manen, 2016, p. 9). The essence of a question is to open up and remain open to all possibilities (Gadamer, 1975, p. 266). The very meaning of research, according to van Manen (2016) is to question something by returning again and again to the phenomenon, to the things themselves, until 'something of its essential nature' is uncovered (p.43), and some understanding of what it really means to be a PME student from a disadvantaged background, is revealed.

The strong drive to understand the lived experiences of a study's participants is facilitated by a constant reorientation from the theoretical to the individual. The researcher understands

that what is already pre-understood or supposed or assumed about the phenomenon by the researcher needs to be acknowledged and cannot be 'bracketed' out or suspended as suggested by Husserl (1970b). Understanding the lived experiences of the students participating in this study was always guided by an awareness that at the core of a phenomenological study are real people participating with a researcher who is trying to make sense of some aspect of human existence.

4.9.3.2 Investigating experience as we live it

Phenomenological research requires that the researcher has a strong engagement to the phenomenon being studied. The researcher must stand in the midst of lived experiences, turning 'to the things themselves' Husserl, 1911/80, p. 116), and looking again at the world by re-awakening the fundamental experience of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). This re-awakening is facilitated by an active exploration of all aspects of the lived experience being studied, while accepting that whatever is brought to light has already lost some of its original essence. Retrieving the essence of a lived experience requires a willingness to place truth as a guide in our own actions and language, searching for words and phrases with interpretive significance. Since the emphasis in all phenomenological research is always on the meaning of a lived experience, the aim is to come to a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of human experience.

Phenomenological questioning, which looks at the nature of a phenomenon, guides the research: is this what it is really like to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE? The hermeneutic phenomenological interview serves as a method for two separate stages of the research study, the gathering of lived experiences, and the opportunity for reflecting on these experiences. The researcher aims to stay as close as possible to the experience as lived, and does this by trying to enter the lifeworld of the participant and participate in it through the hermeneutic interview.

4.9.3.3 *Reflecting on essential themes*

The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to understand the essential meaning of something, and this involves making the structures of meaning of the lived experiences, the themes, explicit. Understanding a phenomenon is not about facts but about reflecting on the significance of an experience that someone has lived through and shedding some light on this experience.

In addition to personal themes, van Manen identified four lifeworld or existential themes that are common to most human beings. The first is *Lived Space,* and draws attention to the influence of the spaces in which we find ourselves, such as home, college, or more widely, the world or landscape in which we live, and how these spaces can impact on how we feel and where we feel comfortable. Second is *Lived Body (corporeality)* which refers to the phenomenological fact that we are physical beings in the world with a corporeal presence, and that our bodies can both expose or conceal us, whether consciously or unconsciously. Third is *Lived Time (temporality)*. The temporal dimensions of the past, present and future 'constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape' (van Manen, 2016, p. 104). Memories of past experiences, for example, can leave traces that can influence the confidence with which a person speaks, or carries himself or herself, or the language that is used. Under the influence of a more constructive present, the past can be reinterpreted more positively. Fourth is *Live Other (relationality)* which is the lived relationship we have with other people that we encounter in our lives. Although it is possible to differentiate between these four existential themes of lived body, lived space, lived time and lived relationships to others, it is not possible to separate them as they form the complex whole of our lived world, the lifeworld.

4.9.3.4 *The art of writing and rewriting*

Phenomenology concerns uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon as it reveals itself. In order to do justice to the richness of what was once hidden, van Manen advocates writing and rewriting, which is the fourth of his methodological themes. Phenomenological writing differs from other kinds of writing according to van Manen (2016), in that it aims at elucidating some

aspect of the lifeworld, the lived experience, searching for a meaning that is 'usually hidden or veiled' and which resonates with some aspect of our own lives (p. 27).

The task of creating compelling phenomenological descriptions that do justice to the lived experiences of the participants, and say something that is worth saying out of all the challenges and 'messiness' involved in the research, is achieved through a constant writing and rewriting. The essence of a lived experience is complex and the 'crafting of a text' attempts to capture linguistically some aspect of the meaning of this phenomenon which is both unique and universal (Manen, 2016, p. 78). The researcher is challenged to write in such a way that the richness and essence of our everyday experiences, our lifeworld, is captured by those who read the text.

4.9.3.5 *Maintaining a strong and orientated relation to the phenomenon*

In order to develop a strong relationship with the lived experience, the researcher must remain animated by, and orientated towards, the phenomenon, and maintain a constant commitment to the question at the core of the research. Undertaking phenomenological research is 'extraordinarily demanding' on the researcher, as van Manen points out (2016, p. 33), and the researcher is constantly aiming for the strongest, deepest and richest interpretation of the phenomenon possible in the hope of generating original insights. Any slackening of interest or getting side-tracked can jeopardise the integrity of the research producing poorly conceived conceptions.

4.9.3.6 *Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole*

The demands of concentrating on understanding the meaning of a lived experience can become all-consuming and the researcher can lose sight of the overall aim of the study which is to construct an organised, coherent text that reveals new insights about the phenomenon. Each part of the study must be measured against its overall design and structure. The researcher needs to step back and get some perspective on how the parts fit in to the study as a whole and whether each individual part serves its correct function.

A phenomenological approach to research reveals a research process that is strongly intertwined with the writing process. Merely organising and presenting transcripts ignores the central role of the interpretive or hermeneutic task of the study. To keep the research context balanced, the researcher needs to keep in mind both the whole and the parts as the study evolves, echoing Heidegger's hermeneutic circle.

4.9.4 Conclusion

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves an attempt to achieve the 'impossible' by trying to create a 'full interpretative description of some aspect of the lifeworld', while acutely conscious that the reality of a lived life is 'always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal' (van Manen, 2016, p. 18). Acknowledging life's complexity brings an acceptance that there is no absolute and final description of a phenomenon. What van Manen advocates is that we do our best to stay in the world that we share with others and orientate towards discovering the meaning of a particular phenomenon and how it is experienced. The six methods provided by van Manen are not procedural steps to follow slavishly but rather guidelines to help us arrive at a place where lived experiences can be found.

The next section of Part 2 of this methodology chapter looks at issues of sampling, quality and rigour, data generation and analysis and the importance of ethics.

4.10 Sampling

Sampling refers to the different strategies that researchers use to make sure that they have the 'right' kind of cases in their study (Flick, 2015, p. 106). The two main methods of sampling are probability (also known as a random sample), and non-probability (also known as a purposive sample) (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 214). As the purpose of this study is to understand and explore the experiences of a specific cohort of students on a particular ITE programme, purposive sampling was the method chosen, with a view to selecting 'information rich cases' which all shared similar characteristics to the phenomenon being studied (Isaacs, 2014, p. 139). Although purposive sampling is not generalizable to a larger population, this is not its primary concern. The aim of purposive sampling is to generate 'insight and in-depth understanding'

(Patton, 2002, p. 230) from those who are in a position to provide it. Non-probability sampling, with its focus on a wider population from which generalisations could be made, did not align with the purpose of this research.

Students from a Professional Masters in Education (PME) in UCD were purposively selected based on their responses to an initial email distributed to the entire PME cohort across both years of the programme in September 2019. Specific criteria were used to ensure that the participants recruited shared some commonality with the phenomenon being studied (Cohen et al, 2018). The criteria specified in the email were that prospective participants should have come through the UCD Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) or similar; or be in receipt of the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant or other such funding; or have attended a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) school; or have come from a socio-economically disadvantaged background.

In total, 18 PME students replied to the email: 11 PME 1 students; and 7 PME 2 students. All students who replied were identified as belonging to a socio-economically disadvantaged background and had experience of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994), thereby constituting a relatively homogeneous group of participants (Creswell, 2007). Not all participants were Irish or from a dominant religious background, but revealing specific details of nationality or religion would compromise the confidentiality of the participants concerned. Age ranged from early twenties to early fifties.

Snowball sampling, where one participant in a study recommends another, was used in the selection of the first five participants who had just completed their initial teacher education. As the focus of the study was on the participants' experiences prior to or during ITE, all participants in the study were referred to as 'students' for ease of use.

4.10.1 Sample Size

Sample size in qualitative research is affected by a variety of factors, including the purpose of the research; the time and resources available; ontological and epistemological issues; what will have credibility; access to the sample; and the nature of the research, whether qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods (Cohen et al., 2018). The sample sizes in qualitative

research tend to be smaller than those in quantitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2014), but there are no hard and fast rules regarding sample size in qualitative research (Patton, 2002) and it comes down to a question of judgement and what the researcher wants to know.

Although a smaller number of participants is generally recommended when doing phenomenological research, each of the students who responded to the initial email requesting participation in the study had expressed a strong desire to have their voices heard. Out of a deep sense of respect and responsibility for those who had asked to be included in the study, the researcher decided to include all those who replied to the email (n= 18), in addition to the initial five participants who had just qualified as post-primary teachers (n=23). While the researcher felt that including all students would make an important contribution to the richness of the data, there was little understanding, at the time, of the depth and breadth of the undertaking or the time demands involved.

This selection of participants produced three cohorts of students, from three consecutive years of a two-year PME programme for the study: five newly qualified teachers (NQTS), (n= 5); seven students in year two of the programme, (n=7) and eleven students from the first year of the programme (n= 11), providing a total of 23 (n= 23).

4.11 Data

4.11.1 Data Generation

Although van Manen (2016) acknowledges that the concept of 'data' can have a quantitative connotation for many, he also highlights its relevance to the human sciences and phenomenology in that methods such as interviewing involve the collecting of data.

Central to this study is the question of 'voice', specifically providing a voice for those students in ITE from disadvantaged backgrounds who had, up till now, felt unheard. The most suitable method for facilitating student voice in this study was deemed to be the interview. Semi-structured rather than unstructured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate way to ensure that the focus remained on the students' lived experiences in particular contexts. Semi-structured interviews were also felt to be more appropriate than structured interviews as they provided the time and space for the participants to express themselves fully, and to discuss

their experiences in more depth, while also 'approaching reality as faithfully as possible' (Padilla-Diaz, 2015, p.104). Consideration was also given to how the researcher was perceived by the participants in terms of differences in age, class, gender, position and race (Isaacs, 2014). The more comfortable and safe a participant feels in an interview, the easier it is for them to talk about their experiences.

Pre-interviews were conducted by phone with the first five participants, who had just completed the PME. Selected through snowball sampling, each participant recommended the next. These pre-interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes each and, although not recorded, permission was given for detailed case notes to be taken during each interview. Together, these pre-interviews acted as a form of focus group, and proved invaluable in trying to gauge the willingness and openness of potential participants to take part in a study where issues concerning social class, education and inequality were being discussed.

The first formal interview with participants lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each, and took place with the 5 NQTs during the summer of 2020, and during the first trimester of the academic year 2020/2021 with the 18 students who were currently studying on the PME programme. All interviews took place online on Zoom due to the worldwide pandemic, and were recorded aurally, with the participants' permission, in the location of choice for the students. The second shorter interview, approximately 30-40 minutes and also on Zoom, was scheduled to take place at the end of the post-primary academic year to allow for more depth and perspective. Key points were noted during the interviews, and immediately afterwards, detailed notes were made in a field journal.

In summary, 5 NQTs were interviewed once on Zoom (and once each informally on the phone), and the 18 students who were currently participating in the programme were interviewed twice in one year. The total number of participants was 23, producing 40 interviews, as one PME 2 chose not to respond to a request for a second interview (5 NQTS +35 PME students = 40). Despite the different stages of the three cohorts on the programme, there was little or no difference in response from each group. Working on a PME programme in Dublin, and coming from a background in education, psychology, and counselling, facilitated the building of rapport, trust and confidence with the students. Both researcher and

researched were viewed as co-constructers in the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). A brief look at virtual interviewing now follows.

4.11.2 *Virtual Interviewing*

Attitudes to, and experiences of the virtual world have changed radically since the pandemic. However, even before the world changed virtually, telephone or online interviews were no longer being regarded as a 'substitute' for face-to-face interviews but 'as different *types* of interview method, with their own advantages and disadvantages' (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 97, italics authors' own).

Some of the challenges of virtual interviewing identified by Braun and Clarke (2014) looked at establishing trust and rapport with participants; security risk to data; and reading communication cues from participants. The researcher's experience in interviewing, alongside the care that was taken with the data, helped in managing these challenges. Some of the advantages included the students being able to choose both the location and time of their choice; not being limited geographically in terms of accessibility; and not having to spent time and money travelling. In addition, by the time the students participated in both of the interviews, they had become accustomed to all of their academic courses, and all of their teaching placement being conducted online.

4.11.3 Data analysis

One of the many challenges of using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is how to make sense of the data in practical terms. The data generated in this study were analysed using a combination of both Braun and Clarke's method of reflexive thematic analysis (2014; 2022), and the principles of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle. Before the data were analysed, each of the 40 interviews was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. While time-consuming, it allowed for an in-depth familiarity with the data. There was a constant re-checking of each interview, noting pauses, changes in tone of voice, or use of language.

While procedurally close to other forms of qualitative interview and analysis, hermeneutic phenomenology is quite different in that it wants to discover how a particular

phenomenon is experienced. The aim of phenomenological data analysis is to create clear, rich and accessible textual expressions of the lived experiences of a phenomenon in a particular context, such that readers can identify with the themes, which van Manen (1997) explains in terms of structures of experience. It is through the use of hermeneutics that an analysis of participants' data is accomplished, guided by the principles of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle. Before the meaning of any phenomenon is made clear, we must find some starting point, acknowledging that the understanding we have at this stage is just average and is influenced by our biases, prejudices and beliefs (Moran, 2000). The hermeneutic circle represents the process of understanding and interpreting a text, involving the researcher in a continuous forward and backward motion between understanding the individual parts of the text by further reference to the whole of the text (Sloan and Bowe, 2013).

4.11.4 *Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

Of the different versions of Thematic Analysis (TA) available, reflexive TA was chosen as the most 'fully qualitative' and the one 'most suitable for those who want to explore deep, complex, nuanced meaning and understanding' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.241), which is core to this study. Reflexive TA involves the practice of always being critically aware of your role and practice as a researcher. Of relevance to this study, reflexive TA allows for 'social as well as psychological' interpretation of data; it is theoretically flexible and fitted in with an inductively-orientated analysis that centred on patterns of meaning; it works very well for those researching on their own; it is useful for those seeking sophisticated, complex analyses; and it can generate 'unanticipated insights' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 261). There was also conceptual alignment between the theory and the practice of data analysis. Most importantly, while it has an open analytic process, it has clear guidelines. Some of the challenges of reflexive TA relate to the need for a strong engagement with theory before any data analysis takes place, and the fact that there are no precise guidelines for higher-level interpretative analysis. In addition, specific 'craft-skills' are needed for good reflexive TA (ibid. p. 261). As with hermeneutic phenomenology, researcher subjectivity in terms of 'who we are and what we bring to the research' are integral to the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 13).

The six phases of reflexive TA that have been identified by Braun and Clarke (2014; 2022), and which guided this study's data analysis are as follows (2022, p. 6):

1. Dataset familiarisation.
2. Data coding.
3. Initial theme generation
4. Theme development and review.
5. Theme refining, defining and naming.
6. Writing up.

This process is embedded in a much bigger set of 'values, assumptions and practices' which together make up the method, so the process *not* the method but applies the method to make sense of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 6, italics authors' own). The process involved in each phase is now explained briefly (following Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 35).

1. Data familiarisation

The researcher immersed herself in the content of the dataset by reading and re-reading the data and making and noting anything that was felt might be of interest. Transcribing each of the 40 interviews personally helped with this phase.

2. Data coding

The dataset was systematically worked through in detail, focusing on and identifying anything that might be relevant or meaningful, and applying ***code labels:*** 'pithy, analytically-meaningful descriptions' (p. 35). The researcher remained conscious of not merely summarising and reducing the content but of trying to shape some kind of analysis of the data. Codes were then collated and compiled into relevant segments under each code.

3. Initial theme generation

Clusters of codes that appeared to have some common meaning or concept, and which related to the research questions, were then compiled by the researcher, thus identifying shared patterns of meaning across the dataset. At this early stage, for example, patterns connected with 'territory' or being 'foreign' or 'different' or 'not welcome' were noted. This initial theme generation did not 'emerge' from the data but was actively constructed by the researcher, based

on the research questions and the researcher's 'knowledge and insights' (p. 35). Once potential or ***candidate themes*** were identified, all relevant data were collated under each theme.

4. Theme development and review

During this phase, the researcher tested the fit of these provisional themes by going back to the full dataset and checking that the themes made sense in relation to the coded extracts. Focus was placed on whether the themes mirrored the most relevant patterns of meaning across the dataset in terms of the research question. Many of the coded extracts, for example, linked the narratives of the students to themes of not being good enough. The researcher chose to split some themes, join others together and discard those not relevant.

5. Theme refining, defining and naming

The researcher refined her analysis during this phase, ensuring that each theme was built around a strong core concept. To help with this, a brief summary of each theme was written and an appropriate name was sought for each. Many themes were again discarded. After much deliberation and many iterations, the various themes were eventually reduced to three: '*Difference as Deficit'; 'Outsiders on Privileged Territory;* and *'Survival: Hiding and Protecting the Self'.*

6. Writing up

Writing was integral to each phase of the analysis. The goal for the researcher here was to finesse and combine both the analytic narrative with what was important in the data extracts in order to present a persuasive story that addressed the research questions. The findings and discussion of same are to be found in chapters 5 and 6.

The researcher acknowledges here that there is an ethical component to interpretation, and that reflexivity is required to recognise that any interpretation will always be 'partial and imperfect' and reflect our own situatedness (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 219).

4.11.5 Data Storage

All interviews took place online due to Covid 19 restrictions, and were recorded aurally with the participants' consent. Interview data was de-identified and each participant assigned a coded first name and no surnames were used. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and stored

securely in a locked filing cabinet. All field notes, interview notes and consent forms were stored separately to the interview transcripts in individual files. Analysed data is stored on an encrypted, password protected laptop. The data will be stored for five years following completion of the research project as per the university policy, and as outlined in the Code of Good Practice in Research. The researcher is responsible for the archiving of the data.

4.11.6 Quality and Trustworthiness

Sustaining the quality of the entire research process is 'the most crucial aspect' of a hermeneutic phenomenological research study (Kafle, 2011, p. 195). Qualitative research must be as reliable as quantitative research albeit with different canons of reliability (Cohen et al., 2018). In traditional positivist terms, reliability and validity are seen as ways of ensuring that the research is rigorous and not misleading. An accepted understanding of these two terms sees reliability described as 'the extent to which the results generated could be generated again', and validity as referring to whether what the research shows is a true reflection of what it claims to show (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 335).

Qualitative research looks at quality through a different lens. Braun and Clarke (2022) see quality research depending as much on 'immersion, creativity, thoughtfulness and insight' as any notions of 'consensus, accuracy or reliability' (p.268). To reflect this difference, Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward an alternative set of stringent criteria (pp. 17-20), as a way of judging the rigour, now referred to as *trustworthiness***,** of qualitative research. Based on Lincoln and Guba's criteria, Cohen et al., (2018) presented the following (p. 248):

1. **Credibility: associated with integrity and truth value** (replacing the quantitative concept of ***Internal validity***).
2. **Transferability: linked to comparability** (replacing the quantitative concept of ***external validity***).
3. **Dependability: based on consistency** (replacing the quantitative concept of ***reliability***).

4. **Confirmability: connected with neutrality (**replacing the quantitative concept of ***objectivity***).

1. Credibility: truth value (replacing the quantitative term ***Validity or Internal Validity***)

Hammersley (1992) suggests that in qualitative research, certainty should be replaced by confidence or credibility in the results. Braun and Clarke (2014) focus on whether the study is a valid reflection of what it claims to be; Cohen et al., (2018) look at how consistent, dependable, and credible its interpretations and conclusions are; and Dibley et al., (2020) consider the integrity of the research processes.

Credibility is usually 'operationalised' in qualitative research by the accuracy with which the research represents the phenomenon (Morse, 2015, p. 1213). This researcher was guided by quality strategies from several other researchers in the field, with many overlapping, thus reinforcing the credibility of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985), emphasised the importance of prolonged engagement with the phenomenon, ensuring that the data produced thick and rich descriptions. They also advocated persistent observation in terms of the phenomenon and the importance of explicating researcher bias. All of these strategies resonate with van Manen's (2016) approach to doing phenomenological research (see 4.9.3 for identification of guidelines), and are strongly interdependent. Credibility was also reinforced by keeping both a detailed field journal throughout all stages of data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings, as well as a reflexive journal where the researcher could reflect on her research practices, assumptions and challenges.

Braun and Clarke (2022) produced a detailed checklist to ensure that the quality of any reflexive thematic analysis undertaken is 'good' (p. 269). The researcher adhered to each of the 15 points in the checklist of a 5-stage process, some of which are as follows:

1. **Transcription**: All transcripts have been checked throughout for accuracy and have been transcribed in adequate detail.
2. **Coding and theme development**: The coding has been 'thorough, inclusive and comprehensive' with each theme distinctive and defined by a central concept.

3. **Analysis and Interpretation in the written report**: The data has not just been summarised but has been properly analysed and interpreted, telling a 'convincing and well organised story that addresses the research question'.
4. **Overall**: That enough time has been given to complete each phase of the analysis, including returning to and redoing analyses if necessary.
5. **Written report**: The researcher acknowledges their theoretical approach and position, and ensures that there is methodological alignment between theory and practice. The researcher is seen as active in producing themes and that themes do not 'emerge'.

2. Transferability: comparability (replacing the quantitative term ***external validity; generalisability***).

A concern of quantitative research is how generalisable the emergent theory is, captured in the term 'external validity', which refers to 'the degree which the results can be generalised to the wider population, cases, settings, times or situations' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 254). However, in qualitative research, far less emphasis is placed on external validity or generalisability and far more on internal validity or credibility, with external validity seen as irrelevant for qualitative research in many cases (Creswell, 2012).

Transferability is a more appropriate term for qualitative research which can be interpreted as 'the extent to which qualitative research results can be 'transferred' to other groups of people' (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 338). In this research, being from a socio-economically disadvantaged in ITE would allow for the identification of 'possible comparison groups' and would indicate how translatable data might be into other cultures and settings (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 255). Overall, it will be the quality of the data, its richness and thickness, that will determine whether transferability is possible or not (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3. Dependability: consistency (replacing the term ***Reliability***).

Replication is seen as a central factor in reliability in quantitative research where using the same methods, with the same sample, should yield the same results in a different context

and time (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 335). This however, is not the goal in qualitative research, where reliability can be thought of in terms of how trustworthy or dependable the methods of data collection and analyses were (Braun and Clarke, 2014); or the degree of accuracy between what the researcher recorded as data and what actually occurred (Cohen et al., 2018); or the sense in which the findings 'resonate' with what is already known about the experiences (Dibley et al, 2020, p.151). Uniformity is not the objective here as different researchers may have different findings from the same setting. Qualitative research is interested in multiple interpretations or meanings of a phenomenon. Consequently, the term reliability might be better construed as *dependability* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 108-9; Anfara et al., 2002).

The uniqueness of a phenomenon in qualitative research is seen as a strength rather than a weakness, and replication is viewed as neither possible nor appropriate (Cohen et al., 2018), or even desirable (Morse, 2015) in qualitative research. In terms of dependability, aiming for transparency in the research process is a more helpful approach in qualitative research. This researcher has taken care to explicate decisions made, processes followed, and accuracy and reliability in recording and transcribing; personal orientation; theories underpinning the study; and methodology and analyses (Roberts et al., 2006).

A clear audit trail that identifies the process of data production, development, analysis, and interpretation, is advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 318), as a means of assessing dependability (and also confirmability). Acknowledging the back-and-forth, non-linearity of the research process, and echoing Braun and Clarke's advice (2022), this researcher kept a paper trail of lists and tables of codes; examples of coded and collated data; thematic mind-maps and theme definitions (p. 275). And, as already mentioned under 'Credibility' at the start of this section, both a field diary and a reflexive diary were kept and form part of this audit trail. The use of direct, relevant quotation in the study, including specific numerical sentence identifiers for each quote, were also a key part in demonstrating the overall dependability of the thesis.

4.Confirmability: neutrality (***Objectivity***).

Confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness or rigour that must be established in qualitative research and is concerned with the veracity and subjectivity of the research findings, and whether the researcher can reliably demonstrate that their findings were not based on their own 'presuppositions' but were anchored in their data (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 152).The tendency to associate objectivity as a positive within quantitative research is open to question as objectivity is 'always refracted through the researcher's eyes' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 25). Heidegger believed that separating our Being from the world in which we live is not only an impossibility but an undesirable thing to do. Subjectivity is positively valued in qualitative research. In fact, the whole process of qualitative research is, inevitably, a '*subjective'* one (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p. 36, italics authors' own). Again echoing Heidegger, we cannot leave aside our histories, traditions, assumptions, values and beliefs.

The very process of theme development in reflexive thematic analysis sees the researcher as 'a situated, subjective and skilled scholar (who) brings their existing knowledge to the dataset' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 232). In line with Heidegger's assertion that 'every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought' (Moran, 2000, p. 236), the hermeneutic phenomenological approach in this study attested to the researcher's biases and assumptions as not only part of the interpretative process, but 'essential' to the process (Laverty, 2003, p. 7). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as a strength, and as core to the process (van Manen, 2016). This researcher's past experiences, both professional and personal, are seen as inextricably linked to the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon (Miles, 2013).

Providing a rationale for the choices and decisions made in the course of a research inquiry is the criterion used for establishing confirmability. As with the criterion of dependability, leaving an audit trail of the documentation of 'data, methods and decisions made' both during a research project and at the end of the process, is what establishes the confirmability criterion of trustworthiness (Seale, 2004, p. 79).

Before moving on to discuss the ethical aspects of the research, on which all of the above are predicated, a brief overview of the approach taken to the reviewing of literature for this study now follows.

4.12 Narrative Literature Reviews

The narrative approach to reviewing literature for a qualitative research study is sometimes seen as inferior to that of the systematic review, which Greenhaigh, Thorne and Malterud, (2018), define as 'an exhaustive search methodology' used to 'search, screen, select, appraise and summarise study findings to answer a narrowly focused research question' (p. 2). However, they also note that this mechanistic extraction and tabulation of data is not necessarily synonymous with high quality, and advocate instead for narrative review which they define as a 'scholarly summary along with interpretation and critique' (p.3).

A narrative review aligns more fully with the overall approach of this study. The type of 'truth' offered with a systematic review is concerned mainly with generalisable data, whereas the truth associated with a narrative review is more interested in a truth that is plausible and which is based on the understanding and insight of skilled professionals (Greenhaigh et al, 2018). This researcher thus favours the emphasis on thinking and interpretation that are important aspects of a narrative review. Literature was identified through relevant databases and websites, and by the harvesting of cited studies in related literature. Detailed notes were compiled on identified literature throughout the process.

4.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethics and ethical obligations are central to this research. Informed consent was seen as an important consideration in this respect as it is an integral part of any ethical investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). All participants received an *Information Sheet and Consent Form* as soon as participation had been agreed and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research The information sheet contained accurate details on the purpose of the research; the proposed time-line for the interviews; risks and benefits; the right to withdraw during the research process without negative impact; and the protection of confidentiality. Consent forms

ensured that each participant voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Each form was signed in advance of the interview and participants were re-sent the consent form before each interview in case of a change of mind. It was important that each participant was still able to exercise a personal choice in the process. Verbal consent was also sought and audio recorded before each interview. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, different code names that did not reveal any racial or religious identity but were generally accepted in terms of gender identification, were assigned to each student. Any other identifying references such as geographic location or professional details were also removed.

Ethical approval is a prerequisite for any study undertaken in University College Dublin, and approval for this study was obtained through the Ethics Research Committee in UCD and all ethical protocols adhered to. The Research Ethics Exemption Number is HS-E-20-35-Aitken-Harford, which was received on 20th February 2020.

4.13.1 Ethics and Positioning

Braun and Clarke (2022) identify three key concepts that impact on and connect many aspects of a research study, from analysis and interpretation to research design and practice, and which have important implications in terms of the ethics of a study. These three concepts are insider/outsider positions, the Other, and intersectionality (p. 216).

In terms of insider/outsider position, stating whether we are a member or not of the group we are studying may not always be clear-cut. In terms of social and economic advantage, the researcher's privileged background placed her in an outside position, yet she shared a common professional background in education with the students, showing how both identities intersected. Of central importance here was the researcher's awareness that identities are complex and that power, privilege or marginalisation can vary according to the social class to which you belong. The concept of the 'Other' is use to describe a person(s) 'who belongs to a social *group* that is marginalised or otherwise outside the dominant norms' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.217, italics authors' own), such as students from a working-class background. The 'otherness' of these students was not merely about their social difference but also about the power invested in the researcher in terms of how she chose to interpret and represent the

students and the stories of a group to which she did not belong. These considerations were ethical. As a privileged, middle-class white teacher educator, the researcher viewed 'giving voice' to the students in this study as problematic if there was no acknowledgment or questioning of the privileged lives of the middle-classes (Clarke and Braun, 2019a).

Great ethical care was taken throughout this study, particularly in terms of assumptions of entitlement or representing the students one-dimensionally. As the largest cohort of students were recruited from the researcher's place of employment, care was also taken to ensure that the power-imbalance in the unequal teacher-student relationship with the researcher did not academically compromise the participants in any way. No student participating in the research attended the researcher's tutorials or was supervised or assessed in any capacity by the researcher.

4.14 Conclusion

Setting aside the clear signposts of an empirical methodology in favour of a complex and challenging phenomenological one was strongly connected to the aim of the study, which was to understand the lived experiences of ITE for a group of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. This focus on lived experience, associated with the world in which people live, was a key driver in choosing the theoretical framework. With its central emphasis on the importance of the subjective experience, phenomenology acknowledges that truth, reality and meaning are always of relevance *for* someone (Zahavi, 2003). We are inextricably tied to the world in which we live so that 'self and world belong together' (Heidegger, 1999, p. 422). It is through these lived experiences in the world that access to understanding and knowledge are made possible (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology was deemed the best approach in facilitating an authentic understanding of human experiences.

Guided by Husserl's focus on the primacy of the subjective lived experience, by Heidegger's and Gadamer's interpretive philosophy, by van Manen's (2016) practical guidelines for carrying out research in the field, and by Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological approach facilitated the exploration of students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE (*n* 23) in this

study. Emphasis was placed on understanding and uncovering the everyday ordinary lives of these students and how they experienced ITE as students from a socio-economically disadvantaged. This aim was grounded in a central focus of phenomenology which argues that it is in the ‘average everydayness’ of people that the meaning of this existence is found (Heidegger, 1927/2011, p. 65).

Chapter 5 *Findings*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of data generated through 40 in-depth interviews, of around 90 minutes duration each, carried out with 23 students who were on, or had just completed, a post-graduate Professional Masters in Education (PME). For ease of expression, those who participated in this study will all be referred to as PME students or students. A total of 56 hours approximately of audio was recorded over the course of the 40 interviews, which, when transcribed verbatim, resulted in 2,266 pages of written data.

The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to gain an insight into what it means to be a student from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background on a post-graduate Professional Masters in Education, while also shedding a light on the role the students' past educational experiences played in shaping their experiences of ITE. Trying to understanding how these students navigated their experiences was also of central importance.

The opportunity afforded by these interviews, 34 of which consisted of two in-depth interviews with students currently on the PME, allowed students from disadvantaged backgrounds the time and space to tell their own stories in the way that suited them best. In describing their experiences of social class on the PME, certain patterns began to emerge in the way these students structured their experiences. The chapter begins by outlining the main structure, that of a journey, that arose from the PME students' accounts of their lived experiences of social class in Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

5.2 Journey

The centrality to the students' stories of movement from one place to another provided the organising structure of a journey, within which dominant patterns were found that highlighted the students' sense of not belonging on middle-class educational territory, their sense of being different to privileged others, and their challenges in trying to navigate their way through 'already-occupied' territory. Earlier experiences from their schooling were carried as baggage, both conscious and unconscious, by the students, shaping their undergraduate and post-graduate higher education experiences, and posing challenges as the students tried to find a secure footing in a privileged world. The further away each stage on the educational journey was from their home territory, the greater the sense of dislocation and alienation felt by this cohort of students, and the stronger the need to adapt to this different world.

Given the impact that education and social background had on the life experiences that each student brought to the PME, two tables have been provided that clearly identify the type of school each PME student attended at primary and post-primary; whether the school was DEIS, non-DEIS or fee-charging; and their parents' level of education.

Table 1

Interviewee Backgrounds: PME 1

Name	Sex	PME	Mixed Primary School (Y/N)	DEIS Primary School (Y/N)	Fee-Paying Primary School (Y/N)	Post-Primary School- Type	Mixed Post Primary (Y/N)	DEIS Post Primary (Y/N)	Fee-Paying Post Primary (Y/N)	Parents' Education Level
Kirstie	F	1	Y	N	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: c.15 Father: c.15
Neil	M	1	Y (Outside Ireland)	N/A	Y	Religious	Y	N	Y	Mother: c.14 Father: c.14
Joe	M	1	N	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	Y	N	Mother: unsure Father: 14
Martina	F	1	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: c. 14 Father: unsure
Jane	F	1	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Both left early
Mary	F	1	N	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	Y	Y	N	Mother: 15 Father: 12
Tom	M	1	Y (Outside Ireland)	N/A	N	Voluntary Secondary	Y	N	N	Mother: 16 Father 15
Lucy	F	1	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: 17 (Leaving Cert) Father: 17
Evan	M	1	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: 15 Father: 15
Jade	F	1	Y (Outside Ireland)	N/A	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: 14 Father: 14

Table 2

Interviewee Backgrounds: PME 2 and PME recently completed

Name	Sex	PME	Mixed Primary School (Y/N)	DEIS Primary School (Y/N)	Fee-Paying Primary School (Y/N)	Post-Primary School- Type	Mixed Post Primary (Y/N)	DEIS Post Primary (Y/N)	Fee-Paying Post Primary (Y/N)	Parents' Education Level
Sandra	F	2	N	N	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	N	Y	Mother: 3rd Level, Father: LC
Linda	F	2	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: c.15 Father: c.15
Gaye	F	2	N	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: 14 Father: 15
Kate	F	2	Y	Y	N	ETB	Y	Y	N	Mother: Leaving Cert Father: Leaving Cert
Clare	F	2	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: 14 Father: 14
Karl	M	2	N	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	Y	N	Mother: 15 Father: 12
Brian	M	2	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: Leaving Cert Father: Junior Cert
Ivan	M	2	Y	Y	N	Community	Y	Y	N	Mother: Leaving Cert Father c. 14
Anne	F	PME completed	N	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	Y	N	Mother: 15 Father: 12
Tara	F	PME completed	Y	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	Y	N	Both left early
Liam	M	PME completed	N	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	N	N	Mother: Leaving Cert Father: Leaving Cert
Gary	M	PME completed	Y	Y	N	Voluntary Secondary	N	N	Y	Mother: Junior Cert Father: 17
Jack	M	PME completed	Y	Y	N	Vocational	Y	N/A	N	Mother: Unknown Father: Apprenticeship

This background information provides some context in terms of the students' later experiences on the PME and on their school placements. In the interest of precision and ease of identification, numbered codes have been used in place of page numbers when quoting from the students' interviews. Within the common thread of socio-economic disadvantage that united this group of PME students, lay individual experiences that reflected the unique journey that each student had taken. The age of the students ranged from early twenties (the majority), to early fifties, and reflected a cohort of students at different stages of their lives and with different life experiences.

To protect the PME students' identities, pseudonyms were used, with traditionally gendered names allocated to denote male or female. Twelve of the students were from Dublin; ten were from outside Dublin, including rural areas; one student was born and educated on a different continent. The names of the middle-class and working-class areas mentioned by the students were also changed, with 'Seaview' representing any affluent area mentioned, and 'Brookvale' standing for any disadvantaged area identified. The names of the universities, colleges and schools were also changed in the interest of protecting all parties concerned. The traditionally middle-class university where the PME students did their Professional Masters in Education was given the name 'Southside University'.

5.2.1 Stages of the Journey

As the lived experiences of this cohort of students on the PME have been shaped and informed by their earlier educational experiences, the journey begins with an exploration of their schooling and their undergraduate experiences.

Stage 1: This is **home territory** for this cohort of students and focuses both on their experiences of school and their families' relationships and attitudes to education.

Stage 2: This **new world** looks at the students' move to the virgin territory of higher education. The students' past experiences manifest here in their struggles to adapt in a higher educational environment which accentuates their social, academic and cultural differences and insecurities. It is at this point that a sense of being 'out of place' is often first experienced.

Stage 3: The **post-graduate world** of teacher education is also unchartered territory, where the myriad educational, social and economic challenges of the previous two phases are brought fully formed into the post-graduate world of a PME programme in a traditionally middle-class university. Trying to 'find their place' in the middle-class world of post-graduate teacher education was often a case of 'knowing their place' for these students.

Stage 4: The **world of post-primary schools and teaching,** also unfamiliar territory, is where the professional world of teacher placement is explored. It involves the students' experiences as teachers in the new spaces of classroom and staffroom. Navigating the social, cultural and social differences of this professional world of teacher education creates further challenges for these student teachers, adding to their sense of difference.

Stage 5: Navigating the in-between world that many of these PME students find themselves in when becoming post-primary teachers is also challenging. Each phase of their journey to ITE involves an ability to navigate in and adapt to their new territory. Changed by the educational journey they have undertaken, the students no longer fit as easily into the home territory they have left behind. Many in this cohort struggled to find a place in which they could feel they truly belonged. This phase looks at how these students try to straddle both worlds.

5.3 Stage 1: The Known World

5.3.1 Introduction

This first section looks at the familiar educational and family world of the students before they set out on their journey to higher education, setting the context for much of their future experiences in the PME. Unlike the middle-classes who have a clear roadmap to higher education, the disadvantaged classes often have to find their own way. The impetus to set off on their journey towards higher education for these students was influenced by a wish to 'move forward' as well as a desire to move 'away from'.

5.3.2 Attitudes to Education

Attitudes to education were not uniform among the families of this cohort of students. Many students discussed how they and their parents saw education both as a ticket to a place of opportunity and as an escape from the limitations of the world with which they were familiar:

> *My parents had a desire for me to get a degree and maybe do a little better in life than they had and have more doors open for me. I want better career opportunities and better opportunities as a person. I felt that the area I'm from represented failure really. It was a place where not many people kind of progressed…It represented being stuck in a rut and not being able to escape (Anne, 103).*

Education as both an opportunity and an escape were also discussed by Jane. She, too, linked the area in which she lived with limitations, and expressed a strong desire to avoid living the life that she felt was laid out for her if she stayed where she was:

> *But I kind of look at education as my only option. I was like, it's either this or like live an awful life. I didn't want to end up getting pregnant, you know, just living in a council estate for the rest of my life. I just said I'm not going to do it. I'm just not doing it (Jane, 48).*

Ivan also mentioned that the area he grew up in 'isn't a great area. There is a lot of stuff going on in the background all the time' (Ivan, 190). The role of location and being from a particular area played central roles in these students' later experiences in higher education.

Gary discussed how his parents were aware of the kind of opportunities that a university education could bring to a family where two other children had additional needs. If Gary had a university education then the family could move up in the world and 'afford the things that we needed' (Gary, 34):

> *My parents saved for a long time to ensure that I would go to higher education. I would be the only one of my family going and it would set me up well in life, basically trying to ensure that it would move our family forward to go to the next level (Gary, 38).*

The belief that a move 'away from' could lead to a move 'upwards' socially was also discussed by Liam who said that his 'father worked in construction' and Liam wanted to be 'better than that' (Liam, 108). As Tom noted: 'There were not many ways out of my circumstances' except through education (Tom, 172).

Not all these students came from families where higher education was encouraged. Lucy recounted how her parents, who had left school early and had different expectations for their daughter, perceived higher education as 'partying for three years' (Lucy, 590):

> *My family don't see the point of education. There were certain days when I wasn't allowed to go to school as I was helping on the farm. It's a rural mindset-'when I was your age I was married and expecting' (Lucy, 593).*

Clare mentioned how for 'me and my friends from disadvantaged areas, spending time doing school work was not a priority for parents: 'Just say you can't do it. You're spending too much time on that' (Clare, 301). For other students in this cohort, parental disengagement from their children's education impacted on other areas such as absenteeism. Both Tom and Jane recalled the negative impact of their absences educationally:

> *I would wake my mum up in the morning and ask her to drive to the school bus and she would just say no (Tom, 159). Not being able to access school was a huge issue for me. I missed 70 days in 5th Year. It was a very tough thing to rectify for me (Tom, 285).*

Jane explained that her parents left it totally up to herself whether she went to school or not, and commented that this laissez-faire approach to education was not the best approach to take for her:

> *I just didn't go to school. I didn't have to. I wasn't sent. It was up to your personal preference. But you don't want to go when you're 15 (Jane, 42).*

Jane went on to discuss the importance of having 'better safeguard measures' in schools' for pupils like her so that they would be not become invisible and fall through the cracks: 'I missed 47 days in 5th Year, and that was one of my best years. Tusla (the Child and Family Protection Agency) never got a call about me' (Jane, 584).

A thread going through most of the PME students' accounts was the strong belief that there was a better class of education to be had in fee-charging schools and that pupils attending such schools were advantaged in many ways. When Jane highlighted how she was not 'missed in school', she also asserted that this would not have happened in a fee-charging school where 'if a student is missing, work is sent home or something is put in place to make sure they don't fall behind. It's a different education' (Jane, 588).

5.3.3 Family Challenges

Alongside differences in attitudes to education, many of these students described the challenges they faced at home. For some, leaving home was their only option if they wanted to continue to higher education. Neil spoke about the 'drama behind the scenes' that was always there when he was a child: 'I had a rocky situation with my parents splitting up when I was

little and I ended up going to four or five different primary schools. It really shaped my personality' (Neil, 25).

Poor relationships with their fathers were an issue for both Liam and Tom. Liam expressed a desire to be different to his father (Liam, 106) as did Tom (Tom, 63). Tom identified some of the many challenges he experienced at home:

> *My parents had no interest in integrating their children when they came to Ireland. They had no real parenting skills. We lived below the poverty line in a very rural area. The saddest points of my life are when I'm thinking that I'm like my father…he was a pretty violent character when he wanted to be. He's just a very angry guy (Tom, 65).*

The decision to leave home was discussed by several PME students as an escape from the challenges of the world they were in. Brian commented on the 'toxic environment at home' and how, when his home life 'crumbled' in his mid-teens, he left for Dublin and has never been back (Brian, 37). When 'things got very bad at home' for Tom in his final year in school, he also left home with 'one change of clothes and my school uniform and one pair of shoes' (Tom, 228).

> *I slept in a car park for 25 days, but it was okay. And at the weekends I made money busking. A sunny Saturday is a blessing. I went to school every day. Truthfully, a lot to things were better and I felt so much better. I have never been back (Tom, 234).*

Leaving home and starting off on a different road, often the road to higher education, was expressed in positive terms by many of these students. As Jane observed: 'when I moved out of home, it was amazing' (Jane, 151).

5.3.4 Challenges in School

School was a time when many of the students discussed their emerging awareness of difference and challenge. Many revealed their academic struggles and the insecurities that they

carried with them as a result of their schooling. They remarked on differences in higher education expectations among their teachers and peers in school, and often spoke of the differences and inequalities that they perceived between DEIS schools and middle-class or fee-charging schools. For almost all of these students, middle-class schools were synonymous with fee-charging schools. Middle-class schools that were non-fee-paying were described by Gaye as 'semi-fee-paying'. She explained that these were schools for the middle classes who had money but 'not as much as the top echelons of society' and where the voluntary contribution that each pupil was expected to pay was 'a lot more than the normal' (Gaye, 308).

While not all of these students' experiences in school or at home were negative, it was the impact of the negative experiences that the students recalled most and it was these experiences that shaped the central thematic features of their educational experiences in third level and in ITE. Clare admitted that she struggled academically at primary level with her English in particular. Academic support at home was limited by the family's early school-leaving. Despite the support of a teacher in primary school, Clare described her continued struggles at post-primary level where her 'writing was really bad and I struggled with English' (Clare, 319):

> *My parents left school at 14 so their reading and spelling wouldn't be fantastic. And my brother is the same. There weren't many books and I hadn't shown any interest in reading myself and was just falling behind (Clare, 317).*

Jack discussed his academic struggles at school and how an undiagnosed disability had major repercussions for his academic trajectory. He linked his lifelong insecure academic identity with the fact that he 'wasn't educated enough to get into the religious schools. I did an interview but I was dyslexic and I didn't get in' (Jack, 68). Jack was sent to a vocational school and remarked on the 'violence that was in the schools then'. He also mentioned how his lifelong

hatred and fear of school has stayed with him, where 'doing your best…was never good enough' (Jack, 72).

The issue of streaming posed a different academic challenge for Gaye, who was focused on doing well academically and going on to higher education. Gaye explained how her DEIS school 'maintained the illusion of mixed ability classes' by 'sprinkling a few smart kids like myself into the lower streams'. She remarked that the 'better' teachers were teaching the higher streams so she struggled to do well academically in one of the lower streams:

> *But you were screwed from day one in First Year until we were distributed around again in Fifth or Sixth Year. It was tough going (Gaye, 466).*

Academic struggles and integration were linked in Tom's story. Tom explained that he wanted to be seen as Irish but that his accent, among other things, differentiated him from the local children: 'I was very unhappy when I first came to Ireland in my primary school and for the first couple of years of post- primary. I failed nearly every exam in Second Year (age c.14) on purpose' (Tom, 120). Tom's solution to apply to an all-Irish school as a means of integrating, proved fortuitous for him: 'The principal there was wonderful and took me on and I started to learn Irish there. I never failed a single exam' (Tom, 122).

5.3.5 The Challenges of the Leaving Certificate Examination

The central role that the Leaving Certificate examination played in both their personal lives and as the gateway to higher education, was spoken of by many of the students. They highlighted, in particular, the negative impact this examination had on their academic self-confidence. Many of the students' accounts featured words such as 'shattering', 'disappointed' and 'struggle'. Brian referred to his ability only in terms of his exam grades:

> *My Leaving Cert results haunt me to this day. I was very disappointed. I still struggle with reading, writing and remembering…I always struggled academically. I was never more than a 'C' (Brian, 276).*

Feelings of disappointment and failure in relation to examination results were also expressed by Joe: 'I was disappointed with my Leaving Cert results. I got a D1 in English. It was such a disappointment. There was a feeling of failure' (Joe, 249). Tara explained that:

> *No matter what I'm doing, everything leads back to the Leaving Certificate for me and how I felt when I didn't get what I wanted… I always swore that I'd never feel like that again; that I wouldn't put myself down like that again (Tara, 535).*

Linda spoke of 'always doubting myself and my capabilities in school' and with little parental support and 'bad exam anxiety and panic attacks', her only way of managing both her academic insecurities and her desire to progress to higher education, was to narrow her horizons and lower her expectations:

> *My thinking was just like, I'm never going to get the points. Maybe college is not for me. So, I kind of said right, I'll just settle for low points. I always expect the worst so that I won't be disappointed (Linda ,79)*

Kate also commented that she would have to lower her horizons if she wanted to 'survive', while observing that if she were more advantaged financially and educationally, that this may not be necessary:

> *I didn't have opportunities when I was in school but if I had money and I was in the Institute of Education, I could've got 500 points. I could've done physiotherapy or law. But the only way to survive is to reduce your horizons, to be honest (Kate, 192).*

Many of the students discussed not only how they felt when they got their results but also how their poor Leaving Certificate results closed off a direct route into higher level education for

them. Many, like Anne, who 'did a very poor Leaving Cert' (Anne, 84) had to find a more indirect route to higher education through doing a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course:

> *I didn't get the points. It was really shattering. That shocked me at that time. It was really, really upsetting…I felt that all the doors were closed to me and that I'd no other options. The PLC was an opportunity to move on and maybe get into college. It was another door maybe (Anne, 87).*

Kirstie, like Anne, commented that her poor Leaving Certificate results took away the option of a direct route into higher education: 'I was not the smartest person in my class in school and I did not get enough points to go straight into higher education. I had to do a PLC beforehand' (Kristie, 192). Tara, too, spoke about her poor Leaving Certificate results and her parents' attempt to find a place where they could somehow locate these points for their daughter: 'My Dad was asking "but where are we going to get some points from?" as if you could just ring up the Department of Education and get some points' (Tara, 521). Tara explained how not doing well in her Leaving Certificate fed into her fears of not being able to achieve her ambition of becoming a post-primary teacher and not being able to expand her horizons:

> *I realised how much education broadens your mind and broadens your horizons. There are more opportunities… I had a vision and a goal to be a teacher and when I thought I might not reach it with my Leaving Cert results, it really hit me. I wanted it when it was going to be taken away from me (Tara, 165).*

When explaining their poor results in the Leaving Certificate, many of the PME students spoke about the importance of expectations in school.

5.3.6 Expectations and Higher Education

Many of the PME students spoke about their own expectations of progressing to higher education in their DEIS schools, while also revealing the different expectations of many of

their peers who never made it as far as the Leaving Certificate. Kate noted that 'only seven people out of a hundred went to higher education from my school and there's only two using their degrees. We'd no opportunities. There wasn't anything there' (Kate, 409). Martina stated that 'only 30 of us, one third, sat the Leaving Cert in in my school, and 50% of the LCAs (Leaving Certificate Applied) dropped off; they just couldn't get to the final hurdle' (Martina, 530). Gaye's school year 'started out with 120 pupils and 33 had left before the Leaving Cert. They had no interest in school. They just wanted to get in and get out as quickly as possible'. (Gaye, 280). Liam referred to the stigma of doing well in his school and that many in his year never finished school:

> *You weren't supposed to do well in school. You were supposed to get by and have a laugh. But a few of us wanted to go to college. We wanted a little bit better (Liam, 47).*

Many students in this cohort commented on the impact that low expectations in school played in their higher education trajectory. Kirstie recalled how in her DEIS school, there were few expectations of doing well academically: 'I don't think that higher education was promoted as something that we were able to do. Like we'd never get the points' (Kirstie, 645).

This view was echoed when Evan explained that 'we weren't expected to go to Southside University in secondary school and weren't taught with that in mind. You did wood work or metal work but there was no preparation in how to write' (Evan, 310). Karl also stated that there was 'little pressure to do well in school' (Karl, 525). Kate recalled the number of 'inexperienced teachers or teachers with no expectations' that she had in school, remarking that she did not think that 'the quality of teaching in my DEIS school was as good as in a fee-paying school' (Kate, 685).

Career guidance teachers were mentioned by many of this cohort of students as being the source of many of their negative experiences in relation to higher education and expectations. When Karl told the guidance teacher that he wanted to be a teacher, she told him

'to do a Level 5 in Sports Management' and he came away feeling that the 'bar was put quite low' (Karl, 66). Kirstie found the guidance teacher 'very poor' (Kirstie, 84) and Kate found the whole experience 'dreadful; I had to find everything out myself' (Kate, 45). Lucy, like Karl, used the words 'low bar' when discussing her 'horrific' career guidance experience. When Lucy requested assistance in applying for the HEAR scheme (an admissions scheme available in 25 institutions of education, for students from socio-economic backgrounds that are under-represented in third level education), her guidance teacher told Lucy that she 'was too busy' to see her (Lucy, 38). Lucy did her own research, but in her application form, her school was not 'recognised on the system' as she had placed an apostrophe in the wrong place in the school name. A letter of appeal Lucy sent was deemed 'past the date' (Lucy, 43).

Clare also referred to the difficulty she had filling out the application form for higher education. Like Clare, many of in this cohort of students were the first in their family to attend university. Clare described the confusion she felt in filling out her application form and how, in the absence of career guidance, she and her friends supported each other:

> *I hadn't got a clue what college was all about and what all the terminology means. I had never heard of the term CAO before. So, I texted my friends in school and we'd call each other and take screenshots and try and Google information, trying to find out how to fill out the CAO forms. We didn't understand the terms on the forms or some of the questions (Clare, 57).*

Some older PME students like Neil (Neil, 143) and Evan (Evan, 54) and Jack (Jack, 33) received no career guidance in school. Joe explained that low expectations resulted in many of his friends having no interest in higher education despite being 'quite clever', preferring 'to get a job or go on social welfare' (Joe, 800). In recalling the many who never made it as far as the Leaving Certificate in their DEIS schools, let alone higher education, these students also spoke

of inequality and difference in relation to the perceived advantages and privileges of the middle-classes who were able to follow a clear roadmap to university.

5.3.7 Different to the Middle-Classes

The feeling of being less advantaged educationally and socially than their middle-class counterparts in school permeated much of what was discussed by this group of students. Jane echoed the views of others when she commented that 'an average child in a fee- paying school is getting a higher quality education than the brightest child in a DEIS school' (Jane, 603). Many, like Gaye and Kate, spoke of the divide and resultant inequality that that they felt existed as a consequence of different educational experiences. Gaye explained that she had no substitute French teacher in her school for four months 'because no one wants to come to your school because it's a DEIS school' (Gaye, 241). Gaye's beliefs that it was a DEIS school's negative image that played a role in not attracting teachers, was contrasted with her views on fee-charging schools:

> *In some fee- paying schools …they had someone extra coming in on top of actually having a French teacher. No one was applying to our school (Gaye, 248).*

Kate described a similar situation in her school where she 'had no Spanish teacher for a year and couldn't afford grinds as there was no family support' (Kate, 693). The experience of not having money for grinds was echoed in Brian's sense that 'middle-class parents can afford grinds. They can throw money at the problem. I'd none'. (Brian, 262). Gaye observed that fee-charging schools were advantaged in comparison to DEIS schools: 'They have access to the best of the best. If a teacher is out you will have a sub' (Gaye, 245).

There was a real awareness among these students of how advantaged they felt the middle-classes were in comparison to their own circumstances. Kate maintained that the middle-class pupils 'have fall-back' (Kate, 351) and were further advantaged by their schooling

because ‘whether you have you have parents who can spend 20,000 euro in a school or whether you have parents who can’t even afford half of the books, we’re all sitting the same Leaving Cert. The inequality annoys me so much’ (Kate, 342). Kate went on to say that good or poor Leaving Certificate results have ‘nothing to do with intelligence’ but everything to do with ‘family connections’ and ‘security’: ‘It comes from primary school. A lot of parents had to drop out of school at 13 or 14 and their children then struggle in school. It’s a vicious cycle’ (Kate, 359). The social-class differences noted by these students were not merely academic. Many students discussed what they perceived to be culturally different experiences in their DEIS schools vis-à-vis fee-charging schools, particularly in relation to pregnancy:

> *Our science teacher said sarcastically to us at the end of sixth year ‘congratulations on none of you getting pregnant’ because people were just dropping out and having babies. In a posh school a girl getting around would be considered a whore whereas in a DEIS school it’s kind of rite of passage (Gaye, 274).*

Liam remarked that he knew that he ‘was lucky’ that his parents could afford to send him to the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking summer school), giving him ‘access to students from fee-paying schools’. This first exposure to the middle classes was described by Liam as ‘almost embarrassing’ because their experiences of school were so different to his own (Liam, 81):

> *There was a boy in my class in First Year in school (age 12/13) and his girlfriend already had a child…the middle-class students couldn’t fathom that this was a real thing. They thought it should be in the front pages of the newspapers it was such a big deal. But in my school the teachers didn’t even flinch. It was just a normal occurrence (Liam, 86).*

In her DEIS school, Gaye observed that the pupils were engaged in sexual behaviour ‘from a young age’, and sex was seen as a marker of adulthood. She maintained that the cultural expectations would be different in fee-charging schools:

> *I remember one girl saying to me that if you're a virgin when you're in Sixth Year you might as well get out…It's not as present in fee paying schools as much: it's like a knowledge that's passed down to them (Gaye, 285).*

The belief that those attending fee-charging schools were advantaged in a variety of ways in comparison to their own experiences in school, was spoken of by most of the cohort of students who had attended DEIS schools. The three PME students who attended fee-charging schools had different experiences.

5.3.8 Contrasting Educational Experiences: Fee-Charging Schools

Education was discussed by many of the PME students as both a way out of their current circumstances and a way forward to a better place. For three in this cohort of students, attending a fee-charging school was seen by their parents as a way of advantaging their children on the competitive road to higher education.

Gary mentioned how his parents 'worried' about the standard of education in the local post-primary school where 'only one guy' from the local school went on to higher education (Gary, 38). He explained that his parents were also concerned that he was 'hanging out with guys from the flats, from a rougher poorer area' and might 'get bullied' as a consequence of wanted to progress to higher education (Gary, 49). His parents saved up and sent him 'to a small fee- paying secondary school', where, despite their concerns, he experienced bullying. Gary recounted how he was excluded by the middle-class pupils, and also highlighted how he felt he contributed to his exclusion:

> *There was stuff that I didn't deal with. The manipulation; excluding me; completely not talking to me. I'd come over to say hello and six or seven people would just disappear. Maybe I didn't always say the right things (Gary, 82).*

Gary related how he eventually found his own group of friends, all of whom were to some degree 'outsiders' like himself and different to the 'native' population of pupils. His three friends were foreign and one was the son of the 'handyman in the school' (Gary, 120). Gary also described the sense of difference and not belonging that he felt:

> *There was just a disconnect between me and the other middle-class boys. I can't really put my finger on it…it wasn't just the accent. They went to rugby and their fathers played golf. It was their mannerisms. They've completely different lifestyles as well (Gary, 116).*

Similar challenges around fitting into her fee-charging school were also highlighted by Sandra. Being part of the sunken middle class, Sandra 'definitely had a nice accent' but this outward 'marker' of class did not prevent her from feeling like 'an alien in this South County Dublin environment' (Sandra, 72). Sandra revealed how 'money was a huge struggle at home' and that difference for her centred on her own hidden economic disadvantage in this privileged middle-class world. While acknowledging that she had a 'roof over her head and food', Sandra revealed that often 'there was no heating or lighting' (Sandra, 81). She also described the shame she felt when making up Christmas food hampers in her school for people in need:

> *Every Christmas we got one of those same hampers. I never talked about it because I was ashamed. I was trying to hide it (Sandra, 85).*

Despite the fact that Sandra's mother worked full time and 'the nuns helped out subsidising our fees', the family still had to rely on help from the St. Vincent de Paul, a religious agency which helps those in need. Sandra described not being able to 'afford books' and 'having to go to the school lost property' for her uniform (Sandra, 83). She also revealed the struggles she experienced at home and at school and her attempts to navigate these challenges by both hiding her difference and searching for others who were the same:

> *I was ashamed and I felt I couldn't talk about it…you're kind of begging for things. There were fights at home: 'why are we there in the school if you can't afford it?' You're trying to hide it (Sandra, 85).*

Neil also recounted how his difference was accentuated in the fee-charging school he attended outside Ireland. His school friends 'came from completely different backgrounds'. Neil lived in a 'council house' unlike his friend who had 'a large house with a swimming pool' (Neil, 119). Neil also had no school trips or experience of anyone being able to give him 'a dig out' with academic work. While acknowledging 'the huge sacrifice' that his mother had made to send him to a 'private school', shame was also experienced by Neil in relation to his mother's job as an adult entertainer:

> *I had some shame at my mother's work. When people would talk about their parents' jobs, I could never imagine what my mum did. I was protecting myself and her. In hindsight, I carry a lot of shame from that. But I knew what she had done for me to give me that leg up (Neil, 133).*

For both Gary and Sandra, higher education was a priority at home. In Gary's case, higher education was seen as a means of financially supporting a family with two children with additional needs. In Sandra's case, her mother and extended family were all university educated and her mother was adamant that 'if you're living under this roof you know you'll be going to college. If not, you could pack your bags' (Sandra, 59).

In tandem with home expectations, Sandra explained that mixing with the privileged middle-classes in fee-charging schools meant that 'higher education was just expected in how the teachers spoke…so it was probably just always in my mind' (Sandra, 52). Gary explained that the 'middle-class guys were all focused' on higher education in his privileged school:

> *The family knows the system. They don't need career guidance. They talk about it at home. And they're looking for a career, something respectable…the top things in*

society, like a doctor, or solicitor or engineer. And it's never just an accountant; it's always a chartered accountant (Gary, 201).

With echoes of what was to come for the others in this cohort of students in higher education, all three students here spoke of always feeling different to the other pupils in their schools, and how their sense of difference and not belonging were accentuated by being in the solidly middle-class world of a fee-charging school. The challenges they faced in trying to navigate through their early exposure to this middle-class world were encapsulated in Sandra's comment: 'I guess I was always between two worlds' (Sandra, 28).

5.3.9 Navigating Stage 1 of their Journey

Despite the various challenges of family and school, this group of PME students managed to navigate the first stage of their journey to higher education. The importance of teachers in helping them on their academic journey was highlighted by many in this group. Brian commented that the teachers in his DEIS schools were 'a godsend. They inspired me to be a teacher' (Brian, 124). Jane recounted the first time in school that she was told she had academic ability: 'It was like a bomb going off in my head. It was the first time anybody had ever told me that I was smart (Jane, 208). Clare commented on the free piano lessons she received from her teacher that enabled her to access her undergraduate music degree. Jane also related how her guidance teacher helped her to 'move out of home for two weeks before my Leaving Cert. And she baked me a cake for my 18th birthday in school' (Jane, 169).

Whereas the disadvantage of those students who attended DEIS schools was more obvious, the two students who attended fee-charging schools in Dublin revealed that they navigated by trying to 'hide' their disadvantage and avoid being exposed (Sandra, 85), and by trying to find other outsiders like themselves (Gary, 120). These navigational strategies would

be mirrored in the ways the rest of this cohort of students would try to manage the challenges they were exposed to the middle-class world of higher education.

Each of these students managed to overcome the many obstacles that lay on the road to higher education. Any one of these barriers could have derailed them or brought them along different routes. Many needed a helping hand. One obstacle too many on the way or the lack of support at a critical juncture could have diverted them away from their goal of becoming post-primary teachers. For most in this cohort who attended a DEIS school, a direct route into higher education was rarely a possibility. These students noted the more circuitous route to higher education that was generally the norm for them, usually through doing a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course or an Access course for mature students. Many postponed accepting a place on the PME in order to save for a year or two. Neil felt that he had 'missed the boat to university from school; that it was never going to happen' (Neil, 185). Both students who attended fee-charging post-primary schools in Ireland went directly into higher education. This more direct route into higher education was not lost on those PME students who had to take the longer and, frequently, more expensive route.

5.3.10 Conclusion

Having survived the first stage of their journey to higher education, each student in this cohort had accumulated certain insecurities which they carried with them to the next stage. These issues included academic insecurities; feelings of not fitting in and belonging; an awareness of social and financial inequalities; and a sense of their inferior position in relation to the more privileged middle-classes. Many expressed personal insecurities about their place in higher education and their right to be there in the first place. Underpinning all of these challenges, however, was a desire to broaden their horizons and make a better life for themselves through education. All the students in this cohort showed a solid resilience in

overcoming these barriers and many revealed a strong desire for fairness in a more socially just world.

5.4 Stage 2 The World of Higher Education

5.4.1 Introduction

The next step on the students' educational journey towards teacher education was their undergraduate degree. This, too, was beset with a variety of challenges, many of which mirrored earlier issues at school, in particular the sense of academic insecurity that many brought with them. An awareness of social, economic and cultural difference, and the markers of that difference relative to the majority middle-class student population, was strengthened and accentuated during their undergraduate experiences. Aligned with this awareness of difference, was a sense of not belonging and a feeling of isolation in this middle-class world.

5.4.2 Challenging Start

Many in this cohort of students discussed the rocky start they experienced at the beginning of their undergraduate journey, including problems accessing higher education, staying the course, and fitting in. Jack described how the mere thought of being assessed and found deficient was enough to deter him from going any further with his education. The damage that resulted from Jack's negative school experiences, including undiagnosed dyslexia and violence among others, meant that stepping into a classroom was a challenge for Jack. When he was made redundant in his forties, Jack thought again about further education:

> *I did some extra-mural classes where you're not graded. Just to see if I could sit there. Because for me, sitting in the classroom was not a straightforward thing (Jack, 82*).

While some students in this cohort who had achieved high grades in their Leaving Certificate examinations were able to move directly into higher education, those with a poor Leaving Certificate result who wished to access higher education, like many in this cohort, had to take

a more circuitous route in the form of a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course, which offers students a second chance to achieve the points they need. This second chance was not without its challenges:

> *It's very hard to get into higher education from the PLC course. You had to get six distinctions. And I had a full-time job. It meant that I was two years behind (Kirstie, 511).*

The fact that Kirstie had to save in order to afford higher education meant that she 'had leave education in order to get back into education' (Kirstie, 517). Anne admitted that 'there was a green-eyed monster on my shoulder' when she saw a girl from a fee-charging school who was able to come directly into Southside University from school: 'That's probably really horrible on my part' (Anne, 194). Those students who managed a more direct route into higher education still faced challenges. Jade started at a Level 8 and explained that:

> *It was too hard. It just went over my head. I couldn't grasp it at all. I was thrown in the deep end and failed at Christmas and left the course (Jade, 103).*

Similar issues arose for Sandra and she discussed the stress that she experienced the first time she went to the solidly middle-class Southside University. Despite her fee-charging education at post-primary level, her middle-class address, and a mother with a university education, Sandra admitted that she lacked confidence, not only in her ability, but in her right to be there. It was not just the size of the lectures in Southside University that Sandra found 'overwhelming', it was her belief that 'it was not okay' for her to be there. She stressed that she 'didn't know what clothes to wear' and 'didn't feel that she looked the part'. As a consequence of this overarching belief that she was not 'able for it', Sandra also 'dropped out of college'.

Evan recounted how he was able to avail of the one-year Access course in Southside University, aimed at mature students of 23 and over who may not have the relevant

qualifications for higher education. Despite the support, Evan explained that as an undergraduate student, he was barely surviving in the privileged environment that was Southside University, where his differences and isolation were accentuated:

> *I didn't understand how college worked. I didn't know what modules or electives were. I hadn't a clue. The others in my subject groups had siblings who went to Southside and they knew exactly what they were doing. I didn't socialise and I never made any real friends there at all. Nobody (Evan, 168).*

Tara was reminded of her social and academic difference by some of the more privileged students when she revealed that she had come to Southside through the HEAR scheme: 'You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that kind of thing'. Tara commented that these middle-class students 'don't understand the need for certain students to receive that support' (Tara, 252). Coming from a DEIS school, Kirstie remarked how socially isolated she was when she arrived in Southside University: 'I didn't know one person on my undergrad in Southside. No one went from my school' (Kirstie, 256). In an attempt to circumvent some of the social challenges of Southside University, Clare made a conscious decision to do her undergraduate degrees in Northside University, 'where more students from disadvantage went and where I felt more comfortable' (Clare, 8). As with every stage on their journey to teacher education, the fact that all of these students managed to access higher education and stay the course, was never a secure expectation.

5.4.3 Academic Challenges

Despite their difficulties, all of these students continued with their undergraduate degrees. Words like 'struggle' and 'failure' were used frequently by the students when describing their experiences as undergraduates. Although not asked specifically about their mental health, 13 of the 23 students identified challenges in this area. Jane discussed how she

began to 'struggle' in her first year in Northside University, both academically and with 'a mental health issue' (Jane, 348). Many students spoke about how their academic challenges intersected with the necessity to work off campus in order to finance or supplement their degree. Karl explained that, for financial reasons, he had to 'skip lectures' and consequently 'failed two modules' (Karl, 251). Prior academic struggles from their schooling were now proving problematic for many students in higher education:

> *I struggled to do essays in Northside University. It was a huge worry. How will I cope academically? I always struggled in English. Language is a huge issue for me (Clare, 142).*

Despite studying English in Westside University, Lucy remarked that she had 'always struggled with English and I still struggle with my grammar'. Kate, too, explained that she had 'very poor syntax and sentence structure but I've never been penalised for it' (Kate, 302). Linda also studied English and remarked that although she would have been 'quite strong' in English in her DEIS school, that going to Southside University made her feel 'like someone who had never studied English in their whole life' when compared to what Linda perceived to be the academic superiority of the middle-class students (Linda, 264):

> *I wasn't as knowledgeable as the others. It was hard. I hadn't a clue. And then academic writing was like a foreign language (Linda, 266).*

In his first year in Northside University, English was a challenge for Joe also. He remarked that he 'tried to keep up' with everyone else but found that he 'was getting bogged down' (Joe, 249). Joe was open about where his struggles with English lay:

> *English is something that I struggled with, especially with grammar and syntax. And I've a limited vocabulary. I was constantly repeating the same words (Joe, 253)*

With parents who had left school early, few of the PME students had access to any form of academic support at home. Martina explained that she had doubts about her standard of writing and could see that the middle-class students had better facility with language:

> *My family couldn't help me with any of my essays in college. They just didn't understand what needed to be done. My mother would just say 'just do your homework'. But it's not homework (Martina, 441).*

Other academic challenges for many in this cohort were the result of certain gaps that emerged in their knowledge that were exposed in the course of their undergraduate degrees.

5.4.3.1 ***Academic Gaps and Imposter Syndrome***

Many students in this cohort discussed the gaps in their knowledge that were revealed and accentuated during their time as undergraduates. Having no books in her house, and not having read 'one book in primary school' (Jane, 139), Jane pointed out that she had never heard of or read any of the children's stories that were so familiar to the middle-class students when she was taking a children's literature module in Northside University. Jane mentioned similar gaps in her knowledge of geography: 'it was totally over my head' (Jane, 376):

> *I started to notice all the gaps that I had. I can't do this. I don't know how. I tried to fake it until I could make it but I didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't know any of the facts. College was really stressful (Jane, 378).*

The academic struggles of these students contributed to their feelings of being imposters and of not deserving of a place in higher education. Many felt that they were at the lowest level of a perceived intellectual and class hierarchy:

> *I was so stressed in the final year of my undergraduate. The language was much more difficult and I didn't understand the language that was used. Everyone else was genuine. There was a huge chasm between the two class groups. I felt that everyone*

was 'here' and I was 'there'. I felt I was at the bottom genuinely, even if I wasn't (Kate, 300).

The feeling that they did not deserve to be in college or university and the fear of being exposed for what they really were, imposters, stayed with these students for the duration of their time as undergraduates. Being assessed in any way, or mixing with the more privileged and 'deserving' middle-class students, was problematic for many:

Exams were absolutely terrifying. All these middle-class people knew exactly what they were doing and I'm a complete impostor. What am I doing here? (Martina, 450).

The fear of being not being as good as the more socially privileged students in her rural college was accentuated for Martina in the smaller class groups. 'Seminars and tutorials left me physically sick. I didn't think I was able for them. I couldn't speak' (Martina, 25). Martina explained that she was so uncomfortable in her seminars that she ended up not attending her classes and missed out on 10 % of her overall marks for one of her subjects. Martina commented that she still struggles with the fact that her social and academic lack of confidence resulted in a lower overall academic grade:

I didn't think I was good enough, I suppose. They had all these great ideas…and there was no point me being there because I can't add to it. And if I do try, it will look like nothing (Martina, 59).

Many of the insecurities and challenges these students discussed as undergraduates were brought with them from their experiences in school. Jane mentioned that her poor school attendance added to her problems as an undergraduate: 'all the other students have their notes from school. I had nothing because I had done nothing in school' (Jane, 136). Feeling out of step with the more advantaged students, in addition to coming into her university through the HEAR scheme, added to what Jane referred as feeling like 'a bit of an imposter (Jane, 131).

Gary summed up the feelings of many: ‘I felt that people might think I’m not supposed to be there. That it’s not for me’ (Gary, 241).

5.4.4 Markers of Difference

A deep vein that ran through all of these students’ accounts of their experiences in higher education was an abiding sense of difference and not fitting in. They spoke of always feeling that they occupied an inferior position in comparison to their more privileged peers, who ‘placed’ them by differentiating and categorising them as ‘other’. Although markers of difference can be used by students on both sides of the class divide as a means of identifying others like themselves, these students also experienced markers being used by the more privileged students to ‘place’ students like them in a ‘classed box’.

The sense of social class being inextricably connected to physical space ran through the narratives of many students in this cohort. They spoke of social markers not only in terms of particular schools, universities, and even specific buildings, but more particularly in terms of place or area. The ‘huge chasm’ that Kate noted between the different social classes was encapsulated in her sense of students being either ‘here’ or ‘there’, with ‘here’ being far inferior to ‘there’ (Kate, 302). Where you lived was an extension of being either ‘here’ or ‘there’.

Three particular markers were discussed by the PME students as central to being ‘put in their place’. These markers were, in many cases, inextricably linked together: what school you attended; where you lived; and, particularly if you were from Dublin, your accent. These three markers will now be discussed, followed by an exploration of markers of financial security and insecurity.

5.4.4.1 *School Attended*

Many in this cohort of students discussed how being asked where they went to school was often a handy heuristic used by the middle-class students, not merely for identifying other privileged students like themselves, but as a shorthand for identifying and differentiating social classes. Gary explained that when he was asked what school he attended, the name of his little-known fee-charging school did not 'resonate' with the middle-class students 'because it's not one of the big five fee-paying middle-class schools', with echoes of Dublin's prestigious legal or accounting firms in Gary's words 'the big five' (Gary, 289). Unlike Gary, the majority of PME students in the group had gone to DEIS schools and Martina explained that she would cover up this fact unless she already knew the students with whom she was mixing:

> *I'd be afraid to say that I went to a DEIS school unless I knew that the people were from the same background. It wouldn't even come up. But other people would know from our accents or where we were living, so I just tried not to say it (Martina, 414).*

Living in a middle-class area, Kirstie recounted an experience she had on the day of her undergraduate induction in Southside University, when all the students were grouped together according to the areas in which they lived. Kirstie got chatting to a girl who 'was all ready to be my friend' until the subject of what school Kirstie had attended came up and she revealed that she had attended a DEIS school: 'I never heard from her again'. If the schools the students attended did not yield the necessary classifying information, this group of students noted that the next question they were invariably asked by the middle-class students was: where do you live?

5.4.4.2 *Area*

Being from a disadvantaged area had a strong influence on whether students even applied for higher education, and if they did, what university they applied to, as was evident in

Tara's account: 'It's just not expected that you go to third level when you live in Brookvale…you're not from D4' (abbreviation for a wealthy postcode in Dublin). Tara explained that there was a pervasive belief in her community that if that if you go to university 'you have to act a certain way or do certain things or become a certain type of person' that would not align with being from Brookvale. Added to this was Tara's 'self-doubt' that she did not 'deserve to be in third level education. I should just finish school and get out and get a job' (Tara, 272). Despite her preference for Southside University, Tara explained that she chose a smaller university outside Dublin because she felt that she would not be 'placed' as easily there:

> *Southside was seen as kind of posh to go to whereas more people from the country will go to Westside University. Country people didn't really know what part of Dublin you are from so it would be easier to fit in there. Whereas in Southside…if you came from a particular area you'd be looked down upon (Tara, 240).*

Many in this cohort of students discussed how the solidly middle-class status of Southside University was perceived to be a barrier for them socially. Being from an affluent area in South Dublin, on the other hand, was perceived by this group as being closely connected to the territorial rights of the middle-class students in Southside University, and the students in this study feared that at any moment they could be found out and ejected.

> *A lot of people from Brookvale feel like they won't belong in a college like Southside and that it's only for people that are from a certain postcode. They feel they might get kicked out and that they don't belong there the minute they stepped through the gate. That it's not a place where they would go (Anne, 143).*

The close association of place with a person's calibre was evident in Anne's comments about people who are from 'DEIS areas, or from areas that have a bad name' (Anne, 136).

> *People think that you're like a rough person, that you're a bit of, and this is a horrible word, like a 'scanger' or a 'knacker' (pejorative terms). That these areas are full of a*

> *lot of crime and of antisocial behaviour and that everyone is the same. People don't really want to know you because you're from a particular postcode (Anne, 139).*

Eight out of the 23 PME students in this cohort did decide to attend Southside University for their primary degree, but where they lived still played a central role in how they were placed. Kirstie gave an example of how, even when she was working in the United States, the middle-class university students she met from Dublin who were holidaying there for three months, were able to place her precisely:

> *They knew exactly the place I lived…and that they were council houses They just assumed that there was no way that I could possibly live anywhere else. They differentiated us straight away from them (Kirstie, 370).*

Gary commented on the 'very dismissive backhanded comments he would get from some of the middle-class students in Southside University when he told them where he lived:

> *I'm now getting some 18-year-old girl with a middle-class accent in a dismissive way saying "oh you're from Brookvale". What am I going to do? Rob you or something? There's "Primetime Investigates' (current affairs programme) flashing through their heads. 'Oh, I wouldn't leave my door open there, you know. Watch your back (Gary, 298).*

As a form of self-protection, Tara chose not to go to Southside University as 'after working so hard to get there I would probably end up leaving' if she felt judged based on where she was from (Tara, 250*)*. It was only after she had completed her undergraduate degree in Westside University that she 'felt ready to try Southside' for the PME (Tara, 245). Tara identified this social divide being there 'in preschool, primary school, and secondary school' resulting students from both sides not knowing 'how to respond' to each other. Tara finished her point by saying:

> *I think a lot of people aren't open minded in that sense. It doesn't really matter where you come from, you're all entitled to an equal opportunity at life. Not even just in education, at life itself (Tara, 275).*

A further marker of difference that reinforced the social divide was accent.

5.4.4.3 *Accent as Differentiator*

The inextricable link between accent and place was evident whenever accent was being discussed by these students. While accent can be used by many as a means of identifying those who are similar and part of the same 'tribe', many students observed that that their accents were often used by middle-class students to both judge and place them socially. Anne described how her accent differentiated her socially from the middle-class students in Southside University: 'She has a bit of an accent. Should I talk to her?' She also commented that her accent was different to the majority and that it 'was like being a small fish in a big pond' (Anne, 137). The fear of being judged as not being good enough was closely connected with accent for Linda also. Despite being gregarious, Linda related how she 'just wouldn't speak for 12 weeks' when she started her undergraduate degree (Linda, 257):

> *I wasn't well spoken. People in college always pronounce their "T.H.s" and "ings". I don't. And I use a lot of slang and I don't say words properly. And I didn't have a good enough way of putting myself across through words. I was very nervous that I'd say the wrong thing. It would take a lot to say something (Linda, 259).*

The connection of people, accent, class and place was discussed by Liam who identified the native student population of Southside University as solidly middle-class and that there was 'a South Dublin culture in the college most definitely', which he attributed to the number of fee-charging schools in the area (Liam, 159). Even though Liam is only twenty minutes from the university he has 'a totally different accent from someone maybe ten minutes away' (Liam,

160). Kate felt that accent was more defining of class than other markers and that her accent placed her 'lower on the scale' than other people (Kate, 47). Anne remarked that the challenge of fitting into this middle-class culture 'was a little bit rough starting off', especially as she commented that accent could be used to judge whether someone was a 'nice' person or not. As with the other students in this cohort, her strategy for coping was to only mix with students from a similar background to her own:

> *I had a bit of a bad accent and when people hear the accent they probably think the person is a bit rough. And so, they might be a little bit afraid. It's very hard to fit in. I stuck with people that I knew from the same background throughout my undergrad. It was like a safety blanket…I stayed inside it (Anne, 195).*

While all students in this cohort commented on differences in social class in their respective undergraduate colleges and universities, those who attended Southside University specifically described the role of accent, area, and school attended as key players in further accentuating the social divide and difference between the privileged and the disadvantaged in the university. This difference contributed to a perception articulated by the disadvantaged students that they were inhabiting an inferior social position in relation to the majority middle-class student population, and that they were less deserving of being undergraduate students among those who were rightfully there.

5.4.4.4 *Markers of Financial Security*

An important marker of difference discussed by the students centred on the privileges that economic security brought for the middle-class students in comparison to the challenges that came from their own financial struggles. The association between status and possessions as markers of social class was identified by many in this cohort as further accentuating their differences. Linda noted the 'real differences in wealth' of the middle-class students in

Southside University, and remembered her first lecture where 'everyone had laptops and I had a pen and paper. I couldn't get a laptop until my grant came through'. Linda described how worried she was about falling behind and having to 'beg borrow and steal notes from everyone' (Linda, 177), and was also aware of how lack of material possessions could mark her as different:

> *I had some crappy android phone that I got from 'Santy' when I started in Southside. It was absolutely dire. But everyone always said 'oh androids are for poor people'. And I was like, alright, but it wasn't my fault. So, when I got my tax back, I treated myself to an iPhone (Linda, 186).*

Evan, a mature student, said that he 'couldn't believe the brand-new minis' of the middle-class students and how 'comfortable they were with digital technology'. He, like Linda, spoke about the different worlds that existed on either side of the social class divide:

> *I wouldn't have come from that kind of background at all. I found it all very tricky. They were just different worlds (Evan, 210).*

Evan concluded by saying that he was also 'really shocked' at the lack of 'cultural awareness of inequality' among the middle-class students: 'It just didn't matter to them. It wasn't relevant to their lives' (Evan, 326).

5.4.4.5 *Markers of Financial Difference*

While not all in this cohort of students spoke with the same accent, or came from the same place, or had the same family or school experiences, every one of them said that they had experienced financial challenges of one kind or another. The majority of students explained that working throughout college was a financial necessity which impacted on both their ability to socialise and on their academic studies. Having 'dropped out' on her first attempt in

Southside University, Sandra explained that she had to work for a year to save up enough money before returning to do a different course:

> *College was hugely stressful for me financially and also emotionally…. I often had five or six jobs on the go. I wasn't just kicking back and enjoying college life (Sandra, 148).*

While many middle-class students also worked part time, Sandra pointed out that her experience was very different. Having disposable income to enjoy the college experience was different to the necessity of having to earn money:

> *Middle-class students didn't have to rely on the money. It was more for having fun. I love sports but I couldn't do sports and I just had to suck it up (Sandra, 163).*

Making ends meet financially was a constant challenge for most of these students. Ivan commented that he 'worked two evenings and at the weekend' and was 'skipping lectures' to take on extra hours (Ivan, 157). Linda remarked that she 'had all these books to buy and only a €50 voucher from the Access centre' (Linda, 195). Lucy faced similar financial challenges:

> *My mother sent me up food for the week, when I was in Westside University. I brought €5 for a night out and I had to plan if I was going to Dublin for a day (Lucy, 322).*

The challenges of the jobs they had taken on were discussed by several in the group: Gaye stated that she 'worked every summer to pay for my undergrad' and remembered a particular summer when she worked on a pig farm. She finished her point by commenting on how different life was for the better off students:

> *They were long hours and it was hard money. I was working on a pig-farm washing pigs. The middle-class students had got cars as presents for their good Leaving Cert results (Gaye, 156).*

Tom described his experiences working in hotels for 26 hours a week, while also trying to accommodate his academic studies. He remarked that 'weddings and funerals are easier to work around the college timetable' (Tom, 459).

> *It was pretty difficult. I was living on €10 to €15 per week. But the hotel gave me a doggy bag to take home on a Saturday and that would do me until Wednesday (Tom, 462).*

Many of the students commented that students who 'came from money' (Ivan, 158) often had little understanding of the challenges other less financially advantaged students faced. As Sandra remarked: 'The embarrassing thing is that you can't admit that you can't do something because you have no money' (Sandra, 168). Gaye described a strategy she had found for managing the middle-class students who had suggested that she ask her parents for money to socialise:

> *I was sick of a group of them so I just told them that my dad had invested money for me. I didn't tell them it was a €5 lottery ticket. They didn't know that. So, I just said we're not as liquid as we used to be (Gaye, 151).*

Not having easy access to money was seen to impact these students socially, academically, emotionally and psychologically, while also affecting their sense of autonomy and freedom:

> *I'm only realising the impact it had on me all my life. No money to see the doctor or to get out of a situation. No freedom. It's the shame of not having enough money (Sandra, 167).*

Sandra concluded noting that 'the money worries at home never left me. They have always been there' (Sandra, 164).

5.4.5 Social Challenges

Being different to the middle-class dominant student population in higher education was articulated in terms of deficit by these students, and was most pronounced in the challenges they faced socially. Issues around belonging and being part of a tribe or place, were invariably discussed in the negative. Most commented on the fact that higher education accentuated social

class difference. The majority of the students had been to DEIS schools and frequently arrived into their higher education institutions either knowing no-one or just one person. Ivan discussed his first evening in Westside University and going into the bar 'to make friends' (Ivan, 97):

> *I sat alone for an hour. I can't do this. I think I have to leave. And then three girls came over and asked me to join them for a drink. To be honest, if it wasn't for them I would never have come back. It was bad (Ivan, 105).*

Ivan's experiences were in a small university outside Dublin, whereas Liam's experiences were in the solidly middle-class Southside University. The difference in wealth and student population in Southside was identified by those in the students who had attended this university as a key factor in how they experienced their own sense of social difference. Liam commented that the number of fee-charging schools in the area around Southside University contributed to the 'culture in the college most definitely' (Liam, 181). Gary remarked on how all 'the posh students coming to Southside came with their secondary school friends'. He explained that he had to work at making new friends, whereas the 'posh' students already had a network of friends and 'there is no value for them in making new friends' (Gary, 353). Kirstie noticed the ease with which she felt the middle-class girls navigated their way through the familiar territory of Southside University: 'They were just sailing through college, because it was so normal for them to be there' (Kirstie, 691).

Interestingly, Sandra, whose family was one of the sunken middle classes and who lived in a middle-class area, spoke about how, although she had no sense of belonging in Southside, she could easily fit into the predominantly middle-class South Dublin student population: 'My accent and how I walked and dressed made it easier for me to fit in to a middle-class university' (Sandra, 159). Others, like Martina, felt that their working-class background marked them as different:

We could be spotted a mile away in tutorials and lectures. We were all having these same feelings in these classes. That we were out of place, you know (Martina, 512).

Finding one or two others that they could feel comfortable with was often spoken of by the students as a matter of luck for them, in comparison to the high numbers of middle-class students who arrived with an already-made network of friends. There was little sense of belonging in the stories these students told of their social experiences in higher education, a fact that accentuated their sense of difference even more.

5.4.6 Navigating through Higher Education

Regardless of the higher-level institutions attended, every student in this group had to find a way of navigating their way through the challenges that they faced as undergraduates. All commented on the challenge of being in a minority as undergraduates among a majority middle-class student population, with little mixing between the classes. This fact was even more pronounced in Southside University where the middle-class students from Dublin could more easily 'place' the disadvantaged students from Dublin. The main navigational strategy for these students invariably led to finding others who were similar to themselves, where they felt accepted and not judged. All spoke of the importance of having at least one friend on campus that they could relate to. These friendships were generally found amongst other students from similar socio-economic backgrounds or from outside Dublin, 'the country'. Without this anchor of friendship, many stated they would never have stayed the course. This strategy of finding and mixing only with your own tribe strengthened the divide between the middle-class Dublin students and these disadvantaged students. Including students from the country as part of their tribe, however, bolstered their small numbers and helped them survive.

Karl, who attended Northside University, explained that he 'hit it off with country people' and 'had a few friends from the inner-city' (Karl, 116). He remarked that he 'never

mixed with the middle-class Dublin students, especially the women', who tended not to integrate with either the working-class students or the 'country students' (Karl, 191).

> *The country people didn't see me as being from a DEIS school. They just saw me as a mad Dub. They didn't care whether I was from the flats or a big house on the South side. That's why I got on with them (Karl, 120).*

Clare, who also went to Northside University, noted that disadvantaged students like her were always on the periphery of the dominant middle-class Dublin groups, and she coped by finding other students similar to herself:

> *I had four friends who were all from similar backgrounds. Two were from Dublin and two were from the country. And the country girls knew nothing about our background. The middle- class girls were very cliquey and had friends from school (Clare, 136).*

The same point was repeatedly made by this group of students that the reason they were friendly with students from the country was that they could not be judged in the same way by country students who were not privy to the subtle nuances of accent, school attended and area lived in, that the Dublin students were. Tara explained that 'it made no difference to my country friends where we were from' (Tara, 319):

> *It was easier to make friends in my undergrad with people who are from the country, because obviously a lot of them didn't understand the difference between Brookvale (a working-class area) and Seaview (a middle-class area). Dublin people know the difference. Country people just classify you as being from Dublin. It makes it a lot easier not having to explain the robbed cars (laughs) (Tara, 327).*

Linda described a navigational strategy she used to help her fit into the privileged environment of Southside University. Unlike her comfortable friendship with her country friends where she 'didn't have to put on a different personality to impress them' (Linda, 291), Linda revealed that

she changed the way she spoke, dressed, and carried herself in an attempt to be blend in with the better-off students:

> *I found that if I can of act in certain ways they wouldn't say something. Like, I would change the way that I talked one hundred percent. I took more care pronouncing words and I pretended that I'm from Dublin and not the country. And I'd cross my legs. And I would wear different clothes into different lectures (Linda, 347).*

Gaye described a similar strategy if 'forced to mix with the middle-class students' in her rural college where she could pass herself as middle-class by 'emulating the middle-class students' accents'. Noticing the more privileged students had good handbags, Gaye recounted how she saved up and bought herself 'a Michael Kors bag' (Gaye, 211). There was one particular experience that Linda recalled where she changed the usual casual clothes that she wore in the Arts building, for something more suitable to wear in the Law Building, where many of the high points middle-class students were to be found:

> *I don't know what I was like. I forced myself to wear a dress on the coldest day of the year because I thought others might think I'm better off than I was. If I wore a tracksuit to the law building I get looks there, so I throw on my high heels in case I'd see the law-heads looking down on me (Linda, 353).*

Being more acceptable to the middle-class students as a way of protecting herself against negative judgement was important for Linda. Martina found both support and sanctuary in the Access offices, where students who came in on the HEAR or Access scheme could go for guidance and support: 'It didn't feel like this strange place' (Martina, 496). She commented that the support she found here was part of what helped her to navigate her way through her undergraduate degree in Southside University:

> *It was a place that we could be, because it's a place where we could see people from where we're from. People kind of knew our backgrounds but we didn't have to actually talk about it, you know. It was nice (Martina, 500).*

Each one of the students ultimately found at least one strategy that helped them navigate through the challenging waters of higher education.

5.4.7 Conclusion

This second stage of their journey as undergraduates in higher education echoed many of the challenges that these students encountered in school, as well as adding some new ones. There was sense for all of them that starting off on the road to higher education would be a challenging one, with no clear roadmap to guide them on their way. Their experiences as undergraduates were underpinned by an acute sense of difference from the dominant middle-class students, which in turn accentuated these students' sense of not belonging on this privileged territory. Many questioned their right to be in higher education at all. Their lack of belonging in this middle-class world of higher education revealed itself in the many social, academic, cultural and financial insecurities that these students experienced. Each student survived, however, even if the baggage they were carrying with them to the next stage of their journey was now heavier.

The next section, stage three of their journey, was the professional Masters in Education and their destination. This destination, however, involved two distinct locations, posing different challenges for this cohort of students. The first location was the academic centre of their master's degree in the solidly middle-class Southside University. The second location was the school(s) in which the students did their teaching placement

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Stage 3: World of Teacher Education

5.5.1 Introduction

The third stage of their journey brought this particular cohort of disadvantaged PME students to the Professional Masters in Education (PME) and the different world of post-graduate education in Southside University. Their experiences during their schooling and undergraduate studies, the first two stages of their educational journey to post-primary teacher education, were spoken of in terms of being challenging, leaving these students with a sense of not belonging in the middle-class world of higher education and of experiencing their difference as deficit when compared to their middle-class peers.

Stage three explores how the experiences of these students during the first two phases of their educational journey were further consolidated and challenged on the middle-class territory of the PME in Southside University, and how the students manage to navigate these experiences.

5.5.2 Initial Response

The initial response to being accepted on the PME for many of the students in this cohort was surprise and delight, followed almost immediately by fear and stress about finance, and being able to cope and fit in. Once again, there was discussion about being in the wrong place. Many were surprised that they had managed to secure a place on the PME. Gaye commented that as teaching ‘runs in families’ and she was ‘outside’ of this, getting a place on the PME was something of a ‘lottery’ for her (Gaye, 370). Joe stated that he was delighted to be offered a place on the PME, especially as he had been ‘rejected twice’ and only got accepted on a third-round offer (Joe, 8). Sandra’s response encapsulated the mixture of delight and worry that was so typical of many of the other students’ responses:

> *I was so excited to be on the PME, even if I didn't know how I was going to pay the fees. But I was there and it was an achievement. But the worry about how I was going to live and pay my fees was extremely stressful (Sandra, 291).*

Managing financially was central to the initial fears articulated by these students. As Martina observed, accepting a place on the PME was 'not as simple as just clicking "accept"; there were a lot more steps to consider' (Martina, 6). For some students like Kirstie and Karl, taking a year off to save the requisite money for fees, was one of those steps. Central as financial concerns were to the students' initial response, these worries were often overshadowed by the fears the students expressed around their ability to fit in both socially and academically:

> *Before coming to Southside University, I was thinking will I know anyone? Will I make friends and fit in with people? Will I fit in on campus? (Mary, 212).*

Despite her strong desire to teach and support pupils like herself, Martina spoke of how her negative experiences as an undergraduate student in a rural institution impacted on her confidence and ability to undertake the PME (Martina, 31):

> *I was terrified accepting my place on the PME. This is a mistake. I was now voluntarily choosing a course based on all the things I'm terrified of (Martina, 570).*

Self-doubt was also evident in Jack's account of accepting a place on the PME: 'Could I do this?' and would 'I get caught out bluffing' (Jack, 198). Linking his academic self-doubt to his middle-class surroundings and prior educational experiences, Jack explained: 'I really wasn't sure that I was in the right place; and that this was what I should be doing' (Jack, 203):

> *I felt very much that I would have been in the wrong place. But I would always have had that self-doubt… that would have gone back all the way through my education and the feeling that I shouldn't be there (Jack, 339).*

The sense of being in the wrong place when accepting a place on the PME, was also evident in the PME students' accounts of the importance of the physical environment in Southside University.

5.5.3 Southside University: Campus

Having completed his undergraduate degree in a small third level institution on the North side of Dublin, Joe commented that he 'couldn't navigate Southside at all' when he arrived on the university campus: 'it's like another planet out there' (Joe, 592). Kate described being 'overwhelmed with the size of Southside and trying to find my way around' (Kate, 366). The size of the campus in relation to their undergraduate experiences was commented on by many of the students who were new to Southside. Gaye noticed 'the sheer vastness and incredible facilities' in Southside, and even took a 'video of the moving stairs in the library to send to friends' (Gaye, 261). Jade reflected that 'just getting around the library' would need a full day (Jade, 38).

Southside University's proximity to their home was an important factor for several students in terms of how safe they felt. For Ivan, although Southside was bigger than Westside University where he did his undergraduate degree, it was also nearer to his Dublin home:

> *Southside University was so much bigger than Westside University. But I didn't feel as isolated because I was in Dublin and if anything happened, someone could come and collect me. Or I could get the bus home (Ivan, 234).*

Lucy also did her undergraduate degree in Westside University but unlike Ivan, she was now further away from her rural home doing the PME in Southside University, remarking that she felt both the difference and the lack of safety:

> *I felt safe in Westside University for my undergraduate. There was a friendly atmosphere there, whereas in Dublin you've no idea what's going on and you're three hours away from home (Lucy, 313).*

Lucy also differentiated between the 'country people' (outside Dublin) in Westside University, where she said she felt 'comfortable' (Lucy, 315), and the understandably more Dublin-centred, middle-class student population of Southside University, where Lucy felt that she was 'trespassing' (Lucy, 337).

How the PME students spoke about their experiences in the middle-class territory that is Southside University, will now be explored.

5.5.3.1 *Southside University: Territorial Rights*

The middle-class composition of the student population in Southside, in addition to its location in one of the most affluent parts of Dublin, were identified as accentuating the sense of difference and of occupying an inferior position on privileged territory, that many of this cohort of students said they felt. Martina commented on the more privileged students being on their 'own ground'; 'being 'settled here' and 'looking at home' (Martina, 212). Gaye observed that the university was 'definitely upper-class, upper-middle-class territory. I've never seen anything like it' (Gaye, 269). Kirstie echoed this view of Southside University as being 'still dominated by the middle and upper middle-class' (Kristie, 591).

The sense of belonging that the disadvantaged students associated with the middle-class PME students was not something that they themselves experienced. Martina remarked that she 'was terrified' in Southside and her sense of impermanence was captured when she asserted that she was 'just floating through and hoping to survive' (Martina, 210). Kirstie's feelings of not belonging were expressed in her comment that she was 'just visiting; you're allowed to be there' (Kirstie, 494). Kirstie went on to say that, unlike those privileged PME students who felt

that they were in their rightful place, she felt 'lucky to be here' (Kirstie, 383). The feeling of being 'lucky' rather than deserving of a place, was repeated in Martina's words when she commented on the confidence of the middle-class PME students in being able to achieve their goal:

> *Doing a masters was just the next step for them. They always had the idea that they were able to do it. They knew they'd be a teacher. For us, if we're lucky, maybe we might be able to get through (Martina, 195).*

The feeling of somehow trespassing on middle-class territory and being 'spotted' as an interloper that underpinned so many of the PME students' accounts of their experiences at undergraduate level, was also at the core of Martina's story on the PME:

> *I remember one day I said I'd treat myself to something in the restaurant but I kind of felt like I shouldn't be there. Even though nobody would know where I'm from or my background, it was just scary to walk on the campus and go in by myself. I kind of felt I was doing something wrong (Martina, 733).*

Rather than eat inside, Martina got something in the local shop as 'it was more natural. It was safer to do it by myself'. Reflecting on her sense of being an outsider, Martina explained that she and her friends from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds 'would just sit outside the restaurants or cafes but wouldn't go in' (Martina, 400). Martina revealed that she felt like 'fish out of water' in Southside University (Martina, 237).

Coming from Northside University where she felt there were more disadvantaged students, Clare explained that she felt more conscious of her disadvantaged background in Southside University:

> *It was always at the back of my mind that I'm a HEAR* (Higher Education Access Route) *student in Southside. I was very self-conscious because there's lots of people from the*

> *South side who would have gone to private schools, and in my mind, we are from different types of worlds (Clare, 7).*

Feeling that they came from different worlds accentuated the sense of not belonging that these students felt, in contrast to their perception of the middle-class native population.

5.5.3.2 *Southside University: Sense of Belonging*

The proximity of Southside University campus to the wealthy schools and suburbs that many of the middle-class PME students came from, was discussed by the less advantaged PME students in terms of being an automatic pathway to higher and post-graduate education for the privileged students:

> *For all the schools in the radius of Southside there is a natural progression. They felt that they belonged. I got that sense. It was a natural progression (Evan, 265).*

This taken-for-granted progression of the middle-class students to higher education and subsequently to the PME, was contrasted with the distance, both physical and psychological, that the PME students spoke of in relation to their own environment and expectations:

> *Oh my God, what am I doing here? I felt I had gone to a different place, to a different world. This is their area. They always knew that they'd be coming down this road, whereas for me, it felt like a different country (Martina, 219).*

Ivan also connected the 'wealth in Southside' (Ivan, 436) with the natural progression of the middle-class PME students to post-graduate education, and discussed his feelings of discomfort, of being 'in the wrong place' and not being part of the dominant middle-class groups. Ivan spoke of being the 'first in his family to get a degree let alone a masters' and questioned whether the PME was for him (Ivan, 247):

> *They're all very comfortable with this. It was the attitudes of some of the people on the PME that they were destined to do this, that this is just where they belong. It was just*

> *like an entitlement. Whereas I didn't expect to get in to the PME. How the hell did I do that? (Ivan, 241).*

Unlike the middle-class PME students who live 'just down the road' (Ivan, 282), the majority of the PME students interviewed did not live in close proximity to Southside University. As Jack pointed out: 'A lot of people in Southside come from the area around the college and I'm not socially in that group' (Jack, 219). Linda made a similar point:

> *All these ones were coming into big Southside from their D4 (middle-class) homes and doing their Masters and I'm just little me from the back arse of rural Ireland (Linda, 40).*

Whether from Dublin or from outside Dublin, the majority of PME students in this cohort had long commutes to Southside University. Gaye stated that she had a five-to-six hour round trip every day, which she called a 'commuting nightmare' (Gaye, 501). The irony of the more privileged PME students, who lived in closest proximity to the university, having the best bus-routes and means of transport, was not lost on Gary:

> *There was no direct bus from where I lived because it wasn't a privileged area. I had to get two buses to Southside. But the middle-class PME students had the direct bus route because they lived in a privileged area. But they also have cars to get in. And they're still late for lectures because of parking issues (Gary, 336).*

The identification of the more advantaged PME students being from South Dublin was a central point that many of the disadvantaged PME students commented on in terms of either being judged or 'placed'. Liam commented that he felt that social class was of particular concern in 'South County Dublin, as there is more snobbery and looking down from the middle-class there' (Liam, 348). Evan also identified the Dublin PME students in particular, whether advantaged or disadvantaged, as being adept at socially placing someone else from Dublin:

> *The Dublin cohort of people on the PME are going to prejudge each other based on where they went to school, where they're from and how they speak. If I was younger I don't know if I would have told the truth about where I was from (Evan, 269).*

The social divide and feelings of difference identified by the majority of disadvantaged PME students are now explored in more detail.

5.5.3.3 *Southside University: Few Among Many*

The perception of both a clear roadmap and an easier pathway to the PME for the middle-class students, was commented on by the more disadvantaged PME students. Evan commented that 'all was planned and laid out in front of them; school, degree, job' (Evan, 269), resulting in a higher proportion of students attending Southside University from middle-class backgrounds, who were 'never on their own' and never needed 'to talk to anyone else' (Kirstie, 450). Gary also commented on the fact that 'the middle-class students coming into the PME came in their cliques' (Gary, 428):

> *It's kind of like a club and they're very protective of that club as well. They don't see anyone else apart from that. It's very tribal (Gary, 431).*

This sense of being isolated and being one among many was clearly captured in Gaye's analogy:

> *I was aware of social class in my undergraduate institution (outside Dublin) but in Southside was the first time when I felt properly marginalised. I looked around and I thought, this is probably racist of me to say, but my God, is this what black people feel on a regular basis? Because there are so few of me and there's loads of them. (Gaye, 251).*

Their position as outsiders in this new territory was keenly felt by the PME students, and whereas they 'chatted, there was no socialising' with the middle-class PME students (Clare,

318). Kirstie maintained that the middle-class students did not want to, or need to, engage with other students outside of their circle and that 'they would never talk to anyone' (Kirstie, 445):

> *Our paths never crossed. I was never asked to join anybody. They didn't want anything to do with me. If I didn't have people who understood me, it would be very difficult. I feel for anyone on the course that doesn't have anyone to talk to (Kirstie, 453).*

Having one person to talk to on the PME programme made a difference for these students. Meeting other similarly disadvantaged students on the HEAR scheme was important for Martina: 'Unless I had someone I knew from the HEAR scheme I wouldn't have done the PME by myself' (Martina, 728). Gaye also commented that she found being on the PME socially isolating:

> *I was still very alienated on the social side. It was very isolating. I found a couple of others to mix with who were also isolated and experienced the same kind of judgement being passed on you on the PME (Gaye, 370).*

Jade also mentioned the already formed middle-class cliques on the PME and remarked that it was hard not knowing anyone: 'You feel like nobody wants to get to know you or get close to you' (Jade, 135).

Some mature students like Neil commented that his social needs were met outside Southside University but that he would 'sympathise with others on the PME who have to struggle with the isolation of it' (Neil, 351). Evan, another mature student, explained that there was little common ground between the middle-class and the disadvantaged groups on the PME, again accentuating the different worlds that both groups came from:

> *I would have been intimidated in Southside if I had been younger. There is nobody to consult with. There is no reference point. Nothing. I had nothing culturally in common with the middle-class students (Evan, 272).*

Adjusting to this new world proved challenging for many of these students.

5.5.3.4 *Southside University: Middle-class Environment*

Trying to fit in and adapt to the different world of the middle classes in Southside University was identified as challenging by this group of PME students. The clear road map to higher and post-graduate education for the middle-class students meant that **'**nothing changed for them. It must be quite easy, you know' (Gary, 429). Gary went on to explain that although he had completed his undergraduate degree in Southside University, he still did not feel that he was part of the university and that he was still trying to figure out how to manage himself around the middle-class PME students:

> *I am essentially new on the PME, even though a lot of PMEs were more new than me, as it was my university. But I never actually thought of it as my university. I have to figure out how the other people (middle classes) operate. I'm coming in, but it's their territory (Gary, 449).*

Whereas the PME students from disadvantaged backgrounds had to work hard at adapting to an alien environment, especially when 'you don't know anyone' (Gary, 436), the more privileged students faced no such challenges according to Gaye, and could 'be what they want to be' (Gaye, 597):

> *Middle-class students never had to fix their lesser qualities. We're forced to have a kind of personality transplant. Because they can skate by on what they had before they arrived in Southside. They all knew each other. They don't have to change themselves because they can stay the same (Gaye, 597).*

5.5.4 Difference and the Social Divide

The sense of feeling different to the middle-class students on the PME was central to the experiences of every PME student in this group. They spoke of social and cultural

differences; of academic and educational differences; of financial and class differences; of differences in class, area and dress; and of differences in language, confidence and expectations.

Evan pointed out 'the definite division on the PME between those who are middle-class and those who aren't' (Evan, 130). Martina simply stated that 'the middle-class students on the PME weren't the same as me'. The obvious economic differences between the social groups were acknowledged by this group of PME students: the middle-class PME students 'had money', as well as having 'family supports and lots of friends whose parents had gone to university' (Martina, 190). Kate highlighted the urban/rural differences that she perceived between the middle-class students, whom she associated as being from South County Dublin only, and the more open rural and disadvantaged PME students like herself:

> *I feel that they're just a different breed altogether. I wouldn't relate to them on the same level. Down here, the people are more blossomed as people; not as closed up. More open (Kate, 168).*

Clare commented that her sense of difference on the PME centred, not only on social class, but on not being from the South Side of Dublin:

> *I feel as if I'm different. I'm from the North Side. There was no one from a working-class North side background in my class (Clare, 314).*

Like so many other PME students, Jack explained that he was 'not of the same ilk as a lot of the other students and their backgrounds, and had very little connection with them' (Jack, 345). Jack differentiated between those PME students who had to work to pay their way and the more privileged students:

> *I had very little connection with them. It's hard trying to mix socially with people from a different background where our concerns are different. Socially I never went out with anybody on the PME. Not all of them were like that, because some were working at*

night time just to be there during the day; and those students were more realistic about things (Jack, 351).

5.5.4.1 *Difference as Social Barrier*

Many of the students linked the sense of difference they experienced to the lack of socialising and integration between the two social groups. As Gaye explained: 'people stayed in their own social groups. Not everyone helps each other' (Gaye, 422):

I don't think integration happens on the PME in Southside. We learned to find our own people, while the middle-class are off doing their own thing. My friends in Southern and Western Universities would have mixed with posh people, but not to the extent of Southside. It's harsh here. And they're only teachers. I can only imagine what medicine is like, in the 1% bracket of the elite (Gaye, 535).

Jack recounted how he had 'tried crossing the social boundaries' (Jack, 197) but his attempts were unsuccessful. He commented that there was 'no connection' and that being a mature student, along with his working-class background and being perceived as a 'country bumpkin', meant that 'it wouldn't have worked as socially I wasn't attuned to their background and I was more like their father' (Jack, 204). Having worked many years in a factory, Jack recalled a conversation that he had overheard among some middle-class undergraduate students in Southside University, and which he felt highlighted the gap between the social classes for him:

I nearly got sick one day when a group of students were slagging another student about going back to his working-class roots because he was working in a factory for the summer. I wondered should I say something, but I didn't say anything. This is the environment that some of the students were coming from and how they think about working on a factory floor (Jack, 228).

Age and life experience worked in Jack's favour when he explained that he could see through 'lip service and whether they're interested in talking' or not. At this stage of his life, Jack explained that he was 'not interested in wasting time with those who don't want to engage' (Jack, 231). Neil, another mature student, observed that 'as far as the PME goes, I couldn't even tell you the name of anybody in my class' (Neil, 349).

Rarely crossing class boundaries was perceived by this cohort of PME students as contributing to and accentuating the different worlds that each group came from. Gaye contended that the lack of social interaction contributed to a lack of understanding on the part of the middle-class PME students of the challenges that the disadvantaged students faced. Despite their advanced knowledge in some areas, the middle-class PME students 'don't understand' what poverty is like: 'They like to think that they know about poverty; but they haven't a clue' (Gaye, 427). Gaye explained that less privileged students on the PME were 'going in completely blind as to what the world is like within that little bubble' of Southside University (Gaye, 476). The academic and financial barriers were secondary to the social barriers for many:

> *People will drop out because of those people. It's not because of the college. It's not because of the academics. It's because of the people in the college…because they are worlds apart from what they are used to. And if you're not able to adapt, it can be very isolating (Gaye, 487).*

As this cohort of students experienced their difference as deficit, a closer exploration of the principal markers of difference is undertaken in the next section.

5.5.5 Markers of Difference

The same core markers of social class difference that were identified by the PME students as central to their undergraduate experiences also came to the fore on the PME. These

markers included accent, area, and finance, which are discussed in this section. A further marker of difference concerned how the less advantaged PME students experienced the perceived personal and academic confidence of the middle-class PME students. This important difference will be explored in a subsequent section.

5.5.5.1 *The 'Epicentre of Wealth'*

The first thing Gaye reported she noticed on the PME in Southside University was 'the insane wealth'. She went on to explain that 'everyone was so much more wealthy' and that she felt that she was 'in the epicentre of wealth' (Gaye, 258). Clare also observed the 'huge difference in wealth and money' when she did the PME in Southside (Clare, 280). As with their undergraduate experience, the PME students remarked that they noticed the 'fancy cars' (Clare, 282); 'better clothes and Hawaiian tans' (Kate, 442); and the fact that 'all the middle-class students had their own laptops and we had none' (Martina, 265). Martina went on to explain the lack of understanding that she felt was evident in comments made by some middle-class students:

> *The middle-class students had the latest iPhones but we had much older ones. I remember a few of them asked us if our phones were broken. We didn't understand what they meant. And they said 'are you just using those until your iPhones are fixed?' Yeah! We all broke our phones at the same time. But we just never took our phones out again. Never (Martina, 271).*

Linda commented that she felt that her clothes differentiated her from the middle-class students who 'looked the part' of future teachers:

> *I remember when I first started on the PME, I felt I couldn't look like a teacher, you know. They were nicely dressed and I wore in a tracksuit. The guys were all in their shirt and slacks and the girls were in their dresses and boots. And they really looked*

like teachers. They're probably like who is this weirdo. She looks kind of rough (Linda, 69).

5.5.5.2 *Accent*

Mirroring their undergraduate experiences of accents as differentiators of social class, many of the PME students stated that there were 'clear differences' between the accents of the middle-class students on the PME and the less advantaged PME students (Linda, 467). Linda explained that the middle-class PME students 'would pronounce things differently. For example, they would say WON and I would say WAN' (Linda, 470). Gaye commented on the 'very posh accent that everyone who had been to a private school had' (Gaye, 255), an accent which differentiated the middle-class students from the less privileged students like themselves, and which several perceived as providing an opportunity to judge:

I'm being judged on the first thing they hear. They don't know me as a person. I'm sick and tired of explaining myself (Linda, 600).

The sense of judgement in relation to accent was linked by Mary not only to social class position, but also to personal worth. Mary explained that she was 'worried' about her country accent, which she connected to her right to be on the programme:

It comes down to being judged…that the person thinks badly of me or has a bad perception of me and that they think oh you're not good enough. Or maybe you don't deserve to be here (Mary, 436).

Ivan revealed that he had 'got slagged' (insulted) about his accent in Southside University. Linda explained that she would be 'shivering in a lecture and dreaded being called on to speak' as she felt that she would be judged negatively because of the 'kind of local way' in which she spoke:

> *I would basically be afraid of someone being 'oh, like the way she speaks is really common'. But I'm not going to put on a posh accent because it's not me (Linda, 81*)

Being a disadvantaged PME student in Southside University but not being from Dublin was seen to be an advantage in terms of accents: 'you can't be judged in the same way if you're from the country' (Gaye, 349). Accent was also seen as advantageous in terms of helping students to find others who were from 'where they were from' (Ivan, 437).

> *At the start of the PME I felt very isolated. And it was hard to find those people (disadvantaged) because there are so few of them. I went by finding an accent similar to my own as I knew there'd be some semblance of normality (Gaye, 345).*

Both accent and where you lived were inextricably linked for these students.

5.5.5.3 *Area:*

The question of where you were from as a means of both accentuating difference and socially placing someone continued to be identified as relevant by this cohort of PME students, creating barriers to social inclusion:

> *It's very hard to break into the cliques in Southside. Even if I eventually got talking to someone, you always get asked where did you go to school and where are you from (Evan, 266).*

When Clare identified the disadvantaged area she lived in, she remarked on the immediate change in attitude from the middle-class PME students:

> *Their faces changed. They became more wary of where I'm coming from because there's a lot of crime associated with the area. Or they looked down on me because of my social class. I don't know what it is but I could see the change in attitude (Clare, 281).*

Tara noticed something similar and remarked that 'people are almost afraid to talk to you. It's nearly that they're taken aback if you say where you're from' (Tara, 358). Of the various negative experiences Martina had in relation to where she lived, she revealed 'the worst one, which still stands out for me' (Martina, 280):

> *I was trying to get the courage to talk to someone but when I did, I was asked where I was from. When I said where I was from, the two girls I was talking to just turned around and walked away. I was more angry than hurt. That's a terrible thing to have done. But I try not to take it personally. I just wanted to be friends with them (Martina, 292).*

As a consequence of the negative responses many of these PME students received when identifying where they lived, Tara commented that there 'would be people in Southside who would be genuinely afraid to say where they were from and would say instead that they are from a better area nearby: 'It's just because of the stigma attached to the area. I think people are almost afraid to talk to you' (Tara, 349). Linda was one of those PME students who pretended to be from a better locality nearby in response to the pitying look that 'kills me' (Linda, 601) whenever she revealed where she was really from:

> *I pretended I was from Seaview instead of where I'm really from. But I couldn't keep the Seaview act up for much longer (Linda, 606).*

Anne recounted an experience she had on the PME when the area she was from was used as an example of 'poor progression rates to higher education' during a lecture (Anne, 241). Anne revealed a certain protectiveness about her area, and wanted to point out that she and her two friends had progressed to post-graduate education:

> *I was very very angry as people must think it's a horrible place. That it had such a bad name. I got really really annoyed that people would think that no one has the desire to*

go to higher education from there. I wanted to say you're very very wrong but I had to bite my tongue and not say anything (Anne, 248).

Anne explained that if she had challenged the lecturer that it 'would have played into a certain negative stereotype of someone from that area, providing a show for all to watch' (Anne, 254). As with all the other markers of difference identified by this cohort of PME students, a sense of difference as deficit in relation to the dominant group continued to feed into their feeling of not belonging. 'You're not one of them' (Clare, 284). And while the middle-class PME students may be 'curious about life on the other side of the tracks', Gaye maintained that 'they would never dream of going there themselves' (Gaye, 321). Brian contended that once he became a teacher he would be able to move socially from a disadvantaged 'there' to a more prosperous 'here':

When someone asks where you're from, I feel I have to justify it by saying where I live. But I won't be from there when I get my teacher salary, you know (Brian, 422).

5.5.5.4 *Finance*

The financial challenges identified by this group of PME students served to further differentiate their experiences on the programme from their more privileged peers. Echoing their experiences as undergraduates, the students discussed how they had no option but to work long hours outside college in order to manage the substantial fees on the PME programme and to survive financially. Consequently, the majority of students revealed that they were not able to socialise, play sports or travel, and were constantly trying to balance the academic, teaching, personal and working aspects of their lives, while coping with the emotional impact of their circumstances:

> *Finances were a much bigger issue for me on the PME than on my undergrad, as it's so expensive. I had to work outside for money. It was so hard working and doing college work (Gaye, 494).*

Many in this cohort had to postpone taking up their offer of a place on the PME in order to afford the fees. Even then, Kirstie commented that she 'was worried about paying for my bus fare, and lunches; the small things' (Kirstie, 12). Sandra mentioned the health issues she had, and the huge stress that she faced both 'financially and emotionally' by having to work outside (Sandra, 244). Subbing in his school 'from nine to five and then doing an evening shift until two in the morning' was described as 'a bit of a tough slog' by Joe (Joe, 58). Linda remarked that she dreaded the sympathetic look 'like someone has died' when she explained to the more privileged students that she had no option but to work off campus (Linda, 479).

Having to work long hours outside of the PME was 'just alien to the middle-class students' according to Tara (Tara, 485):

> *The middle-class students on the PME were exhausted after just teaching and I was going onto work shift: 'oh, you work as well?' Well, that's how I afford to pay for this (Tara, 497).*

Unable to afford living in Dublin, Gaye explained that her long daily commute had implications for her health and academic work:

> *I was slumped over my desk in the tutorial. I just couldn't concentrate. I wasn't able to take stuff in. There was never enough time to do anything and I was completely emotionally and physically exhausted. Last year was horrible (Gaye, 509).*

Lack of money was identified by these students as one of the key stressors on the PME, affecting how they experienced the programme:

> *Money just stressed me out the whole time on the PME. When my laptop broke I didn't have enough money to get another one. I'm still struggling. I couldn't ever fully relax and enjoy it (Sandra, 130).*

Karl explained how a recent fire at home meant that his family had to move house while 'getting money to rent' (Karl, 197), with implications for his academic work for the PME:

> *We were living with no power. I had to go to a friend's house to plug my laptop in to do my four assignments. I just washed in the sink or in the school gym, and me Ma went into the neighbour's house (Karl, 201).*

Many of the students discussed how the bureaucracy around accessing grants, such as the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant was 'very stressful' (Brian, 227): 'My nana had to go without some things on her pension' (Brian, 231). Mary also had financial problems while waiting for her grant to be approved:

> *Getting the grant was a real spanner in the works. They wouldn't give it to me at the beginning. There was huge stress. My parents are both on welfare but they were prepared to get it all for me. You're always battling bureaucracy (Mary 264).*

Even when Martina and her friends received their grants, lack of money continued to accentuate the differences in territorial belonging between the two social groups:

> *Our money just barely covered our buses and a couple of lunches a month, not a week. Some of us just brought our sandwiches and ate outside, while the other PME students who are better off ate in the cafeteria (Martina, 228).*

As Martina identified, the sense of being on the outside in this privileged world was frequently accentuated by what these students could not access and what the more privileged students could:

> *I brought in packed lunches every day because I couldn't afford Centra (on-campus shop). There was no chicken fillet sandwiches for me. And I'd be starving looking at the well-off students eating them (Linda, 752).*

Accentuating this sense of 'us' and 'them' were the reactions that those students in receipt of a SUSI grant would get from some of the middle-class PME students. Linda explained that:

> *People would like to categorise you as a certain kind of person. I wouldn't be saying that I got a SUSI grant to anyone or I get slagged and ridiculed (Linda, 135).*

Linda went on to talk about the 'snarky, disparaging comments' from an older, middle-class male PME student and that she was 'really upset' as a consequence (Linda, 751):

> *You with your big age and you are picking on someone that you don't know the background of. You don't know the kind of struggles that I've had with regards to my fees. And to be so ridiculed. I was so uncomfortable. Even with a grant I had no spare cash. I bet he's not bringing in his sambo (sandwich) but I'm still bringing in my lunch bag (Linda, 763).*

The use of the SUSI grant as a yardstick with which to 'place' someone socially, was also used by the PME students themselves as a way of both identifying others like themselves and as a way of differentiating others from themselves: 'I would probably say that I'd be lower socially than others because they don't need a grant' (Brian, 43). Trying to cover up their lack of money was described as challenging by this group of PME students:

> *I felt I couldn't say I don't have the money to socialise. I tried to keep face. I stretched and stressed rather than saying no (Sandra, 238).*

Brian explained that the help of friends 'did not take away my embarrassment' and that he would 'beat around the bush' rather than draw attention to his financial circumstances (Brian, 25). However, being able to access money from the Southside University support funds meant

that Tom could now afford certain things that had caused him a lot of 'embarrassment' before. As he pointed out: 'it changed my life' (Tom, 291):

> *I went to the dentist for the first time since I was 14, and that's a long time ago. And the chiropodist. It's so good now. It sounds silly, but does everyone get this good feeling? The difference between me feeling okay and me not feeling not okay was €300 (Tom, 302).*

The issues identified by this group of students did not just focus on the practical problems that a lack of money brought them on the PME, but often on the emotional cost of feeling different, of always coming from behind and of trying to belong in a world that they did not feel was theirs in any meaningful way. Sandra stated that there needed to be stronger awareness of the systemic unfairness that lies at the core of the differences between the middle-class PME students and those who are less advantaged:

> *There needs to be more emotional support and more talk about this. Not having enough money to do something needs to be normalised. That it's all not shameful, but that it's unfair. And maybe we need to figure out ways that people can be more supportive (Sandra, 373).*

Similar challenges were also experienced by these students online.

5.5.6 Online Experiences

With the onset of the global pandemic, all of the PME students in this cohort who were still on the programme were now participating online. Their experiences of difference and of trying to fit in to a world that is not their world, were identified as also being of relevance online. For some, having lectures online worked in their favour. Martina remarked that she 'didn't have to stutter and overthink' and could 'post comments into the group without people watching me' (Martina, 69). Mary felt that being able to type in questions was more

comfortable for her as she felt that it was the ‘posher ones who asked all the questions’ (Mary, 10). The pre-recorded lectures were identified by Lucy as a positive because they allowed her time ‘to gather her thoughts’ (Lucy, 321).

The majority of PME students in this cohort, however, identified more challenges than benefits from their online experiences, mentioning problems with their wi-fi and internet; social isolation; issues of confidence; not having any suitable place to work; family issues; and lack of privacy.

5.5.6.1 ***Trying to connect.*** In contrast to the middle-class PME students who ‘have the technology’, (Jane, 67), many of this group of PME students, like Sandra, explained that they had no Wi-Fi or internet as they could not ‘afford it’ (Sandra, 431). Lucy remarked that ‘rural Wi-Fi isn’t great’ and that she just 'zoned out’ (Lucy, 321). Linda described the pressure she felt to ‘to fix this’ and her only solution was do all her online teaching in her grandmother’s house or stay back in school (Linda, 68). Stress around accessing Wi-Fi or having the appropriate technology was discussed by many of the PME students, not merely in relation to finance and family, but also in terms of how they felt:

> *I had no Wi-Fi and no Internet so I had to work from a local hotel. I was too embarrassed to say that I had no money. I bought Internet access per month after that. I had no laptop and I couldn’t replace it (Sandra 436).*

5.5.6.2 ***Disconnected.*** As Lucy pointed out ‘it’s just not the same meeting people on zoom’ (Lucy, 181), a point that many other students concurred with. Making friends was discussed as being challenging by Linda:

> *I was so disconnected from college online it was unbelievable. I could not be further from feeling like I'm in college. I could be in college with complete strangers. It made absolutely no difference. I made no new friends at all (Linda, 656).*

Mary revealed that she found the online experience was 'very isolating' for her and that she did not have any sense of belonging or feeling integrated in any way on the PME. She explained that she felt that she was on her own with 'no friends to go for coffee with' (Mary, 395). While acknowledging that 'it's weird for everyone not to be on campus' (Jane, 761), not having a ready-made network of friends like the middle-class PME students and not being able to find others like herself to connect with, was particularly challenging online for Jane:

> *Online we don't get to talk to anybody to find out who is in a similar boat to ourselves. This lack of contact is very alien; not to be able to make friends on the course. I can't talk to anyone. It's completely isolating. There is a terrible lack of integration (Jane, 768).*

Opportunities to integrate, such as breakout rooms, were 'pointless' according to Lucy, who noted that most of the PME students had their cameras off and were 'just sitting there and no-one saying anything' (Lucy, 159):

> *Online was very hard to build relationships. I didn't say to anyone how hard I was finding everything. I didn't know if anyone was feeling it as hard as I was (Lucy, 191).*

5.5.6.3 ***Exposed.*** Jane maintained that she could 'definitely tell about people's class' from what was revealed of their homes online (Jane, 38). Kirstie pointed out that some of her fee-paying pupils 'were in offices' (Kristie, 107), while Jane noticed that the middle-class PME students were happy to have their 'cameras and mics on, and their offices or library or fancy kitchen' on view (Jane, 41). For the PME students from a less privileged background, many like Jane

remarked that participating in a lecture, or teaching from your home, felt like an 'invasion of privacy' (Jane, 37):

> *It's very stressful. I didn't want them to see my socks or the pile of clothes on my chair beside me. Everything is on show about you. It's very exposing (Jane, 46).*

Family life for many of these PME students was discussed as being challenging when trying to participate in lectures, tutorials or teach online. Living in a 'cramped, loud household, where one of the kids had special needs' was difficult for Linda (Linda, 621):

> *I'm always afraid that my ma is going to be shouting or my brother is going to come out with something. My family are really noisy with lots of screaming and shouting in my house. You could hear everything (Linda, 630).*

Linda explained that having 'nowhere else to go' meant that she had to adapt her teaching methodologies to her circumstances by muting herself and using various video clips as teaching tools instead of her voice, as she was 'very nervous doing stuff on the mic' given her family circumstances (Linda, 193).

A different marker of class identified by this group of PME students, the perceived confidence of the middle-class students, is explored in the next section.

5.5.7 The Confidence of Class

A central component contributing to the disadvantaged students' sense of difference was an awareness that the middle-class PME students were 'much more self-confident and much more self-assured' than they were (Clare, 312). They explained that the privilege of the middle-class students created a confidence and 'assurance that they're okay' (Clare, 310). This confidence was discussed as being embodied in the body language, dress code, language and communication skills of the middle-class students:

> *The majority of students on the PME would have come from very well-to-do backgrounds. They have a couple of houses and different accents. And the way they dress is different. And the way they kind of hold themselves; there is a confidence and a certain culture. What they talk about is different (Evan, 263).*

The disadvantaged PME students discussed feeling their difference as deficit in relation to the confidence of the middle-class PME students, evident in Linda's comment that she 'didn't feel comfortable at all', just 'different' (Linda, 68):

> *You can see the difference in their body language. You notice the way they hold themselves more confidently. Like walking into the lecture, their head would be up and their Louis Vuitton handbag on the shoulder. And I'm struggling here with my girlfriends. We all have our platinum hair, and come in, like head down, in a big tracksuit. And I throw myself into the corner. (Linda, 61).*

Gary maintained that this middle-class self-confidence resulted in a certain 'pompousness', and a belief that they were 'the top of society and the crème de la crème', able to access 'whatever they need' (Gary, 485). Theories as to where this middle-class confidence came from were discussed by several of the students. Reflecting many of their undergraduate experiences, Clare connected middle-class confidence to the fact that these students 'know what they're doing and are more comfortable being in Southside. Their family has been to college'. (Clare, 312). The benefit of having a family history of both HE and teaching was evident in Gaye's comment that:

> *There are a lot of middle-class people on the PME. There are very few that are just normal. You notice that the people who are there, a lot of them have come from money or have parents who are teachers. It's like a generational thing (Gaye, 12).*

The generational and reproductive aspect of social class difference on the PME was also noted by Neil, who commented that the 'children of teachers' in the teaching profession and how

'everyone's being taught by the middle class' (Neil, 287). Gaye explained the middle class in terms of 'a life cycle', where you are in a 'bubble of wealth' (Gaye, 115):

> *And you have somebody pushing you to make sure that you are the best at what you do. Or being told that you are the best. And there is a certain element of self-fulfilling prophecy there. You know you will be the best (Gaye, 121).*

The views of these PME students in relation to confidence and social class were corroborated by Sandra's comments, as one of the sunken middle class. Sandra connected confidence with the advantages of attending a fee-charging school and having an educated extended family:

> *I think there are definite benefits in coming from a middle-class background. It gave me confidence in my abilities on the PME. I don't think it was arrogance, but in my whole family I was surrounded by professionals, doctors and teachers. There's a bit of confidence coming from your schooling and upbringing and you can have conversations with people (Sandra, 120).*

5.5.7.1 *Middle Class Voice on the PME*

The self-confidence of the middle-class PME students was discussed by the less advantaged PME students in terms of the strength of the middle-class 'voice' on the PME in relation to their own perceived lack of voice, whether on site or online. Gaye maintained that this confident voice of the middle-class students originated in being sure, from a young age, that their voice would always be heard. She explained that this contrasted with her own experiences in school where the pupils were just trying to survive and did not have the luxury of being 'heard' in the same way:

> *The middle-class students are able to vocalise their whole lives. They were able to battle their way to ask questions and be answered in Second Year in school, and were*

> *heard. It's harsher for us in school. We were just trying to get the work done (Gaye, 457).*

Mary noticed that the PME students 'who asked all the questions have posher Dublin accents compared to other people' and sounded 'confident in themselves' (Mary, 10). Jane, too, observed how 'the people who spoke at lectures were from South County Dublin' and always felt that 'they have a right to ask questions' (Jane, 124). Gaye also commented that the middle-class PME students 'always have something to say' and 'always answer confidently' (Gaye, 448). Linda remarked on how well the more privileged students spoke and how well-read she felt they were:

> *In lectures they speak freely. They express themselves well. You could hear their voices far more than someone like me. They would use a lot of big words in lectures and go on about all these big fancy theories. Like they've read 40 papers. I don't have the time (Linda, 165).*

Gaye also noticed that 'even though they may be very wrong' that the self-confidence of the middle-class PME students still ensured that their voices were heard (Gaye, 451): 'There is a willingness among the middle-class students to answer questions, even if the answer isn't right. There is not even an idea that you might just be wrong. They're happy to belt it out. There is a huge self-confidence there' (Gaye, 118). Gary also commented on the 'strong voice' of the middle-class students in lectures and, like Gaye, noted that these students may not always be correct but they have the confidence to opine in front of others:

> *Some (middle-class) people say absolute rubbish and then you hear the accent. And they keep going with it as well. The lecturers get frustrated with them as they can be dismissive of others (Gary, 509).*

Kate contended that despite the fact that many of the middle-class PME students 'pretend' to be knowledgeable, they 'are never challenged on it over a lecture'. (Kate, 81). Lucy went

further and linked the strength of the middle-class voice on the PME with an element of unfairness. She explained that 'there is 150 of us on the course but they always get their voices heard. It annoyed me that they got their way' (Lucy, 418). Lucy went on to discuss the connection between voice and power, and the lack of respect that she perceived when the middle-class students would 'argue with the lecturer' (Lucy, 420):

> *My mouth was open. You should respect lecturers. Maybe I grew up with that kind of attitude but they got away with it. They stuck out like a sore thumb, even on zoom. I saw other people like me who were a bit overwhelmed. But the middle-class people, they interrupt people. They think they have the power to do that. It is frustrating with people talking over each other. But they got their way (Lucy, 422).*

Kirstie also noted the confidence of the middle-class PME students who felt comfortable questioning lecturers if they did not receive the top grades that they expected: 'their default position was an A grade. I would never question any lecturer, but they felt they had the authority to question them' (Kirstie, 378). Being seen and heard in lectures translated in the middle-class PME students being known differently to the lecturers, according to Jane, with the middle-class 'South Dublin PMEs being on first name terms with the lecturers' (Jane, 132), further accentuating the difference between the classes. Gaye discussed how not being part of the dominant social and vocal groups on the PME in Southside University resulted in her feeling both invisible and marginalised for the first time in her life, in contrast to her undergraduate studies outside Dublin:

> *The lecturers just automatically presume a middle-class audience. Like I've sat in lectures and what I heard was 95% of middle-class students. I felt invisible and marginalised for the very first time. It was totally different to my undergrad. (Gaye, 172).*

5.5.7.2 *Neither Seen nor Heard*

The self-belief and self-confidence identified as belonging to the middle-class PME students were in stark contrast to the insecurity experienced by the less advantaged groups, who discussed how they frequently felt both unseen and unheard in this middle-class territory. Several reasons were given as to why this group felt that they could not speak at lectures. These reasons included not feeling that it was their place to speak; feeling that their lack of knowledge might be exposed; and lacking confidence or feeling embarrassed by what they perceived to be their inferior position in relation to the middle-class PME students.

Kirstie explained that she did not have the same confidence to speak out as her middle-class peers on the programme. She commented that her 'default position is that everyone is above me' (Kirstie, 381). Jane noted the 'fancy names' and 'good teacher names' of some of the middle-class students in the lectures, and how her name fell short: 'Why isn't mine a good teacher name?' (Jane, 128). Kate admitted that she 'sometimes felt a bit ridiculous' not asking some of the questions that she wanted to ask, but she felt that her rural background and her lack of general knowledge compared unfavourably with the superior knowledge of the middle-class PME students:

> *I was okay in my undergraduate speaking up in class but not on the PME. I thought, that's probably a stupid question. And they weren't a culchie (country person) like me. And their knowledge as well. Like, I should know. But these people seem to have read every single book on Bloom's Taxonomy (Kate, 75).*

Jane also admitted that she felt that is was 'so ridiculous being a student who wouldn't speak or a teacher who wouldn't speak' (Jane, 493):

> *But I felt that no one could possibly be interested in what I had to say. It was not my business to say anything. I would just sit there quietly. I was grateful that they asked*

questions because then I wouldn't have to. I'd be so annoyed if my pupils did this (Jane, 509).

Not attending a 'private school' or being able to 'afford grinds' like the middle-class PME students resulted in Lucy saying that she 'didn't want to speak up' and that she 'wouldn't have the guts' to speak out. She went on to say that the felt both 'embarrassed and a bit jealous' of the academic advantages of the middle-class students (Lucy, 14). Many of the students spoke of their fears of being exposed as being wrong in their answers, resulting in many ceding to the dominant middle-class voice. In saying that she never spoke at a lecture as 'it's not my place', Jane highlighted two interpretations of place as both a territory and also as a right or authority to speak, which she did not feel that she had. Jane explained that if she 'had to speak at a lecture, I'd be gone' (Jane, 139):

What if my answer's wrong? I'd be mortified. It's like impostor syndrome. You feel that you shouldn't be here, never mind taking up the space to ask any questions. What if I mumble and nobody can hear me. I'd be so upset. There's just so much anxiety around it all (Jane, 515).

Clare wondered if the middle-class PME students would be able to identify her difference, and this fear of exposure or being judged meant that Clare never spoke in any of the lectures:

I didn't speak out in lectures. I just tried my best but I always wondered what they think or do they know. Probably no one really cares, so I think it's more in your head (Clare, 24).

Not all disadvantaged PME students were afraid to speak out. Those who were older and had worked and lived abroad, like Sandra, had more of a voice. Sandra, commented that over time it was 'easier for me to speak' and wondered if it had something to do with her 'middle-class background' in attending a fee-charging school and having a highly educated extended family (Sandra, 115). Gaye, also older, had achieved well academically in her Leaving Certificate,

achieving ‘an A1 in English which puts me in the top 5% of what the fee-paying are producing’ and felt a lot more confident on the PME (Gaye, 227). Despite her ability, Gaye said that she still felt that she was judged:

> *There are judgements made by middle-class students on the PME. There is almost a sense of surprise when you show any intelligence. Wow! I wasn’t expecting much from you. They’re shocked that you’re actually able to come up with good ideas. And if you’re more intelligent than they are, but have had less of a chance educationally, that really shakes them (Gaye, 234).*

Few of these students shared Gaye’s confidence in their own academic ability.

5.5.8 Better Academically

An important difference highlighted by many in this group of PME students centred on the perceived academic superiority of the middle-class PME students. Academic differences were linked by the students to social class, money and good academic results. Brian contrasted his own fears of not being ‘good enough’ (Brian, 558) with what he felt was the academic superiority of the middle-class PME students:

> *I personally think the middle-class students just have more brains. I don’t know why. I always felt that my grades and my ability weren’t good enough. I always have a fear that it’s all going to be taken away from me. That I’m not going to pass my inspection. That I’m going to fail an exam. That the school are going to complain about me. That something is going to happen and that I just won’t be able to be a teacher. And if that happens, I’ll be devastated (Brian, 566).*

Clare also revealed that she and her friends were ‘more self-conscious that the middle-class students would be better academically’ (Clare, 11). Kate linked academic results to the kind of schools attended:

> *I definitely think the middle class know more. They went to private schools. You'd know by the way they speak. They could afford grinds and get guaranteed results. I went to an ETB (less academic) school. I can see a difference. They have a better general knowledge than me. They know more things. They're just better (Kate, 94).*

Brian also connected the superior academic results of the middle-class PME students to their ability to 'afford a better education', adding that 'it's highly unlikely that they all had better brains than me' (Brian, 98). Brian made a more fundamental connection between fee-charging schools, academic confidence and being better teachers. Brian's prior academic insecurities at school and college, were now evident in his comments that he did not see himself in the same league as the middle-class PME students, either academically or as a teacher. His insecure teacher identity was evident when he stated that the these privately educated PME students should teach in less advantaged schools as a means of levelling the playing field:

> *I've spoken to a lot of PME students from my methodology and I know that they're very, very good teachers. And I think it will be better for those kinds of teachers to teach in non-fee-paying schools because they're great teachers. And everyone should have access to them, to give students who don't have the money, the best chance of achieving (Brian, 108).*

5.5.8.1 *Academic Challenges*

Having noted their academic differences, the students further commented on the different academic challenges they had to face if they wanted to survive in this world of post-graduate teacher education. Linking language to understanding, Kate remarked that she thought she 'was the only one who didn't understand things on PME' (Kate, 569):

> *You have to recalibrate yourself, kind of re-programme your brain. I didn't understand Bloom's Taxonomy and never heard of pedagogy. My head was ready to explode. I*

> *didn't understand what's actually happening. I couldn't relate to what was being said. So, I switched off (Kate, 576).*

Lucy also had difficulty with language and understanding and explained that she wanted to understand but that 'there are so many big words and short-hands' used in the lectures (Lucy, 532):

> *I had to google them. Other people seemed to understand them but I didn't. I turned my camera off so that no one can see me searching for the definitions. I didn't want to be completely lost. I wanted to have some bit of understanding (Lucy, 541).*

Google-translating words was also something that Martina revealed she resorted to during the lectures as she 'didn't know what the words were' but, like Lucy, wanted to understand (Martina, 622):

> *When I'm googling words, my face glows so I try and hide my phone and my face so people can't see. And then I'm okay. Now I understand what this means. But I'm always afraid that they will catch me out (Martina, 643).*

Fear of being 'caught out' and discomfort at not understanding, had a negative impact on how Martina revealed she felt about herself. She explained that other friends of hers from similar backgrounds felt the same:

> *It made me feel thick (stupid) even though I knew what they were talking about. I felt I wasn't able to be at the same standard as the middle-class students in the in the lectures and classes. My friends were all going through the same sort of feelings (Martina, 637).*

Clare linked language and social class together. She maintained that middle-class parents, having been to college themselves, 'would know the lingo' and be better equipped in supporting their children (Clare, 14). Referencing the middle-class PME students, Clare commented:

> *They were able to read the academic articles, unlike my parents and other students from disadvantaged areas whose parents wouldn't know what's going on in college, or know what any of the lingo means (Clare, 15).*

Kirstie pointed out that she had difficulty understanding, not only the lecturers, but the other PME students and that this accentuated what she perceived to be their superior knowledge and verbal fluency:

> *I got kind of panicky because I thought, how do they know that much. And I would compare myself negatively to them; like I should know those words, but I don't. I would never question anything. I would just assume that I would know nothing (Kirstie,761).*

Kate also highlighted what she felt were the differences between the advanced vocabulary of the middle-class PME students from Dublin, and what she felt was her own sparse word stock. She understood that she was not alone in this and that there were others like herself who felt the same:

> *A lot of the PMEs from Dublin would use words that I've never heard of. It's a competition. But I need to compete. I'm aware of improving my vocabulary. Some people are in the same boat as me and we have to try hard (Kate, 657).*

Mary also commented on wishing to improve what she felt were her poor language skills: 'I'm worried that my work isn't up to the standard' needed to meet the needs of the programme (Mary, 438). Joe remarked that his vocabulary was 'more basic and to the point' than the 'long words in long sentences' that the middle-class PME students used (Joe, 121):

> *It's nobody's fault. It's the way they've been raised. I don't judge them. I know I'll always be challenged with understanding content. I take more time to wrap my head around things. My pace is slower to comprehend (Joe, 721).*

The PME students discussed how their challenges around language fed into both their academic insecurities and their sense of difference on the programme:

It can be quite scary if someone uses a word that you and your friends and everyone around you doesn't use. I can see how that would be like they have the power. Like you feel a little bit powerless (Tom, 611).

5.5.8.2 *Academic Writing*

The difficulties and differences that many PME students identified around their language use, such as feeling that generally 'it isn't good enough' (Mary, 440), or that their 'academic vocabulary is problematic' (Joe, 631) or that the 'academic language in Southside University is a different language' (Evan, 310), translated for many into difficulties with their academic writing. 'I am still terrified of academic writing' (Martina, 635):

I found it hard to keep up and felt a bit overwhelmed at times. I found the academic writing challenging. I couldn't make head or tail of some of the readings (Jade, 392).

Attempts to improve what many in this group of PME students perceived to be a language deficit, often brought them up against what was felt to be a cultural deficit. Despite being a 'big reader' from an early age ('pre-internet'), Evan felt that this advantage was still not enough to balance things out with the middle-class PME students. He explained that there was a difference in the quality between what he had read and what the middle-class students read: 'I still didn't know what to read until I left school. But middle-class students already knew what to read at a young age. And I find that fascinating' (Evan, 312). Evan believed that any PME students who did not read 'faced challenges with the academic writing' (Evan, 310). But when Martina tried to improve her vocabulary on the PME, she still struggled with understanding how, when, and where to use the new words she had learned 'I couldn't just input them. It didn't work' (Martina, 476). Many of the PME students' stories highlight the role that culture and class play in contributing to what it means to be educated, particularly in terms of higher

education. Tom, also a reader, said that a lot of the time someone from a disadvantaged background can be 'quite malnourished' (Tom, 611):

> *I use malnourished quite carefully there, because I don't just mean food. It can be other things you know. You're malnourished in your education and in your interests. Your interests haven't been cultivated (Tom, 619).*

5.5.8.3 *'Malnourished' and Teaching Implications*

Being 'malnourished' in Tom's sense of the word was discussed as manifesting in the language, knowledge and cultural gaps that many of these PME students from disadvantaged backgrounds noted they were faced with on the PME programme. Jane revealed that she had 'lots of gaps' both in her teaching subjects and in her general knowledge, unlike the perceived superior knowledge of the more privileged students which 'was 100% different to mine' (Jane, 172):

> *There are lots of things that are just assumed that you know, like common knowledge things. And the middle-class PME students would give these random examples of things. And I would be thinking, what are you talking about? (Jane, 179).*

Many PME students feared that their lack of knowledge would impact negatively on their teaching. Even though she was teaching English, Lucy felt that 'she had no real knowledge in English'. She explained that she needed to improve her own language skills if she wanted to be the kind of teacher who would be able to help others like herself from a disadvantaged background. 'I know what I want to be but I don't know how to be a different teacher' (Lucy, 646):

> *I was thinking I should really be trying to improve my own language so that I could be educating the students (in school) better. I was thinking of the kids who are similar to me when I was in school and I should be preparing them for going to college. I don't*

> *want them to get the same shockers as me when they open up the first academic paper to read (Lucy, 638).*

It is not only challenges and differences around language skills that had implications for the teaching practice of this group of PME students. Although he was teaching music, Tom explained that he had never been taught music as a child and that 'there was never a piano in our house'. Tom highlighted the difference and the unfairness in being expected to deliver a class to the same standard as the more privileged PME students 'who had a decade more experience playing an instrument' than he had (Tom, 120):

> *There is that kind of imposter syndrome. But I'm trying to catch up. I'm trying to be as good as them, you know (Tom 14).*

As with many other disadvantaged PME students, Tom felt that no matter how hard he tried, even if he managed to catch up with the middle-class PME students, a sense of difference would remain:

> *There is frustration and a kind of upset that you aren't at the same standard as the others. But even if you end up catching up, there's always that feeling that you've missed something. That you're not quite there. You might feel different (Tom, 39).*

Social class differences in relation to the teaching of modern languages were commented on by Evan. He said that it was only his years working abroad that enabled him to study a language and that this differed to the economically advantaged position of the middle-class PME students who could spend their summers abroad learning a language. Evan believed that 'languages lend themselves' to the kind of economic advantage that middle-class students have (Evan, 148). He went on to point out how these social class advantages had implications for the kind of student who would end up teaching modern languages. He maintained that there was a definite social class difference between his Language Methods group and the 'broader

church' found in his other Method's group. 'There were far fewer working-class students in the language methods' and there was little or no social interaction (Evan, 151).

The clear divide between the privileged and the less advantaged in Southern University was identified by these students as contributing to their sense of difference, and to the tenuous, subordinate position that many of these PME students felt they held on the PME. They explained that differences between the social classes were accentuated by what they saw as the many educational, economic, social and cultural advantages of the middle-class PME students, giving the privileged students a sense of confidence in their abilities, a feeling of entitlement to be on their home territory, and a right to be heard. The less advantaged students did not blame middle-class parents for trying to advantage their children. Tom commented that he understood that middle-class parents 'want the best for their children', and that he would want the same himself if he had a child. He clarified that he placed the blame, not on the middle-classes but 'solely on the system', a system that supports the 'clear divide between those who can afford it and the working class' (Tom, 51).

The final part of this third phase of the PME students journey looks at how this group of disadvantaged students managed to navigate the challenges they faced on the PME programme.

5.5.9 Navigating

The choices that this cohort of PME students made which enabled them to navigate safely in what they perceived to be the foreign, often choppy waters, of the PME, replicated the strategies that they had used when navigating their undergraduate experiences. These strategies centred on 'everyone finding their own tribe' (Gaye, 171). As Tara explained:

> *On the PME you definitely stick with your own; with people from a similar area or with people from the country. They understand you. They get you. You kind of talk the same. I think when you're from an area you tend to stick with like-minded people (Tara, 488).*

Sandra related how she 'naturally gravitated towards people who are similar to me', explaining that it was a lack of money that connected her to other PME students 'not my accent or class' (Sandra, 69). Sandra identified her tribe as those PME students who were similarly disadvantaged:

> *I could be open with these people. I didn't have to hide having no money. I can talk and say that I don't know how I'm going to get through the week (Sandra, 88).*

Invariably, 'finding your own' meant finding other PME students from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds or, as in their undergraduate experiences, mixing with PME students from outside Dublin 'who didn't know any different' (Kirstie, 124):

> *People from the country couldn't really judge … because they didn't know what your area was like. They didn't know any better (Anne, 311).*

Perceptions of people from outside Dublin or from disadvantaged backgrounds, were commented on positively by this cohort of PME students. Linda explained that country people did not need to 'interrogate you' or 'need to know' as much about you (Linda, 118). Gaye remarked that country people 'were friendly' (Gaye, 169), and Sandra noted that country people knew what it is to work hard for a living (Sandra, 81). In contrast to her privileged peers, being from a middle-class area and attending a fee-charging school did not provide Sandra with a ready-made tribe. Sandra continued to be an outsider, observing that she did not 'fit in with the South Dublin crowd. I never have' (Sandra, 64). She explained that as soon as she started speaking with someone, she would be able to tell that 'their circumstances were different' to hers and that they were from a different world (Sandra, 344). In order to survive, Sandra said that she had to find a tribe of other outsiders with whom she could identify:

> *That's why I ended up gravitating towards people who would have similar ways of seeing things to myself. I associated with working class people who I find real. They speak about real things. They just get life and not all the other bullshit (Sandra, 352).*

Gary also attended a fee-charging school, and remarked that, he too, did not find his tribe from his school network. Unlike the homogeneity of the middle-class PME groups, Gary noted that his tribe was more mixed:

> *We were kind of an odd group. We had no secondary school background that was carrying us. A lot in Ireland is based on secondary school. It's amazing that such a small period of peoples' lives can define you find so much afterwards; if you let it (Gary, 465).*

For both Sandra and Gary, attending a fee-charging school did not in and of itself provide access to a ready-made middle-class tribe in Southside, where they continued to remain outsiders.

Sticking with a tight group of friends with similar experiences to their own, was the main navigational tool that all of the PME students in this group explained worked best for them. They also commented that smaller groups generally worked better for them on the PME, particularly in relation to their tutorials, or their Methods group. Linda identified the Supplementary Teaching Support Programme (STSP), which provides additional targeted professional support for PME students, as a place where she felt safe and less exposed:

> *The first time I felt truly normal on the PME was in the STSP class. I was in my own league now. There was a nice atmosphere. It was grand. There was a real interest in us. It was a very safe space. There were no worries. I felt completely fine. I only integrated in the smaller groups otherwise I never would have had a hope (Linda, 616).*

The navigational strategies used by these PME students enabled them to survive in a world where their differences were experienced as deficits, and where they felt that they were

outsiders on middle-class territory. However, their experience on the PME in Southside University is only half the story. The final phase of their journey goes to yet another world and explores their experiences on their school placement.

5.6 Stage 4: School Placement

5.6.1 Introduction

Given the centrality of teaching to the PME, a core component of the fourth stage of this cohort's educational journey relates to the students' experiences in the new world of school placement. Their experiences from the first three stages of their journey which reinforced their sense of difference as deficit, and of not belonging or fitting in, were further consolidated in the middle-class world of post-primary teaching.

5.6.2 School Placement: Hierarchy

The strong connection between social class and education was evident in Neil's comment that it was 'only as I progressed through the year that I realised how much of a middle-class profession teaching is' (Neil, 33). Discussions about school placement with other PMEs was identified by Joe as the moment when he 'started to notice the difference' between the social classes (Joe, 100). The idea of a social scale was reinforced by the hierarchy of schools that emerged in relation to their school placement. This sense of hierarchy was particularly evident in the wealthy Dublin suburbs surrounding Southside University. A high proportion of middle-class PME students secured a placement in one of the fee-charging schools nearby, whereas many of the disadvantaged students did their school placement in local DEIS schools that were further from the hierarchical epicentre. Lucy talked about how she felt socially placed and often excluded based on where she taught. Whereas the classed nuances of

Dublin schools may have been lost on Lucy, the sense of being lower on a perceived school hierarchy was not.

> *There was 100% a hierarchy of schools. I remember the majority of PMEs from Dublin talking about the private schools they were teaching in. I didn't know where these schools were or what they are. I hadn't a notion. But people would say 'oh, wow, isn't that a private school?'. And then they'd ask you where you're teaching and I'm just in the local (rural) community school, so then it's the end of the conversation. It just moves on (Lucy, 235).*

All the students in this cohort had experience of the social divide and hierarchy that exists between schools, and of the socially identifying questions that related to where they lived or what schools they attended. Many now noted that the usual placing questions that they were familiar with were being replaced by a different set of questions that served the same function:

> *On the PME instead of asking the question where are you from, it was replaced with where are you teaching. So, for me the two went hand-in-hand. I taught where I was from, so I couldn't escape the question (Tara, 461).*

Many in this cohort felt that the hierarchy and ranking associated with schools was also being extended to the PME students who taught in these schools. This was particularly pertinent for these students as the majority chose to do their placements in the DEIS schools with which they were familiar but which were now being experienced as lower on the 'ranking scale' of schools. As Kirstie pointed out: 'PMEs definitely gravitate towards their own social backgrounds' (Kirstie, 433). Kate also noted that students 'all stuck together' according to their 'postcode', and that disadvantaged students 'similar to me' stayed in DEIS schools, which was perceived by the students as saying something about them, not only in terms of socially placing them, but as a reflection of the kind of people they were:

> *Asking where you're teaching on the PME is like asking what your job is socially. If you're working in the top-notch schools for instance, the really good schools that have a good reputation, then you were saying something about yourself. And when I said that I worked in a school in a working-class area, they were very dismissive 'where is that? I've never heard of that' (Anne, 424).*

The hierarchical ranking between schools was reflective of the social divide between schools, as was evident in Kate's comment that she was 'the only person who applied to my (DEIS) school because there's not as much prestige to it' (Kate, 104). The situation differed with some of the middle-class students that Kate noticed on the PME:

> *A lot of the boys on the PME who speak very well and dress very well are definitely gravitating towards prestigious schools because I think there's competition there. It's like if you're becoming a lawyer, you're going to try and get into the best law school because it's all for the name (Kate, 200).*

Ivan maintained that there was 'a lot of snobbery about schools' with the middle-class PME students and a sense of 'entitlement' from their long association with fee-charging schools (Ivan, 268). Gaye also commented on 'a sense of entitlement in their comments 'oh, you're in a DEIS school…' (Gaye, 383). Interestingly, several students placed DEIS and Educate Together schools under the same banner. Linda made the point that PME students who teach in a DEIS school 'are judged 100%' but that she was also 'severely judged and looked down on for teaching in an Educate Together school' (Linda, 501). Working in a DEIS school would be viewed as a step down for the middle-classes, according to Gaye: 'would you be able to go back to your middle-class family if you're teaching in a DEIS school? There would be a perception of what went wrong that you ended up in a DEIS school' (Gaye, 420).

Negative comments and attitudes about DEIS schools by other PME students were often also personal comments for these students as the majority of this cohort had attended

DEIS schools and many lived in disadvantaged areas. As Ivan stated: 'I teach in that area. That's where I'm from' (Ivan, 270). He also noticed the number of PME students who had never heard of DEIS schools: 'How could you not know what DEIS is?' And when he explained, the response was dismissive: 'Oh, I couldn't teach in those schools' (Ivan, 275). Neil also commented on the negative comments made when he was asked where he was doing his placement:

> *An interesting thing happened to me twice when I was talking about my school placement. Some of the PMEs made disparaging remarks about where I was teaching, so I said "oh, my daughter is going to be going to that school, you know". They had to backpedal a bit (Neil, 306).*

The discourse among the PME students of a school hierarchy resulted in an acceptance by this cohort of students' that DEIS schools were somehow lower on the ranking scale and that they, as past-pupils and now as teachers were, by default, also lower on the ranking scale. Knowing your place meant staying in your place and not crossing the social divide on a teaching placement: 'There is almost an expectation that if you come from a DEIS school in a certain area that you would go back and teach in that area' (Gaye 46).

Echoing their earlier educational experiences, markers of difference were now seen to play a part in the students' school placements.

5.6.3 School Placement: Where you live

The impact of where these students were from, particularly if they lived in disadvantaged areas in Dublin, continued to be of relevance in contributing to the sense of difference they felt and to the social divide that resulted. As Tara commented: 'The social aspect was massively impacted on by where you're from. The middle-class students look at

you like you've twenty heads when you're from a different area' (Tara, 476). Where they were from continued to be linked with negativity of some kind:

> *It's happened a few times, even outside school where I'm teaching. When I was asked where I was living and I told them, they'd say "oh yeah- and how is that going for you?'. I'm proud of where I live. This place has been good to me. My kids are from there. I get it a lot (Neil, 313).*

Whenever Tara identified where she was from, she noticed that the middle-class students 'were kind of shocked that you were on the PME. Surprised that you were sitting there. That you could afford the PME. It was all of these things' (Tara, 489). Tara commented that where she was from acted as a boundary to a territory where she felt unwelcome:

> *You could tell by a person that they were a bit taken aback by where you're from but it was then that the conversation would stop. There was no follow-up. So, you knew your boundaries (Tara, 521).*

Evan discussed how being from a working-class area differentiated him from the pupils he was teaching in a fee-charging school, highlighting how he 'was judged in the school. I was asked point blank by a student in First Year where I was from. I'm not going to lie to them, so I told them' (Evan, 73):

> *I was like, why does it matter where I'm from? But it definitely does. They know about this area from the media or their parents and I'm aware of that. So, I suppose another word for it is, I'd be sensitive to that. I'm completely put in a box and it explains who I am to them (Evan, 80).*

5.6.4 School Placement: Accent

In relation to their school placement, this cohort of students commented once again on the role of accent 'in defining social class' (Kate, 42) and thus placing them, not just

geographically, but also socially. Many of the students ranked themselves as 'lower on the scale' than those with a 'posh accent' (Kate, 44). As before, disadvantaged students who were from Dublin were singled out as being easier to place class-wise: 'It's what you'd notice' (Karl 13).

Having done some prior extra-curricular work in the fee-charging school where he was now doing his placement, Evan did not have to do an interview but wondered if he had done one, would his accent have been an issue 'in whether I got my placement there' (Evan, 239). He also commented that it would be 'fascinating to find out' how many PMEs from working-class backgrounds 'actually get called for interview in a fee-paying school. And if they were called to interview, did they get a placement' (Evan, 248). Whenever she spoke, Tara said that she was conscious of her accent: 'Alarm bells would go off in my head because they're probably thinking 'oh God, what kind of a person is she then. It's written on somebody's face without them realising it' (Tara, 508). Awareness of their accent as a marker of both difference and deficit was identified by this cohort as being particularly relevant in the staffroom of the schools they were teaching in. Even the students from outside Dublin felt judged because of their accent and how it differentiated them from the middle-class teachers in the staffroom. Mary noticed that 'a lot of the teachers are from a professional background or from educated families' and was keenly aware of 'the difference in my background' (Mary, 53):

> *I'm self-conscious of my rural accent and that I pronounce words differently to the teachers who are from the local town. I try to pronounce things the way they should probably be pronounced. Even if you were having a general chitchat about the weather, maybe they're thinking she's not the usual type of teacher or something. You're thinking, are they judging me by my accent (Mary, 44).*

Evan also altered his working-class accent when teaching in a fee-charging school: 'I was conscious to change my accent to be a bit more acceptable to the target audience' (Evan, 11).

Clare was another student who commented that she 'changed her accent' over the two years of her teaching placement in order to fit in with the middle-class teachers in the staffroom:

> *I now watch my accent a bit more particularly in the staffroom. Last year I would sit in the staffroom and say 'me ma' and 'me da' and the teachers would look around and they'd go 'oh, me ma! Where are you from?' and they would have a bit of a laugh with me. So, I have to watch my accent (Clare, 370).*

Having an identifiable working-class Dublin accent differentiated Kirstie from the pupils she was teaching in the privileged school where she did her first placement. She discussed how the pupils corrected her pronunciation for her:

> *Because I don't sound like them they'd repeat the way I sound in class. Like, for example, the name 'Hugh', I was saying it like "You". One of the students would repeat it after me and be like it's not 'You" it's Hugh'. At the start it was really bad but I learned to make a laugh out of it "Well, that's just how I say it". You know, I wouldn't be getting upset in front of them. I just have to make a joke out of it and then they'd be fine about it (Kirstie, 160).*

Evan explained that he was 'very conscious of being from a working-class background' in the fee-charging school in which he was teaching, and would 'have to be a little more careful' with the way he speaks when mixing with the pupils and staff. He was acutely aware that 'an awful lot of people judge people by accent' and went on to discuss Bourdieu's cultural capital and the 'kind of soft power' that the middle classes are advantaged with. He felt that being from a different background not only differentiates someone but also separates people and noted that his 'colleagues and all the students are talking the same talk and they're familiar with each other. I don't fit that' (Evan, 66). Evan explained that his accent not only separated him from the 'real' teachers on the staff but also affected his identity as a teacher:

> *The only other people in the school with the same accent as me are the canteen staff and the groundsmen. They would all very much have a Dublin accent so it's almost like I am part of that cohort. I'm not a 'teacher-teacher' that they are used to. I'm not validated unless I have a certain accent. Unless I can tick a certain kind of box (Evan, 88).*

Despite the challenges that these students perceived of being placed on a lower rung in the hierarchy of accents, they apportioned no blame to the middle-classes. Tara explained that it was 'through no fault of their own' that people judged her: 'It's their upbringing. It's who you socialise with and who is in your bubble' (Tara, 514). Kirstie also remarked that she did not 'hold it against' her middle-class pupils when they repeated her mispronunciation and that, having no experience of someone from her background, she understood why they behaved in such a way:

> *As much as it's not right for them to do it, I know why they do it. They don't know any different. It's alien to them to have someone come in and hear for themselves someone from a totally different background. I know why they're doing it but it's just amazing for me to actually see students like them and that they really do think that way. It's not personal (Kirstie, 646).*

Accents that differ from the norm can highlight, distance and separate those who are not from the dominant group. As Neil, who comes from outside Ireland, commented: 'A foreign accent can be a hinderance. And sometimes it's nice to feel a sense of belonging, you know. That you're okay' (Neil, 51). However, outside his own country, Neil could not be judged and socially positioned on his school placement in the same way as the students from Ireland, and especially Dublin, could. Accent alone is not the whole story; it is what goes with the accent that distinguishes groups and individuals. Evan explained that he had experienced the

unfairness inherent in the Irish education system as a pupil in a disadvantaged area and now he was seeing the same unfairness from his position as a teacher in a privileged school:

> *It's not just the accent. It's the actual language that you use. I can see the bias in the Irish education system and it's nice to be coming to that insight not just from a pupil's perspective but from a completely different angle as a teacher. And I can still see the same patterns. It's Bourdieu's social reproduction and I can see it more clearly now that I ever did before (Evan, 328).*

The next section looks at clothes, not only as a marker of difference and social class, but also as a marker of the students as professionals.

5.6.5 School Placement: Clothes

A real source of anxiety for many of the students in this cohort concerned clothes and what to wear on their school placement. For some, the challenge lay in not knowing how to dress as a teacher. For others, trying to present professionally in a school was difficult in straitened circumstances. The symbolic representation of clothes that was at odds with their value system was also mentioned as problematic. Several students, like Kate, wondered where the middle-class students got their 'sense of style from? Is there was a book you read?' Kate had no one to consult on what was appropriate to wear and resorted to googling 'how to dress as a teacher' and 'teacher outfits' (Kate, 32):

> *I wasn't going to mention this. I know it's really bad. I made the mistake of wearing shorts into school. They weren't in any way revealing but I was called into the principal's office and sent home. I was told that there was a dress code but I had requested this and was never given it. I felt absolutely ridiculous. I felt stupid. I actually felt really small. I was sent home and then lost out on a class that I was subbing which was 35 euro. I felt like a kid in the principal's office. I felt like a child (Kate, 52).*

These students understood that 'you can be judged by your appearance' and that you 'have to look the part to succeed and to be taken seriously' (Linda, 546). This pressure led to others like Lucy also googling 'teacher outfits', something that she continued to do throughout the year (Lucy 59). Brian also 'worried about clothes' as he explained that he was concerned that 'the other teachers would look down on me'.

> *A few times I was walking past management and they look at you. It could just be like a normal look but I felt it wasn't. So, I said it to one of the other teachers, who was just qualified 'do you think they're judging me by the way I dress' and he said that they weren't like that at all. But I felt that I was being judged. I just felt this. I thought that the students didn't think that I was presenting very well. My main fear was that they were thinking that I wasn't professional (Brian, 57).*

The fear of not being seen as professional by their colleagues and the pupils in the school was identified as a source of great anxiety by these students. This fear was exacerbated by the financial circumstances that many of these students found themselves in. Rotating a few items of clothing was a strategy that many resorted to, including Lucy, who explained that she also kept a detailed record of the few outfits she had so that she could avoid some of the comments made by the staff and students about what she wore:

> *Students on my school placement said multiple times about my clothes 'oh, you're wearing that top again'. Even staff members (would comment) because I have a set of clothes for school. So, I rotate them. It was a bit upsetting at the time. I kind of felt self-conscious about wearing that top again so I'd write down the date of when I wore the top to school and then make sure that there was a long distance between wearing it again (Lucy, 56).*

Sandra also commented that she was always 'trying to be a professional but I don't feel like professional' (Sandra, 387). She felt under extra pressure to look the part of a teacher as she

was teaching in a fee-charging school and teachers would 'be expected to dress smarter here. And a lot of the children are coming from nice backgrounds so maybe you feel that you need to look a certain way too so they respect you as well' (Sandra, 391). Like Lucy, Sandra also rotated her clothes:

> *I had the same two or three dresses and I rotated them. And I would always think, oh my God, they know that I'm wearing the same clothes all the time. But trying to look professional when you're kind of struggling to get from A to B is very difficult. I was lucky that I was just working three days and I could rotate my three outfits and didn't have to worry about the extra two days. I've never said any of this openly before (Sandra, 394).*

Linda remarked that she felt judged for what she wore, not by the pupils, but by the staff, and would get 'the eyes looking you up and down to see what you're wearing' (Linda, 335):

> *I was kind of wearing the same clothes all the time and I was kind of like, oh Jesus, someone is going to be like 'look at Miss Smelly now. Wearing the same trousers as yesterday'. But I never, never felt judged by the children (Linda, 343).*

For many of these students, a shirt and tie were discussed as representing far more than items of clothing. Many of the students had negative perceptions of those who wore a shirt and tie as both items were identified as representative of middle-class authority and power. Evan remarked that all the male teachers in the fee-charging school where he did his placement had to wear a shirt and tie 'and I have a problem with this' (Evan, 284):

> *Because of where I come from, I don't feel comfortable. Where I grew up we just have that mistrust of shirts and ties. And it's an authority thing as well. I don't like that kind of hierarchy because I never enjoyed and it displays this kind of old idea of hierarchy. I think students will connect more if you're normal (Evan, 290).*

Kate also connected a shirt and tie with the middle-classes: ‘It’s wealth. It’s prestige. It’s like higher. Only people in the solicitor’s office where I live would wear a shirt and tie (Kate, 144). Lucy also linked these items of clothing with class and remarked that, if she met people who wore them, that she would be on middle-class territory where she did not belong: ‘what am I doing here? I’m in the wrong place. What’s going on? That I was trespassing’ (Lucy, 337). Jade associated these items of clothing with teaching in privileged schools and that would mean ‘having to dry clean and iron them, and all of these care instructions you have to take with the formal dress. It’s not as easy as putting them in the washing-machine, you know’. She went on to say that because of the clothing expense that she perceived was attached to working in a fee-charging school, that she would ‘wait until she had a bit more savings in order to be able to get the desired wardrobe’ (Jade, 75).

Clare mentioned that she appreciated the more informal approach to the school dress code that she found when teaching in the inner-city DEIS school where she did her second placement. She felt that the more casual approach to what the teachers wore would facilitate an easier relationship between her and her pupils. She ‘didn’t have to wear high heels or over dress’ as she did in her first non-DEIS school placement, and felt that she could now ‘relate to the kids better’ (Clare, 120). In the Educate Together school where he taught, Brian remarked that there was no school uniform and that ‘there wasn’t one teacher on the staff that wore a tie, including the principal, so I loved the school. I thought it was brilliant’ (Brian, 72).

The next section looks at the feelings that these students expressed about applying to or working in fee-charging schools.

5.6.6 School Placement: Avoiding Fee-Charging Schools

The reasons why so many students in this cohort (18 out of 23) made a deliberate decision to exclude fee-charging schools from their school placement choice were as important

as the reasons why they considered only DEIS schools for their placement. The school placement choices these students made further consolidated the social divide between the classes, and were illustrative of their prior strategy of staying on safe territory with their own tribe. While some of these students discussed the satisfaction of supporting disadvantaged pupils like themselves, many others stated that they would not consider applying to do their placement in a fee-charging school because they would not fit in academically, socially or culturally. Gaye commented that school placement decisions were indicative, not only of knowing one's place and avoiding being out of place, but were also illustrative of the reproduction of social class:

> *I would never apply for a fee-paying school because I'd never get in. You're not wanted. It's as simple as that. You need to be middle-class to get a job in a middle-class school, or a fee- paying school, or a semi fee- paying school. The middle-class students on the PME ended up back in their private schools and others who had exactly the same education didn't get an offer. Your grades don't count. You know not to apply to middle-class schools. You could fake it but you will be exposed and what you really are will filter through. The class division is 100 percent reproduced in our teaching practice (Gaye 316).*

Linda discussed an uncomfortable experience she had with middle-class teachers, in a middle-class school when she was there for a Department of Education training day. She identified this experience as the first time she had really understood the extent, division and difference between the social classes. She also stated that she would never apply to a fee-charging school as 'the way I look and the way I speak wouldn't necessarily fit the image of the school' (Linda, 398):

> *I was put in a group on my own with all these posh ones but I never felt so alien in my life. The way they pronounced and enunciated all the words, I was afraid to say*

> *anything in front of them, even just simple things. They never made an effort to include you. They wouldn't be bothered asking you anything. I never really thought about all of this much (social class divide) until I encountered that group on the training day. But after that I was thinking, this is a lot bigger than what I thought. It matters to an awful lot of people (Linda, 415).*

In addition to the role of social class in their choice of school placement, their prior educational struggles and challenges were discussed as playing a key role in their school placement decision-making. Brian revealed that he did not think that he would 'be as clever as the other teachers in a fee-paying school. I got a very average Leaving Cert, so I think that would rule me out anyway' (Brian, 157). Many others also highlighted how they felt that their academic insecurities would not only be a barrier to getting a placement in a middle-class school but would also be far more likely to be exposed:

> *I feel that I am genuinely not smart enough or academic enough to be a teacher in a fee-paying school. And it's also the accent as well; it's still there. And I would definitely feel exposed in schools like that. I'm teaching myself as it is, before I teach my class (in a DEIS school) so that I know what I'm doing. Sometimes I'll slip up in the classroom and the kids will google the answer and I'm like 'you're right, I'm wrong'. I don't pretend to be smarter than them and I tell them I'm not smarter; it's just that you're younger. I tell them if I'm wrong and that I don't know the answer and that like I genuinely cannot do that. So, I would not see myself being comfortable teaching in a fee-paying school (Jane, 564).*

There was a perception amongst all of these students that fee-charging schools 'have very high academic standards and that there is a lot of stress and pressure to do well' in such schools (Clare, 355). There was also a belief that middle-class schools are 'top of the ladder' and that 'you have to have a certain level of excellence achieved' in order to work there (Gaye, 47).

Despite getting an A1 in her Leaving Certificate English exam, Gaye stated that 'you would have to keep quiet that you went to a DEIS school because they might think that the standard from you will be lower. The perception is that you're not as good as someone produced out of a fee-paying school' (Gaye, 100). Lucy commented that 'you would have to be always on the ball. You'd have to know all the answers to all the questions and for the pupils to get 600 points. And I don't think I'd be able to do that' (Lucy, 99). Lucy's academic struggles in school came into play in her comments that she would not 'have the confidence to say okay, I'd be able to teach you. I really struggled with certain things in school' (Lucy, 77). Lack of confidence played a role in Martina's decision, too, as did a belief that if parents are paying for their children's education that they deserve the 'best':

> *I would need to be really confident in my subject area and in my teaching skills to be able to teach in a fee-paying school. It doesn't seem right to say it but if you're paying you should be getting the best. And I think personally I'd be a little bit afraid to sign up for the role of being the best. It's kind of true at the moment (Martina, 370).*

Many in this cohort revealed that underpinning their academic insecurities was an overwhelming fear that their perceived academic and social shortcomings would be more likely to be exposed in a fee-charging school. Jane stated that there was fear of being judged as not good enough because, being from a working-class area and having attended a DEIS school, she would not fit the profile of the type of teacher that middle-class parents, who are paying substantial fees, want to teach their children:

> *I wouldn't feel competent enough to teach in a fee-paying school. I would probably feel uncomfortable because what I do lack would be noticed in a fee-paying school. I'd feel judged by both the kids and the parents especially in Dublin. If you're paying 12 grand a year and then you don't want to meet the teacher who is from a working-class area*

> *and went to 'that' school that might be in the in the news. If the parents are going to be paying the money, they don't want a teacher who went to a DEIS school (Jane, 400).*

The academic insecurities identified by many in this cohort, alongside their contention that fee-charging schools were mainly focused on academic success, highlighted for them a desire to avoid the type of schools where they felt their academic lack of confidence might be exposed. Clare discussed how she had applied to a fee-charging school but when she looked at various videos of the school on YouTube, she decided that she would not proceed. She explained that this was a way of protecting herself in a world where she perceived the pupils to be more skilled than she was and where she did not have the ability to meet the academic expectations of the school:

> *Straightaway I just said no, that's not for me. I was applying for music and I was looking at the big choirs in this school. And the students were playing the piano since they were 5 or 6 and I only started at 15 or 16. My parents wouldn't have the money for piano lessons. The students would have more skills than me. I've never conducted a choir. I just felt that the expectations of the students, school and the parents was way above my head. I'm less confident that my skills can meet their expectations (Clare, 141).*

Clare's insecurities about applying to a fee-charging school were not only academic. She also had social and cultural insecurities and even wondered if her address might exclude from an interview. She continued to highlight the sense of difference that she felt:

> *I don't know if they (staff) have experience of people from DEIS schools or if they'd associate with people from disadvantaged areas. They mightn't have a good friendship as we're from such different backgrounds. They'd catch my accent and what would they think? It's more about what the parents have passed down on their judgement of people from the North Side (Clare, 152).*

Avoiding the exposure and judgement that many felt awaited them if they did their placement in the privileged world of fee-charging schools, many of these students naturally turned towards more disadvantaged schools, where they were on familiar territory and felt more protected.

5.6.7 School Placement: Choosing DEIS and Educate Together Schools

The majority of students in this cohort felt that teaching in a DEIS school was more in tune with the suite of competencies that they could bring, reflecting a skillset that played to their strengths. Clare explained that being 'from a disadvantaged background' gave her an 'understanding' that others might not have: It's a type of knowledge' (Clare, 18). Brian's skill may not have been academic but he, too, felt that connection with his pupils: 'I think that my teaching style is not 100 percent focused on academic achievement. It's more about making the kids feel comfortable and feel involved' (Brian, 158). A core competency identified by these students as something of value that they could bring to DEIS schools was an understanding of both the pupils and the social context in which the pupils lived. As Clare stated: 'I have similar backgrounds to the pupils and I would be able to help them more' (Clare, 373). Lucy also remarked that she can 'relate to the pupils because I know where they come from' (Lucy, 81). They commented that they felt more comfortable in a teaching environment where there was more emphasis on ways that pupils could be supported to reach their potential, not just academically, and where teacher-pupil relationships were central:

> *I'd be able to relate to the kids a lot better with my background. I prefer to deal with people from my own social class. I would find it difficult to deal with kids who don't understand what it's like to struggle. I can relate more to the kids in a State school. I've a different relationship with them. I've more in common. I've been there myself (Neil, 47).*

Many of these students explained that their educational insecurities did not sit easily with an academic teacher identity and that they were more comfortable with a teacher identity that was based on the social, relational and supportive aspects of teaching. Brian commented that in either DEIS or Educate Together schools he could 'make the most difference in students' lives. They might be from homes where there is not the best support, and kids need that. Teachers are the next step. The one consistent in their life' (Brian, 149). The levels of confidence these students felt in applying to disadvantaged schools versus their discomfort in applying to fee-paying schools for their placement, had a strong connection to their social background.

Rather than expose herself in a privileged educational environment where she felt she could be isolated by the staff and where the pupils 'are criticising you and judging your academic abilities as a teacher' (Clare, 176), Clare, like the majority of students in this cohort, opted to do her placement in a DEIS school. But not all of the students made this choice. Five students made the decision to do one of their teaching placements in a fee-charging school. The next section explores their experiences.

5.6.8 Fee-Charging School Placement

Of the five students (out of 23) who opted to do a placement in a fee-charging school, two had attended fee-charging post-primary schools; one was born outside Ireland; one had worked in a different capacity in the school; and one lived in a middle-class area, albeit on a council estate. The views of these five students reflected the acceptance by every student in the cohort that there was a hierarchy of schools and that fee-charging schools were at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Tom pointed out that he was not 'particularly fond of the idea that we have some schools that are better than other schools but the fact is that everyone knows that fee-paying schools, especially the oldest schools with more financial backing, are better than the DEIS schools. It's not a good thing. It's not great at all' (Tom, 58). Evan revealed how

'shocked' he was at the 'judging' of other teachers in the fee-charging school where he did his placement who advised him never to work in a DEIS school: 'You want the private schools' (Evan, 193).

Experiencing at first hand the privileged world of fee-charging schools and the advantages they could offer, was spoken of by Evan as consolidating his views of the social class divide: 'Seeing how the other half lives completely opened my mind' (Evan, 226). He discussed in detail all the advantages that he saw in the school. He noted the 'economic advantage' of school choice and grinds; and 'being able to send your child away for the summer to learn a different language'; and the myriad cultural resources available to the pupils where they are 'almost assimilated into higher education from a young age'; and the advantage of being in schools where there are resources to 'support the kids with learning disabilities'. All of these advantages were identified by Evan as providing 'more one-upmanship' for the pupils, parents and schools (Evan, 372). He also remarked that these advantages resulted in 'a form of selection going on in fee-paying schools' (Evan, 543). Sandra echoed Evan's views:

> *Having worked and been in a fee-paying school myself, the middle class are 100 percent advantaged. I don't see how it could be otherwise. The parents have gone to university and have books at home and money and encouragement. There is an ease that comes with money. It can buy you grinds and grades and all that extra stuff you're going to have. A middle-class child will do well even if they're not in a fee- paying school but putting them in a private school gives them that extra kind of one-upmanship on others. I think it's totally unfair and uneven. I guess it's economics. These schools are businesses and I guess it's perpetuating the social divide. It's to keep people separated and keeping certain people at a disadvantage (Sandra, 352).*

As Karl pointed out, in a 'community college or a DEIS school you get a whole mix of kids' but in a fee-charging school all the pupils are 'on the same page, wanting to do well and get

high grades. It's like sport, if you're playing with a better team, you will become a better player' (Karl 76). Teaching in these privileged schools was described as being challenging by this cohort of students as their social, cultural, and economic difference from the dominant groups was more accentuated. Before she started teaching in the school, Kirstie wondered 'how different can it be? I'm from the area', but added the words 'on paper' (Kirstie, 445). She explained that being from a middle-class area was not an advantage culturally for her:

> *When you dig a bit deeper, it's the small things people say, you know, that's such a big difference. Like, a lot of people thought it was crazy that I didn't drive. I don't drive as I can't afford a car. I have to get the same buses as some of the students. It feels weird sitting with them. A lot to them get dropped off by their brothers in Fifth or Sixth Year (Kirstie, 455).*

Tom acknowledged that he was always aware of the difference in his social class: 'I was very conscious of my social difference in the background absolutely all the time on my school placement in a fee-paying school'. He noted that he was one of the few without a car on the staff, and whereas he had to walk or get the bus, the fifth-year students were able to drive in (Tom, 65). Evan also revealed how his social background singled him out as different in his fee-charging school:

> *I felt very out of place. I'm doing the job well but I can see that there is no teacher in the school with the same accent as me. There is a way of doing things in the school, a cultural thing you know. There is a way to behave and act in the school. For me it's challenging coming into that school. It's another world completely for me. I wouldn't have had the confidence to do this in my twenties (Evan, 728).*

A heightened awareness of difference, alongside strong feelings of not belonging in this privileged world, was discussed by Kirstie as contributing to a sense of not being a 'real' teacher and of not being on the same social level as her colleagues:

> *The teachers are very different to me. I just feel a little bit like an outsider. That I'm not a real teacher. And when I compare myself to others, I feel like I'm always doing something wrong (Kirstie, 576).*

Teaching in such a socially different environment to his own, was also discussed by Evan as making him insecure in his teacher identity. He maintained that any pupil failure would have been attributed to 'where I'm from' and not to his teaching methods. He felt that in the eyes of his colleagues that 'people from that background aren't going to make good teachers. They speak a different language' (Evan, 354):

> *I had doubts because I felt kind of alienated from teaching. I just felt it. I didn't fit in and I needed that validation so I was really conscious of that. I was really worried about the kids getting good marks because I think my background may have come into it if they didn't get good marks… I felt more was expected of me because I have to kind of prove myself more (Evan, 348).*

Evan went on to explain that it was 'a real eye-opener' for him to see the reproduction of privilege from both sides of the social divide, having being a student in a disadvantaged school to now being a teacher in a fee-charging school. However, his awareness merely served to highlight what he perceived to be 'the worst of both worlds'. He contended that he would be excluded from this privileged world as a qualified teacher, and that the exclusion of the working class from this privileged world would perpetuate the reproduction of social class:

> *If there is no social mobility, there are no working-Declass teachers. Otherwise we might as well revert to an Eighteenth century educated elite for the special few. It is not just the middle- and- upper class people who are entitled to drink champagne. Why can't I be a teacher in this fee-paying secondary school? There should be a social mix of students and teachers (Evan, 726).*

The student who spoke of adapting more easily to working in a fee-charging school was Sandra, the only student who had come from a middle-class background, albeit sunken. Despite her financial struggles and a socially strong awareness of inequality, Sandra explained that she found 'working in a fee-paying school much easier because they have a bit more money and I was paid every few weeks which just changed my whole year'. The financial security meant that she did not have to work outside the school and could for the first time 'actually relax and enjoy the teaching' (Sandra, 228):

> *It was just a different world. It's part of the ethos of the school to look after the staff. We all got hampers at Christmas and vouchers. I felt like this ease of wealth. I've seen the difference between fee- paying and non-fee paying and for me, fee- paying just felt so easy to have the support. And the behaviour of the middle-class children was amazing (Sandra, 239).*

While Sandra's social leanings were 'towards teaching in a public school', her years of financial struggles were also vying for position and she stated that 'maybe I'm at the stage where I just want to be looked after, you know' (Sandra, 258). This viewpoint contrasted with Kirstie's who stated that although working in a privileged school had been 'a great experience', her preference would not be to 'willingly work in a private school again. It just goes against a lot of the stuff I believe in' (Kirstie, 465). Whatever their views, each student always identified their sense of difference and lack of belonging in these schools, particularly in relation to the middle-class staff and pupils.

5.6.8.1 *Fee-Charging School Placement: Staff*

All the students doing their placement in fee-charging schools identified the many differences between them and the middle-class staff and how these differences contributed to their sense of not fitting in. Evan pointed out that 'teaching is 100 percent a middle-class

profession and all of my colleagues are very much from a middle-class background' (Evan, 238). Kirstie similarly noted that 'a lot of the male teachers on the staff went to the school themselves, going back generations' (Kirstie, 234). Evan pointed out that he was not as advantaged as the middle-class teachers who came from the same background as their pupils:

> *There is a natural kind of confidence or a familiarity with their surroundings. They talk the talk with the kids and the kids can talk their talk. And it wouldn't be the same talk that I would have where I come from and where I went to school. My background is very different (Evan, 61).*

Being from a different social background to the norm in the school, where the teachers had 'holiday homes in Portugal or Spain' was spoken of by Evan as accentuating his sense of not fitting in (Evan, 98):

> *What it's actually done for me is that I chat more with the Moldovan cleaning staff; I chat with the canteen staff, and I chat more with the groundsmen than I do with my own colleagues (Evan, 106).*

Sandra also commented on the privileged lifestyle of many of the teachers and said that she was trying 'not to hold that against people so much' (Sandra, 218). Kirstie stated that she was 'definitely conscious of difference' and that the middle-class staff 'just had a different outlook' to her. She noted that the social and cultural differences between the social classes were frequently highlighted in staff comments.

> *Things that shocked them were just normal to me. In my school lots of friends didn't know who their dads were. Or their dads were in prison. Or their parents had them when they were 15. My best friend had a baby at 15 and I was the godmother at 14. For me it was just life, nothing unusual. But they'd be like 'oh, that's disgraceful' (Kirstie, 283).*

Not being from the same social background, Evan felt that he 'was looked down upon a little by the teaching staff and would 'definitely feel judged by a few colleagues particularly the new, younger cohort of teachers' (Evan,109). Kirstie also stated that she 'definitely felt that I'm judged for where I'm from. They know exactly where I live and they know that I'm not in the same social circle as them' (Kirstie, 557). Feeling judged in such a manner resulted in Kirstie feeling that 'I don't have the right to say something' (Kirstie, 549). Being different to the staff also filtered down to a real sense of difference with the pupils this cohort of students taught.

5.6.8.2 *Fee-Charging School Placement: Pupils*

Teaching pupils from this world of privilege was identified as challenging by the students. Kirstie asserted that 'it was a lot more extreme than I thought it was going to be'. She explained how one of the first- year pupils in her English class told her that 'he didn't need to study English and History' (Kirstie, 665):

> *He actually has his own company already. His parents set it up for him and his friends. He wants to be a plastic surgeon as there's no money in history and English. Why are you thinking of money at 12? Someone's telling them this. He didn't care as long as he's making money. It's all that matters (Kirstie, 677).*

Evan commented that 'The kids I teach have been all over the world by first year. It absolutely blew my mind. I'd only been to Wexford at their age. I felt a bit intimidated at what these kids already knew of the world' (Evan, 14). Kirstie also noticed that 'whatever country you mention, they've been there or have houses there' (Kirstie, 139). Being their English teacher and not being confident in her own language skills, Kirstie stated that she felt somewhat intimidated by the linguistic ability of her pupils:

> *Like for 12 and 13 year- olds, I'm not going to lie, some of the stuff they were saying in their assignments I'd have to google it. God, I wouldn't have known that when I was that age at all. Some of the stuff I'd even have to think about like, what does that even mean? (Kirstie, 168).*

The academic ability of the pupils was observed by Kirstie as going hand-in-hand with a 'huge amount of pressure that was put on the first- year students in the school'. She explained that she 'didn't feel comfortable putting that much pressure on students at that age. It was just taken so seriously. It was way too much. It was almost a life or death situation' (Kirstie, 91). Incongruous with the pressure, Kirstie found it highly unusual that all the pupils were 'given the exam questions months in advance' (Kirstie, 94). Despite knowing the questions, some of her pupils still failed, a situation that was unacceptable in the school, where all of the pupils were expected to pass:

> *We were told not to actually fail them. That's not okay. A lot of us might have failed in my DEIS school but we didn't know what was going to be on the exam. And we didn't have the support. It's just giving the kids in this school false hope and keeping the parents happy. But it's also condoning behaviour of not doing their work and still thinking they can pass (Kirstie, 470).*

Evan commented on the 'gloating' by some of the staff about how well their school had done in the League Tables: 'Aren't we great. Look where we are'. Evan found this attitude 'completely shocking' as no account was being taken of the many advantages that contributed to the school's success: the 'smaller classes, extra grinds, cultural differences, extra tuition, extra- curricular activities and economic circumstances'. Evan followed this by saying that 'if you think that this is just down to the name of the school, you're fooling yourself' (Evan, 198). Even more problematic for Evan were the views of some of the staff and the perceived value judgements that he felt were made on the quality of person who did well academically:

> *Those teachers that said it, it was almost like the students are a better quality of human being and 'we're better teachers' and it was that one-upmanship which showed the completely skewed outlook they have. It makes me feel sick because I came from a school that was in a disadvantaged area and know people that I went to school with that ended up doing brilliant things (Evan, 214).*

The high value placed on academic success in fee-charging schools was identified by some of the students in the cohort who worked there as being a by-product of the marketing tool whereby every student must succeed if high fees are being paid. Evan recounted his disbelief at the 'completely foreign experience' of the prize-giving assembly at the end of the year, where each pupil received a prize, whether it was deserved or not:

> *It's kind of aristocratic giving the kids something for nothing. It's a marketing tool. The parents make big donations to the school and buy lots of things for the kids. It's also a cultural thing that you get a prize whether you deserve it or not. There is no need to worry. And it drives the idea that you will be fine and always do well, that you will achieve because of who you are. I just don't get it. It's just a different world (Evan, 624).*

Kirstie maintained that belonging to this different world of privilege was also reflected in a different code of acceptable behaviour. It was Kirstie whose accent was mimicked by the pupils but she asserted that she understood why the pupils did this. But she chose to report an incident of what she felt was inappropriate behaviour from one of her first-year pupils:

> *It was really embarrassing having to bring that to the male principal because I almost felt that it was my fault. I've done all the right things that you're supposed to do. I was told that the pupil would be punished. But the following day, I was told by the principal that it that it was not that pupil and when I went back into the classroom, the pupil was*

> *sitting at the back smirking. No wonder they grow up to do worse things and get away with it. In what world is that acceptable (Kirstie,490).*

Despite the poor behaviour of some of the pupils in her class, Kirstie stated that 'some of the kids I met were great' (Kirstie, 414). However, managing pupils in a fee-charging school is not the same as dealing with their parents, as Kirstie also discovered.

In contrast to her own experience attending a DEIS school, where 'the teachers wouldn't have a clue who some of the parents were', Kirstie related how teaching in a fee-charging school was the direct opposite: 'all the teachers know all the parents here going back through generations, because they're in contact with the school all the time' (Kirstie, 438). Kirstie emphasised the 'very full-on contact from parents' relating how she 'just felt that I was open to students and parents 24/7'. She also revealed how the difference in social standing between her and the parents 'terrified' her, compounded when saw the 'sign off on their emails and they were all doctors or professors…it was 'nerve-wracking' (Kirstie, 54). Parental influence also loomed over Kirstie's teaching in the classroom, where 'every time I write something on the board I'm supposed to take a picture of it and put it on One Note so that the parents can see what their children are doing in class'. She went on to discuss how the 'different cultural expectations in middle-class schools' resulted in constant 'parental pressure on staff and students' (Kirstie, 721). However, there was one particular incident with a parent that stood out for Kirstie:

> *I had a very uncomfortable phone call with a parent about their child's grade in a test. She started asking me about myself 'You're new in the school. I didn't hear your name before'. And then she asked me what my background was. I actually didn't understand what she meant by that and I said I was a teacher. And she said 'But before that'. I was like, I shouldn't tell. She wanted to know where I come from, if I was qualified. I tried to sway the conversation back. Why did I even tell her (Kirstie, 204).*

Kirstie also revealed how another teacher with 'a North Side accent' had also got similar phone calls from parents 'where people said stuff to her'. As Katie commented: 'Can she not just be a teacher no matter where she's from?' (Kirstie, 217). Kirstie felt that where she came from and where she went to school still mattered. Sandra wondered if 'maybe it's a Dublin association about what school you went to and how you categorise people', but she also felt that 'it's kind of a dangerous thing to be talking about where you went to school as you get older' (Sandra, 34).

The small group in this cohort who did their PME placement in a fee-charging school discussed how their experiences highlighted for them the stark contrast between the different worlds of the privileged and the disadvantaged, and the unfairness that they saw in the education system. Joe maintained that at the core of the unfairness was social class, and that the bias towards the privileged that he perceived in the education system generally was 'just a fault of life', where those with 'better resources' are able to 'ensure that their kids do better' (Joe, 230). The next section explores the experiences of the majority in this cohort who did their school placement in more disadvantaged schools.

5.6.9 DEIS School Placement

The sense of hierarchy associated with different schools was something that many in this cohort of students commented on: 'I'd be afraid to say that I went to a DEIS school unless I knew that the people were from the same background' (Martina, 411). Martina went on to explain a strategy her school had adopted in order to circumvent the negative 'branding' associated with DEIS schools: 'Our school changed its name from the name of the area to a different name so you would never know where we went to school. We could cover it up, which sounds terrible. Well, that's just the way it is' (Martina,349). Gaye explained that the negative connotations associated with DEIS schools resulted in attempts by management in her DEIS

placement school to reject the DEIS name, along with all of the resources available to a DEIS school:

> *The school I'm in now is basically a DEIS school but nobody wants to take on the status of DEIS because people are kind of ashamed of it. It's ridiculous. How do you get more resources to help the students? (Linda, 211).*

The lack of a perceived understanding of DEIS schools by the privileged PME students was noted by Gaye: 'The middle-class students on the PME see DEIS schools very differently' (Gaye, 379). This lack of understanding was often felt by the disadvantaged students as manifesting in a certain judging of the those who attended DEIS schools: 'Some of the PME students would look down on DEIS schools and would judge students who are in DEIS schools, and that the kids are only there to cause a ruckus' (Karl, 98). Several of these students used war metaphors to illustrate their points:

> *A lot of the middle-class PMEs found it quite interesting when you said that you were teaching in a DEIS school. They were horrified at the behaviour and some of the things that were going on. Their immediate response was 'oh my God, are you okay? Almost like it was a kind of minefield or battlefield you're going into. Like a soldier going to war. It's just kids with a few behavioural issues (Gaye, 34).*

Linda also used the image of a warzone to explain the response of the middle-class students: 'When I say that I'm teaching in a DEIS school, the reaction was like, oh my God! What's that like? As if someone had been thrown into the middle of Iraq' (Linda, 456). The shocked reactions of the middle-class PME students was also captured in Gaye's observation that 'there is a look of terror and panic when you talk about your issues. They're not gremlins, they're only children' (Gaye, 387), and Joe's contention that the privileged students might think that he taught 'in a nut house' (Joe, 102). Karl maintained that privileged PME students who taught in DEIS schools 'think that they're doing the world a favour' (Karl, 98), while Gaye felt that

middle-class PME students would be ‘eaten alive for breakfast’ in a DEIS school where the ‘kids would see their uppitiness, their sense of entitlement’ (Gaye, 401).The reality of teaching in a DEIS school versus the perception of others, is explored in the next section.

5.6.9.1 *DEIS School Placement: Pupils*

All of the students in this cohort who taught in DEIS schools commented on the challenges that their pupils faced both within and outside school, struggles that education alone could not remediate. Coming from similar backgrounds themselves, these PME students explained that they could understand their pupils and see behind and beyond any behavioural issues: ‘There are lovely, bright students who struggle because of their background and because of the area they live in and get labelled for being in a DEIS school’ (Martina, 338). Karl also maintained that ’90 percent of the kids are terrific’ but admitted that the ’10 percent who are who are problematic would be a lot rougher and a lot madder’ than pupils in the non-DEIS school where he did his second placement (Karl, 105). The negative perception of every child in DEIS schools having ‘all these problems, anger issues, and no parental guidance to help all these crazy children’ was not a true reflection, according to Martina, stating that ‘they’re just children who are struggling’ (Martina, 423).

Permeating all of the discussions about the children they taught was an understanding by this cohort of the educational impact of the struggles that their pupils faced. While admitting that some of her pupils ‘are not angels and it would be lunacy to think so’, Gaye pointed out that these pupils ‘often have to go through hoops to get to school sometimes. It’s heart-breaking. They’re having such a hard time at home so I understand why someone might act out’ (Gaye, 392). The impossibility of separating their socio-economic and home environment from their education was highlighted by many in this cohort, with strong echoes of their own experiences:

> *The bar is really set so low for those kids that higher education is just not a possibility. There is no one pushing them. There is no drive. They don't know anyone that's done it. It doesn't seem like a possibility. And they don't want to do it because they don't like school, and why would you want to do to do more school that gets even harder. There are huge gaps in their knowledge, things that we would just assume were common sense. I was talking to kids and they didn't know there were cars in Ireland in the 1970s. They thought that we were still on horses (Jane, 706).*

Jane explained that the teachers in the DEIS school that she had attended and where she now taught 'get frustrated' due to the lack of interest in learning that they perceive in their pupils: 'But why would they care? Education is not a part of their lives. School is just somewhere they're sent' (Jane, 471). Jane went on to point out that for the teachers 'education is a huge part of who they are', whereas for their pupils 'education is not important to them, even socially':

> *The kids are just sent to school but it's not considered a big part of your life. It's like a creche more than anything. There is no generational stuff around education. It's just where you get sent for a couple of hours every day and then you go home (Jane, 478).*

Unlike their counterparts in fee-charging schools who 'think that they will be going to college', Clare pointed out that the pupils in her inner city DEIS school prioritise friendship over academic success. When the possibility of moving some of the more able pupils to a higher streamed class presented itself, the pupils 'didn't want to be seen as smart or getting the answers right because they didn't want to leave their friends' (Clare, 278). Clare explained that the pupils she taught 'weren't even aware of college at 17 or 18' and that she understood that their interests lay elsewhere:

> *My family would have grown up in the flat area in the inner city so I would have known their background, and their way of thinking is completely different. Like, one girl*

> *brought in a George Forman sandwich maker and was charging the other girls a euro to toast their sandwiches. Their family would have been selling things on Moore Street. She genuinely didn't see a problem in making money this way (Clare, 61).*

Having interests outside education was something that Jane noticed with some of her pupils. Despite not being from a 'well-off family', one of Jane's pupils 'pulled out the latest iPhone' and commented that she would 'kill herself' if she had an old mobile phone like Jane's, and that having 'designer clothes and a Canada Goose jacket' was a priority for this young girl (Jane, 641). Without education as a priority, pupil absenteeism was identified as problematic by many in this cohort: 'It was an achievement getting them into school' (Karl, 137). Jane noted that 'none of the LCA class turned up this morning: 'It wasn't a big deal. It was quite normal for them' (Jane, 615). Growing up in the same deprived area was an advantage in understanding these pupils:

> *There is a certain type of kid in my school and there is nothing wrong with that. And I can tell where they're from as soon as I meet them and that's because I'm from the same place. I grew up there. And there is a lot of special needs, a lot of Travellers and some really stupid and bold kids. But they've been socialised differently (Jane,621).*

Jade highlighted similar points to Jane maintaining that 'if a child is born in poverty and grows up in this atmosphere where school is only for the elite or the clever, they make no effort, and parents teach their kids that school is not for them' (Jade, 306). Jane, too, felt that 'parents don't see education as of any use' and that when she contacted parents about their child's progress 'they see it as you're going out of your way to annoy them' (Jane, 485). With regard to parents, Joe contended that there was 'a lot more parental involvement in a fee-paying school. You'd be lucky to get the parents in here' (Joe 159). Martina understood some of the difficulties that parents faced and the educational impact on the lives of their children:

> *There are a lot of single parents who want their children to do well but they have to work long hours and might not have a lot of money to pay for grinds or whatever and are not there to push them to do their homework. A lot of the students in Sixth Year this year were babysitting younger siblings while trying to study for the Leaving Cert. You can't do both at the same time (Martina, 492).*

As with all teachers, this group of PME students had to learn to adapt their teaching to the pupils in their care.

5.6.9.2 *DEIS School Placement: Teaching*

The challenges inherent in teaching pupils who are already struggling in many ways were highlighted by all in this cohort. They were aware of how different their experiences were to those PME students who were teaching in more privileged schools. The pupils in Karl's inner-city school 'had no pencil or paper' so he just brought in what the pupils needed every day rather than 'shouting and roaring at them like a few of the teachers, which was just a waste of time' (Karl, 131). Unlike the stories Joe was hearing about PME students teaching in more privileged schools where the pupils 'are as good as gold', Joe's 'biggest challenge is getting the kids staying in the room and to sit down and pay attention' (Joe, 99). The challenges that their pupils faced outside school frequently manifested in their struggles in the classroom. Jade recounted how some pupils in her DEIS school 'were barely able to string a sentence together in second year'. She felt that the source of their literacy problems lay 'in their early years where there is something missing' (Jade, 160).

Brian discovered that 'some of the children in my class weren't able to read or write' (Brian, 259). Jane was also aware of the complexity of the challenges that many of her pupils faced, and that now she, as their teacher, also faced. She linked her pupils' literacy problems with other issues such as absenteeism and family instability:

> *I have 15-year-old who cannot read or write and I've never met him because I teach the class on a Friday and he's never turned up once. And I have another student from the same area and his dad is one of the most notorious people that is known to the guards. So, when I hear other PMEs worrying about their lesson plans, that's not on my radar as much as other issues. Their parents genuinely just do not work; it's not normal for them. Where I grew up, I didn't know anybody who had a job. The kids can't understand why I went to college. Why would you study to be a teacher? Wasting your life (Jane, 637).*

The socio-economic backgrounds of the pupils had an impact on how these students from similar backgrounds chose to approach teaching on their DEIS placements.

5.6.9.3 *DEIS School Placement: Impact on Teaching Method*

Many of the students in this cohort spoke of the need to prioritise the needs of their pupils when teaching in a DEIS school. Tara contended that while the middle-class PME students can focus on following the curriculum and can decide 'this is how I teach and that's it', she felt that there was more of an imperative in a DEIS school to prioritise the pupils' needs over the curriculum. Tara explained that 'nine out of ten times' she has to abandon her lesson plan in order to 'adapt to the emotional and social needs of kids in front of you', and that education is often 'the last thing that the kids are thinking about' (Tara, 651).

Many of the students talked about how their lack of academic confidence manifested in the style of teaching that they adopted in their DEIS school. Being the knowledgeable teacher with a sense of presence was identified by Martina as inimical with her poor sense of academic teacher identity: 'I don't think I have the confidence to be the teacher that, you know, just enters the classroom and everyone just goes we'd better hop on straightaway' (Martina, 207). Despite the fact that no PME student, or indeed teacher, knows all the answers, Martina

explained that her lack of academic confidence and the fear of being exposed terrified her, and resulted in Martina opting for a different teaching style, a more 'relaxed' approach, which she felt protected her from being criticised for not knowing the correct answers:

> *A student asked a question and I remember thinking, oh my God, if I don't know the answer to this, it is going to be terrible. I remember being terrified for not knowing all the answers to all the questions. So, I told them that I didn't know the answers and to email me the questions. So not being the teacher who knows the answers was more suited to me. It eased the pressure of having to know everything. That's just not going to work (Martina, 226).*

Martina went on to explain that she would avoid 'whatever they were teaching us in college', where the teacher had a certain presence and content knowledge. Instead she revealed that she opted for a looser teaching style, where she would sit with her pupils and chat about the points she felt were relevant, and where she could avoid what she perceived to be 'lecturing' and 'having to stand at the top of the classroom, hoping and praying that I will be okay' (Martina, 193):

> *I was able to make it (teaching style) a bit more relaxed…I will probably just kind of sit down and chat rather than lecturing. That's more for me as well as the students. I wouldn't feel as comfortable with 'let's do this and this'. That's just not really suited to me. Not feeling that I should know everything kind of took a little bit of the pressure off really. It's the amount of confidence I would need. I work best at the level of confidence I have (Martina, 213).*

Lack of confidence was also an issue for Brian in the classroom and he remarked that he 'was very nervous standing in front of people delivering lessons' (Brian, 331). Brian explained that he always felt that he was 'not as good as other people' and that his ability and grades were not 'not as good as most other people':

> *I just felt that I wasn't as good a teacher as most people were…A lot of the kids have low literacy levels so there's almost a sense that we don't have to be brilliant teachers, you know. I hate to see that because that's not fair and it's not right for the kids, just because expectations are low and teachers won't teach to the best of their ability. But even if the kids don't achieve, the same the same amount of effort should be put in (Brian, 136).*

Brian went on to explain that he could see that many of his pupils had poor language skills and 'might have an inferiority complex', something that he could understand being 'exactly the same' himself. As a result, his approach to teaching prioritised building relationships with his pupils over academic achievement (Brian, 475).

5.6.9.4 *DEIS School Placement: Making a Difference*

Whatever their confidence levels or approach to teaching, the students in this cohort emphasised the importance of being a positive influence in their pupils' lives and of making a difference in whatever ways they could. Evan was clear that he wanted 'to help disadvantaged students. It's more rewarding' (Evan, 246). Martina also clarified that she wanted 'to be able to help students who have been given a label that they're just from a DEIS school' (Martina, 354). Others in the group, like Karl, emphasised the satisfaction of working with children who are happy to move from a C to a B and where 'it's not a looming disaster for mankind if they only have 540 points in their Leaving Cert' (Karl, 143). Like Karl, Tara got great satisfaction in helping one of her pupils who was on the cusp of leaving the school for a place in a 'special school':

> *I remember helping a child to get a D in ordinary level English at Junior Cert. When I met him, he couldn't read and had no interest in school. I had hours of one-to-one with him every week. That one moment when he got his D was the best feeling ever because*

> *he was so proud. I want to be the teacher that makes a difference to help you to be better. This student deserved a medal not a special school. He's just from an extremely hard background. He's just misunderstood (Tara, 615).*

Gaye explained that teaching in a DEIS school was an opportunity to 'help students infiltrate the space' occupied by the middle-classes. She felt that teaching per se would not be 'valued' by parents in fee-charging schools, that teachers would be 'just an extension of the paid help at home that they pay money for', and that all she would be doing would be pushing 'privileged people on the conveyor belt to take up space in higher education'. She contended that unless the disadvantaged occupied a place of vantage from the inside and persevered to 'break through the barriers…. and occupy that space,' that nothing would change (Gaye, 213). She felt that teaching in a DEIS school would afford her the chance of changing the status quo. However, choosing to teach in a DEIS school served a more self-serving purpose for some. Martina recounted her annoyance when she tried to support a middle-class PME student who was doing his placement in the same DEIS school:

> '*Look, we're nearly there', I said, and he turned around and said 'I don't care. I'm never coming back here again. I just wanted to tick a DEIS school off my C.V.' I don't get that mindset. It was kind of upsetting. These kids can be annoying little shits sometimes but they've so much going on for them. They are not just a box to be ticked (Martina, 327).*

The centrality of background to 'where I wanted to teach and why I wanted to become a teacher', was identified by Tara as a key factor in motivating her to teach pupils who 'don't have that support system at home' and where they need 'someone fighting their corner and cheering them on'. This commitment to a cause often came at a personal cost, as Jane explained: 'My biggest struggle is prioritising my education in Southside over the education of my students in the school. I'm behind on my lesson plans and on my deadlines. Teaching

feels more important. It's my responsibility. I'm just really struggling, and it's hard to enjoy the PME' (Jane, 800).

5.6.9.5 *DEIS School Placement: Staff*

Staff and staffrooms in schools are still middle-class spaces, regardless of school type, and Jane spoke of how she experienced her social difference when, on the first day of her school placement, her cooperating teacher 'made a point of highlighting that we're going to have nothing to do with each other, and pretty much never spoke to me again' (Jane, 245). Jane was informed by the 'real teachers' that she had to grade portfolios for the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme (LCVP) the day before the results were due in, and with 'barely any support' it took a 'shocking toll' on Jane (Jane, 328).

> *I had never met any of the students. I was in an awful way. It was just really horrible. I stayed up all night doing theirs and had to get extensions for every single one of my own assignments. I wasn't sleeping and was stressed. It was really really bad (Jane, 335).*

Ivan observed that he was lucky to find someone on his placement that he knew and they 'latched on to each other all day' (Ivan, 240). Lucy described the isolation she felt and the struggles she faced in the first day and month of her school placement: 'The very first day I arrived in the school, I hadn't even walked around the school, I was told that I was taking a class at 11.00 for an hour. I didn't have any books' (Lucy, 206). Lucy explained that she and another PME student found having 'no one to talk to in the first month very hard'. While some teachers 'from the same background' could understand what Lucy was going through, others were not as understanding:

> *I couldn't say to anyone how hard I was finding everything. Like I really struggled with the school. I couldn't talk to anyone. The first month was very tricky. Some teachers*

> *expected you to know everything, and if you didn't know, 'how can you not know that and you're a teacher'. Lucky enough I hadn't too many run-ins after I figured out that they weren't the nicest. I never did anything wrong. I would say hello and they would never say hello back. But I always made sure to say hello (Lucy, 144).*

Jade explained that her sense of difference on the staff was not just connected to social class but also to her religious differences, which she felt 'were a barrier in the school where I was teaching'. She explained that it was often 'the text behind the unspoken words' that made her think that 'maybe they're looking down on you'. While the staff were all very nice she did not feel 'included' (Jade, 340). This feeling of social isolation from the staff played a central role in how Jade viewed herself as having a different standing to other teachers:

> *They were always kind of closed. They didn't really afford me the chance to create friendships that are necessary in the staffroom. I felt really hurt because to be the best teacher you need to have those open relationships. It really detrimentally affected me. At times I was like, teaching is not for me. There was no point in being a teacher that has no other teacher friends (Jade, 144).*

Joe spoke of difference in terms of his perception that he was not of the same academic standard as the other teachers on the staff. He recalled an incident where the teachers in the staffroom 'went around the table' comparing their Leaving Certificate results, which appeared to be 'substantially better' than his own: 'It was probably the only time that I felt not just embarrassed, but just a bit underwhelmed compared to them. I didn't excel' (Joe,150). Tara explained that she always felt different to the other teachers and that they had no real interest in talking with her: 'Do you care about what I'm saying?' (Tara, 271). She recounted how her many attempts to integrate on the staff were rebuffed, and how this impacted her:

> *I always felt like I was a burden on the staff, that I wasn't really wanted by some. I felt really nervous going around those teachers in the staffroom. Where will I sit? I feel*

> *they won't want me to sit with them. I went to sit down at a table and somebody there put a scarf on the chair and said 'sorry, that seat's taken' and I was like, 'you're a grown woman, I just want to sit and eat my yoghurt. Let me just sit there for five minutes (Linda, 286).*

Martina remarked that while she integrated with her cooperating teachers that this was not the case with the staff as a whole. Literally finding her place in the staffroom proved challenging for her: 'I feel that I shouldn't be taking up a seat really as it's their staff room. I just eat in my workroom' (Martina, 798). Having her attempts to integrate rebuffed, Martina related how she tended to avoid the staffroom, in the process isolating herself even further:

> *For the most part, I didn't really go into the staff room. There were 40 or 50 staff members who you know knew everything. And I was just sitting there like 'oh my God, I'm so out of my depth. I don't know what to be talking about. I don't know anything. I don't have anything of value to add. I shouldn't be here. I did try and stick with the NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers) but they sort of stayed away from me and sat with the settled teachers. I was just thinking oh please, please be my friend. For the most part when it started to get a little bit kind of overwhelming I'd just pick up my bag and walk out (Martina, 272).*

Despite the isolation she felt throughout the year, Martina said that she regretted not making more of an effort: 'the teachers were all so nice when I was leaving and said to definitely come back sometime and like, we'll become friends. I should have tried' (Martina, 176).

5.6.9.6 ***DEIS School Placement: Different Roles***

While understanding the complex needs of their pupils was an advantage for all of the students in this cohort who returned to their old school for their teaching placement, some students had different on the roles ascribed to them by the staff in their schools. Jane described

one of her roles as being an interpreter between the school and the pupils, differentiating her from the other teachers in the school in a variety of ways, including social class:

> *A student's dad was stabbed around the corner from me and the teachers came to me before kind of gauging what to do with the student. I was just this little token. Is this normal Jane? And I'd say, yeah that's normal for them. You know, you do feel different to the other teachers. I'm their source of information in the school, like Richard Chambers about to present the news (Jane, 453).*

Being one of the few pupils from her school to proceed as far as higher education, let alone return as a post-graduate student teacher, also positioned Jane in a role that accentuated her difference: 'You're the exception':

> *The teachers didn't do it out of malice either but you almost felt like a bit of a circus pony. I never realised how big the social class difference could be. These teachers weren't really posh but I live in the area and there is a completely different experience (Jane 458).*

Karl described his role in the school as one of 'a celebrity coming back to teach the kids'. He remarked that 'the kids kind of idolised me in a way' and how his teachers would single him out in front of the pupils as an example of success: 'He was one of youse' (Karl, 442). For Jane, being singled out as a success in her school merely confirmed for her the inequity inherent in the education system: 'If you do succeed in some way, it's oh my God you're amazing. You're like some kind of show pony. Whereas in private schools you are expected to do well' (Jane 628). Jane, like many other students in this cohort, wondered if you were a betting person, what child you would back in the race for academic success? Would it be the child from the privileged background whose parents are 'doctors, lawyers and politicians' (Jane, 619), and who have invested 'probably 30 or 40 grand' at post-primary in their child's education (Karl, 261), in schools 'where they have huge resources' (Linda, 442), or would you back the

disadvantaged child from areas where ‘only 15% go onto higher education, even though they may be twice as bright as the advantaged kids’ (Karl, 265), where some teenagers cannot ‘read or write’ (Jane, 618) and where teachers and pupils would be ‘lucky to get a textbook’? (Linda, 446). Karl asserted that in his inner-city school it ‘doesn’t matter how hard these kids try they are in the same race’ as those children who have had a lot of money spent on their education (Karl, 267). As Jane asked: ‘Who are you going to back’ (Jane, 627).

In choosing to do their school placements in DEIS schools, many in this cohort of students had to contend with negative perceptions of these schools from the middle-class PME students. Awareness of the struggles their pupils faced and a desire to help their pupils to make a difference and help their pupils to ‘spread their wings’ (Jade, 179), were some of the reasons cited by these students for choosing to teach in DEIS schools. However, many students explained that their choice to teach in a DEIS school was also influenced by their fears of not being good enough to teach in a fee-charging school, and that their academic insecurities were more likely to be exposed in these privileged settings. Many felt that choosing to teach in DEIS schools reduced the likelihood of parents or children from similar backgrounds being able to identify what these students felt were fault lines in their knowledge. In many ways, choosing to teach in a DEIS school served as a protection for many of these students and formed part of an important navigational strategy, more of which strategies are explored in the next section.

5.6.10 Navigating Strategies

The choice of school placement was a clear example of a navigational strategy identified by the majority of students in this cohort. Other methods used to navigate their school placement replicated earlier approaches that the students had found successful, in particular, staying close to others like themselves and doing their best to camouflage who they were. A love of their new profession served as a key support for all of these students.

5.6.10.1 *Staying Close to your Tribe*

Linda commented that ‘a lot of PME do their placement in their old school and don’t venture much further for the other one’ (Linda, 438). Evan noticed that ‘students on the PME find school placements that align with their own background’ (Evan,554). Kate, just qualified as a teacher, continued the strategy when she opted for a teaching position in a rural school:

> *I felt comfortable with the teachers and the pupils. It’s what I’ve experienced all my life. I don’t know how to relate to people from Dublin. If worst came to worst, maybe I could (Kate, 185).*

Lucy’s strategy was also to choose only DEIS schools for her placement and ruled out even local non-fee-charging schools: ‘I wasn’t confident to go into the all-girls Catholic school’ (Lucy, 148). Socially, Sandra remarked that she felt different to the staff, despite being a past pupil of the school, and found a small tribe that she could connect with: ‘I found two teachers that I could relate to and be honest with from a rural background’ (Sandra, 229).

5.6.10.2 *Being a Chameleon*

Hiding in plain sight among the middle-classes was a strategy identified by Sandra and Tom, both of whom had middle-class accents, and neither of whom had been to a DEIS school. Sandra’s experiences in the past where she ‘had to work hard at a lot of different things’ resulted in an ability to ‘be a bit more of a chameleon in order to fit in on the staff’ (Sandra, 298). Tom described how he could ‘carry myself pretty well in those situations where I can sort of blag and I can pretend that I’m on the same level as them and I can converse, you know’ (Tom, 81). He explained that his ability to pretend and blend in was ‘a skill that he could whip out’ and which was honed during his schooldays:

> *In secondary school I was easily the poorest by a mile… I never really spoke about my situation. I'd kind of tell a white lie and pretend that I knew places that I didn't know. I'm trying not to do it. I turn the conversation to others. I did that a lot in my school placement. The most interesting person to anyone is themselves so if you can make the conversation about them they generally have quite a good time. But I never wanted to talk about myself so this is really really good for me just to let things out (Tom, 104).*

Tom revealed that gaining more confidence meant that he was 'better now at regulating my baseline personality' (Tom, 164) but that he could still 'be a sort of chameleon and pick up accents and sound quite D4 (middle-class) even though I'm very much not' (Tom 231). He explained that his skill was really that of an actor, and that being expert at observing what other people need was used to camouflage himself:

> *I often feel like I put up a façade of an actor you know, just depending on the situation and the person I'm talking to. I will do my very best to line up as much as I can of my own personality to be as close as possible to something that they would find acceptable. I think it's something that I feel most people try to do but it's something that I tend to do with reasonable accuracy. Sort of like picking up an accent, you pick up what they really value (Tom, 646).*

Due to the constant 'drama behind the scenes as a kid', Neil explained that the strategy that worked for him meant always having to 'reset myself otherwise I'd get totally lost in the background'. However, 'resetting' himself also entailed having to 'kind of swallow things deep down and pretend that they never happened' (Neil, 668). Kirstie's method of coping with the cultural and social differences she experienced when teaching in a privileged fee-charging school, involved learning a different set of social skills:

> *Teachers who went to a private school themselves would not have had the same experiences of it as me because I had to learn how to interact with different types of*

people. I've been around middle-class people before but this is a lot more extreme. I have to tell myself okay, you are supposed to be here, you know. Sometimes I felt like, Jesus, why am I here. It feels like I'm in a different country or something (Kirstie, 441).

5.6.10.3 *Getting Support in Southside University*

Outside of their own coping strategies, the support this cohort received in Southside University was highlighted as central to how they managed their placement and the programme in general. They emphasised the importance of the support they received in ensuring that they remained on the programme and navigated the two years successfully. The importance of asking for help was remarked on by Neil who said that teaching can be 'a lonely profession and sometimes you just need to fight the fear and ask for help and advice'. He also commented that he was comfortable doing this but that there was 'huge difference' between Irish people and where he was from: 'If I want to know something, I'll ask you. If you don't want to tell me, that's fine. I'm not offended' (Neil, 389).

Despite the challenges, the students stated that they 'loved the PME' and had 'fantastic experiences' (Tara, 546), and were 'grateful to be on the course' (Lucy, 550). Liam also emphasised that he had a 'very good experience on the PME' (Liam, 210). Jane disclosed that without the 'support I got on the PME I would've failed' (Jane, 652). For Linda, the STSP support programme was the first time she felt in a 'safe space and felt completely fine' (Linda, 612). Sandra maintained that 'people were approachable in Southside. You weren't just a number. You felt like there was support there. It was so nice to be able to find that support and people who would understand' (Sandra (354). Gaye also highlighted and singled out the support the students received in Southside University:

> *I was lucky to end up in Southside. There is nothing anywhere, in any other university, with nearly as much support as this programme. It was a massive relief to have the support from the University (Gaye, 385).*

Tutorial groups were cited by all in this cohort as a key supporting strategy. For many like Lucy, it was the combination of the social support 'we really gelled', combined with the safety of being able ask questions 'no matter how silly', and get support without feeling that you were 'being judged' (Lucy, 152). The fear of being judged as not knowing was still strong for these students, and the tutorial groups proved to be safe territory where 'nobody would judge you when didn't know what to do and didn't know something that you should know' (Martina, 167).

5.6.10.4 *Love of Teaching*

Underpinning many of the navigational strategies for this cohort, and helping to overcome many of the challenges they faced, was the love of teaching: 'When you feel you're good at something, that builds your confidence', according to Liam. He explained that he 'loved teaching' and that it did not feel like work for him (Liam, 320). Clare also commented on how much she 'loved teaching' in her inner city DEIS school, and that she 'couldn't wait to get back into teaching after the holidays' (Clare, 379). Kate also 'loved teaching. It makes me happy. I love seeing other people learn. I'm completely comfortable with myself as a teacher' (Kate, 277). Neil's sentiments were similar:

> *I love teaching. Most of my work up until now has been quite lonely so now with teaching you're talking all day long and you've so many different personalities and that's just with the kids and the staff (Neil, 365).*

Neil remarked that he was especially appreciative of the opportunity he had been given to teach as he 'kept getting blocked on my academic route, so I'm delighted now' (Neil, 390).

Despite being told by family and friends that she was ‘mad teaching as the money isn’t great’, Tara explained that money was not the driver for her: ‘I could make a million a year and I genuinely hands down would not be as happy as I am teaching in the school that I’m in (Tara, 590). It was the desire to teach that drove these students and which overrode the obstacles they faced: ‘Give me twenty classes a day rather than the academic stuff’ (Karl, 395). They were all on the same journey: ‘We’re all going to be teachers at the end of the day. We shared a common experience’ (Evan, 335). As Brian commented: ‘Becoming a teacher will be the proudest day of my life’ (Brian, 567). Newly qualified, Jack related how he had to ‘pinch’ himself that he was ‘actually teaching’ (Jack, 196). Gaye, also newly qualified and with a position in a rural school, finally found a place in the middle-class territory of teaching. She commented how ‘nice’ it was that someone from her background could ‘just claw our way in with full-time teachers. That it could be done. That someone will take you in eventually’ (Gaye, 140). Gaye, like every other student in this cohort was successful in finding a pathway to post-primary teaching.

5.6.11 Conclusion

Despite the many challenges, all of the students in this cohort can be seen as successful in either achieving their goal of becoming post-primary teachers, or in moving towards their goal. However, there was a certain tension evident between the reality of the students’ challenges and the highlighting of their enjoyment of the programme and the support and encouragement they received. Nevertheless, each found strategies that helped them survive, although at a high personal cost for many. The price of achieving their goal was often paid in feelings of dislocation and isolation. As with many journeys, the educational journey these students had undertaken had changed them and brought them further away from their home territory but not feeling at home in their new middle-class territory. Many experienced a sense

of being caught between two worlds and not fully belonging to either. This new in-between world is explored in the final section.

5.7 Stage 6: Between Two Worlds

5.7.1 Introduction

Finding themselves between two worlds and not belonging comfortably to either, was discussed as being challenging by this cohort of students. There was a sense that they no longer belonged to the once familiar world from where they set out on their educational journey, but neither did they feel part of the new world in which they now found themselves. Family and friends now viewed these students as different, and the students tried to minimise this difference by changing and adapting who they now were as professionals. This adaptation was particularly evident in how many in the cohort spoke of how they chose to communicate with their family and friends, and in how they closed off important aspects of their academic achievement by minimising any references to their new profession. Trying to find a place where they belonged was difficult:

> *I definitely feel that I'm between two worlds. It's uncomfortable straddling two worlds because you don't know where you stand. I don't know who my people are or what my area is or what I should do, type of thing. It's kind of confusing, like I probably am to some people. That's the impact of it (Gary 648).*

Kirstie explained that 'growing up in a working-class family and teaching in a middle-class school' felt like 'hanging between two worlds. It's really strange'. She used the analogy of 'living a double-life' (Kirstie, 327):

> *When I'm at home I'd be afraid to use any school or college vocabulary because it doesn't sound natural coming from me. But then in college I don't say anything because I feel that everybody is above me, like (Kirsty, 393).*

Clare's comments were similar to Kirstie's but Clare had found a way of switching between the two worlds so that they had almost blended into one: 'I was between two worlds because of where my family is from and the world they have entered me into. I now don't know any different than switching between two worlds. It's kind of one world to me' (Clare, 245). Evan stated that regardless of where a person ends up professionally, it is where a person starts out from that is defining:

> *It's something that you're always very conscious of with having a masters. It's like well, what world do we belong to. But you'll always be where you come from and I can't ignore that (Evan, 731).*

The sense of leaving 'where they came from' by having a masters, was identified by many in this cohort as changing a delicate balance with family and friends, who now perceived them through a different lens.

5.7.2 New Perceptions: Uppity

Many students in this cohort revealed that they were conscious of not wanting their family to think that they were 'better than them' as a result of their journey to higher and now post-graduate education (Clare, 522). Despite their best efforts to ensure that they did not come across as 'snobby' (Karl, 211) or having 'notions' (Neil, 403) or 'being too posh and stuck up' (Jane, 537), the very fact that they were doing a masters and becoming teachers automatically set them apart from their family, friends and community:

> *My own community would put me on a bit of a higher pedestal with my teaching, but they also turn their noses up a little bit. They would be judging you. Look at her. She thinks she's great getting a masters (Anne, 365).*

Karl revealed that he would 'underplay' being a teacher at home and would never talk about it 'unless asked' (Karl, 211). Mary also tried 'not to talk about being a teacher at home' (Mary, 522). Jane commented that doing a masters was perceived 'as kind of putting other people down and all of a sudden you're stuck up' (Jane, 537). Jack found that some people from 'his past' would feel uncomfortable that he had gone on to higher education and that it would 'nearly be held against you' (Jack, 469):

> *Why are you trying to come out of the environment you were born into? I've come across some people from my past who think I've got too uppity in myself. You were fine as you were. You didn't need to go on. You'll think you're above us now. (Jack, 480). Once you break ranks, people's attitudes change. It's like a family member who breaks for the border before the rest of them. Why didn't you wait for us all? (Jack, 532).*

Proceeding to higher and post-graduate education was spoken of as transforming these students in many ways, differentiating them now from their own tribe. Jane noticed that family and people from her area would comment on her accent: 'You don't sound like you're from here' (Jane, 830). Ivan recounted how he had 'lost contact with friends' as a consequence of going on to higher education. The ability to win an argument would elicit a negative response: 'They'll say get off your high horse with your effing degree' (Ivan 379). Despite the obvious gains, many students, like Mary, described the sense of loss experienced as a result of their educational journey. In many ways, the differences that these students experienced between them and the middle-classes when they first arrived in higher education, were now being replicated in the perceptions that their own families and friends had to their own change of status:

> *Some family members will probably think 'oh look at her, at her cap and gown. She thinks she's all great now that she is doing a masters in Southside. But I also feel about the masters that I don't really belong, because your family and friends don't have one. I'm just very different to them all now (Mary, 431).*

The differences and the lack of understanding between the two worlds were challenging for these students to manage.

5.7.3 Little Understanding between Worlds

Many in the cohort discussed the gap in understanding between their families and the academic and professional world that these students now inhabited. Sandra, part of the sunken middle class, was the only student in the cohort who had a parent with a university education. Like Linda, the rest of the cohort, was 'the first person' in her family to go to higher education (Linda, 460). Martina explained that her family had no understanding of what she had undertaken in terms of the PME: 'My older brother didn't even do his Junior Certificate and just doesn't understand what I'm doing. He doesn't get it' (Martina, 441). Clare commented that she never spoke about college or the PME because her family 'don't understand what I'm doing. My brother left school at 14' (Clare, 238). Lucy also mentioned her parents the lack of understanding and she, like most of the other students, chose not to talk about her experiences on the PME: 'They're not really interested' (Lucy, 274):

> *My family see no difference between a three- week course in nutrition and six years studying towards teaching. It's frustrating. Everything is just called college. If I try to explain they're very much 'shut up! You talk about it so much'. My Nana just explains to people that have a lot of homework to do on the computer (Jane, 560).*

The lack of understanding between the world of family, friends and community and the new world that these students now inhabited, was challenging for Linda who revealed that no one

in her family ever showed an interest in what she was doing in college: 'I would worry if someone did' (Linda, 590).

> *I felt really deflated, especially from my Ma and Da. There is no amazement at the masters. I was like 'I'm finished college' and they said 'oh, very good'. I never made it a big deal at home but nobody else would either (Linda, 475).*

As a result of their progression to master's level, these students discovered that they and their families now inhabited two separate worlds. They needed to find a way of adapting to this new between world that they now found themselves in.

5.7.4 Bridging Gaps in Communication

Having bridged some of the gaps that existed between their world and the privileged world of higher education, the students now discussed how they had to bridge the new gaps that emerged between themselves and their families as a result of their educational achievements. One strategy identified by many was changing their method of communication:

> *It feels like you don't fit in anywhere only with others who have been through the same process. At home I have to dumb it down. I have to watch myself and the words I use. I have to make an effort all the time and it's exhausting. My mother would say 'we speak English in this house you know'. I can feel more myself in college (Gaye, 566).*

Like Gaye, many other students changed and adapted how they communicated at home in order to fit in and bridge the gap between the two worlds: 'It takes a lot to kind of explain things so I'd probably dampen it down a bit' (Martina, 439). Karl remarked that the vocabulary he uses at home would be 'quite basic' (Karl 217). Despite not having the 'best vocabulary as an English teacher', Linda still found that when she talked with her parents they would ask: 'What does that mean? There is a difference now. It's so unrelatable to them' (Linda, 481). Clare admitted that she found adapting to the differences 'quite difficult' and would revert 'back to

how I normally speak at home, to my own accent' and avoided using any 'big academic words' (Clare, 485). Jane spoke of the effort required to rein in her new-found identity:

> *My family have accused me since I was 14 of specifically using words that they don't understand at home, so I just don't talk at home. It's so much effort trying to swap what you were originally going to say. I have to change the conversation because I will make them feel uncomfortable then they will just be angry at you for no reason. I think I always feel like this when I'm living in the area I grew up in, but when I didn't live here, I didn't feel like that (Jane, 543).*

Adapting to their new in-between world involved the ability to 'switch between two worlds', according to Gaye, as 'otherwise it just wouldn't be fair' (Gaye, 333). Adjusting to their new in-between world involved adjustments in the other worlds that these students now found themselves in.

5.7.5 New Identities

Many students talked about their difficulties in adapting to their new teacher identities and accommodating this new identity with their many other identities. Evan was conscious of the different identities he inhabited and how people are 'acting and fulfilling a role' in the various situations in which they find themselves. Now in his forties, he explained that he could be 'completely myself with my friends' but had a different identity in the academic world or the school staffroom: 'I am in two different worlds definitely but I'm aware of it' (Evan, 745).

Many of these students discussed how being a teacher was not always viewed positively by their families and friends, who often held strong negative memories of their experiences with teachers in school. Teachers were often perceived as authoritarian, middle-class figures who held all the answers, and some family members had difficulty reconciling this image with

the new 'teacher' now in their midst. There was a sense of going over to the 'other side' permeating many of the responses the students received:

> *There is such a negative opinion of teachers. They think that what happened to them years ago still happens and that now I am doing it. 'You think that you're better than us now' (Jane, 544).*

Martina experienced a negative response from her older brother in particular. The image of abandoning her own people and joining the enemy was evident when she said to her brother: 'I know that you didn't like teachers in your old school and now I've become a traitor and I'm on the other side' (Martina, 439). Martina went on to explain where her brother's negative attitude to teachers came from:

> *My brother didn't want to be in school. There was no teacher that he liked and he mitched every day. There was a nun in school that he was terrified of and he said to me 'I hope you're not going to turn into her. She was terrible. Don't be like her'. If I said anything good about teachers, he'd say 'You're one of them now' (Martina, 449).*

Friends, too, had negative perception of teachers. Gaye recounted her first meeting with her new housemates: 'The minute they heard I was a teacher their hackles went up. I think there is a class perception that you must be middle-class and well off and be snotty as a consequence of being a teacher' (Gaye, 342). Now that she was teaching, Clare identified the 'status change' as a barrier between her and some of her friends, while others were 'fascinated with me being a teacher' (Clare, 480):

> *Most of my friends are from disadvantaged areas, especially the inner city. They know that I'm a teacher but they look at you differently, not so much because I'm in college but it's because I'm a teacher. It's the career itself that sets you apart. Teachers are completely different (Clare, 202).*

Disbelief that someone from a disadvantaged background could be a teacher also permeated many of this cohort's accounts of their friends' reactions: 'Some of my friends can't believe that I'm a teacher. They don't expect it' (Joe, 201). Linda found that her friends found it 'bizarre' that she was a teacher: 'How are *you* a teacher?'

> *They think that teachers have no lives. That they're busy being strict and angry and don't do anything energetic or fun. That they're little bit uptight and not up for the crack. They can't put me and teaching together. They see teachers as teachers. They wouldn't see teachers as like common people like me, apart from maybe the metalwork teacher or something (Linda, 506).*

The students identified the many challenges the faced adapting to their new teacher identity. Evan discussed the 'real cultural difference' that he experienced in his new role as a teacher and that having no one in his family to 'break the mould' before him, was difficult (Evan, 667). As a teacher from a working-class background, Evan wondered if he could ever escape his background:

> *Do I really belong here? Is there any real social mobility or am I destined to stay where I'm meant to be? Subconsciously you're wondering if you can reach the top level coming from somewhere like me (Evan, 671).*

Evan also commented on his struggles in reconciling his own working-class background with the middle-class profession that he was now entering. He felt that by being a teacher he was 'kind of not being authentic and not being true' to himself (Evan, 41). As with so many of the others in this cohort, Evan acknowledged that he felt both disloyalty and disconnection in leaving behind his old world and entering the new middle-class world of teaching:

> *There was a kind of disconnect between who I am and what is expected of me as a teacher. And I would struggle with that and it's something that I have to work on. There's a disconnect between who you are and your people, almost your tribe. It's*

> *almost like I'm leaving them behind to belong to this other gang; and that I have to satisfy what's required for the other gang. There's a kind of shame and guilt to it. You're disconnected from yourself just to satisfy what's kind of expected of you as a teacher (Evan, 36).*

It was interesting to note that Sandra, part of the sunken middle-class, revealed that her new teacher identity sat uneasily for her also. She explained that it was only by having a profession that she felt finally accepted in her solidly middle-class extended family: 'I was uncomfortable that my granny is so excited because finally you know she can say "oh Sandra is teaching in a fee-paying school". It's the same with some of my aunts as well. It sits well with them now that they can place me'. Sandra explained that she now struggled in reconciling her new successful teacher identity with her old impoverished identity, which had placed her 'well outside the family dynamics' (Sandra, 295).

> *My extended family have no idea what it's like for my mother and myself. They wouldn't have had any involvement, you know, when things were difficult. I think I struggle with that a bit now. Now that I have this title, everything is fine. I'm struggling because I feel that's not the full me either. It shouldn't be my job title that makes me seem okay. I know that's not the way they see it, but yeah that's coming from me I guess. It's like the title is like a big Band Aid that now covers up all the struggles and pain behind the title (Sandra, 331).*

In terms of social class, Gaye maintained that there would 'always be division and a barrier' between the classes, but that this was 'just never spoken about. It's put under the carpet' (Gaye, 573). All of these students found themselves with new teacher identities and all had to find ways of adapting, not only to how others now perceived them, but to how they now viewed themselves. Many found it challenging aligning their social class background with their new teacher identities:

> *I am struggling with my family and they are struggling with me. I talk different. I speak different. I do things different. And I have different beliefs. The more I do the more alien everything is. It really is a bit of a struggle. I am progressing socially and educationally and I work. I'm the only one I know in my family or community who works (Jane, 819).*

The educational journey undertaken by this cohort of students brought them nearer their goal of becoming teachers but further from their home and community. Achieving their goal came at a price. They now found themselves in the uncomfortable position of being between two worlds and not quite belonging to either. As Jane noted: 'There is a really big difference now between me and my family. It's all quite alien. We are stuck in different worlds' (Jane, 825.)

5.7.6 Conclusion

The goal of becoming post-primary teachers represents the end of a long educational journey for this group of students, from their primary and post-primary schooling, through further and higher education, and eventually to a post-graduate Professional Masters in Education, their PME. A constant theme throughout their journey was the sense of struggle to belong in a world that is predicated on middle-class norms. However, despite the challenges and obstacles they faced, the inequalities and injustices they overcame, and the considerable emotional cost that each paid, ultimately this was a journey of perseverance and success. Each one of the students in this cohort was in the process of, or had achieved, their goal of becoming post-primary teachers. The next chapter will discuss, interpret and explain these findings.

Chapter 6 *Discussion Chapter*

6.1 Introduction

This study was motivated by a strong desire to understand two questions. The first was what it felt like to experience the phenomenon of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as a student from a disadvantaged background. The second question was to understand how the students from such backgrounds navigated their experiences. Acknowledging the inseparability of individuals from the world in which they live (Heidegger, 1927, 1996), any understanding of the lived experiences of ITE for disadvantaged students is predicated on an understanding of what shaped those experiences, thus providing a third contextual research question that focused on this cohort of students' prior educational experiences. The research was guided by the belief that we must give a clear voice to those students who experienced this phenomenon if we are to understand it.

There has been a worldwide focus in recent decades on expanding and widening participation for underrepresented groups in higher education, including those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Scanlon et al., 2019). This focus has been matched by calls to diversify the teaching population (Santoro, 2015). However, there has been little research carried out that provides an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of these students once they access initial teacher education (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2020). Research that sheds a light on what it means to be a student in ITE from a from socioeconomically disadvantaged background is needed if we want to understand their experiences and encourage diversity of entrants to the teaching profession.

The structure underpinning how this group of students chose make sense of their experiences was of a journey through three different educational worlds: their schooling; their undergraduate education; and their Professional Masters in Education (PME). At the core of the journey metaphor was movement from one place to another, conveying change, challenge,

and progression (Hughes and Tight, 2013), as well as fulfilling the important function of expressing meaning (Hanic, Pavlovic and Jahic, 2018). Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), three major themes were constructed from patterns of meaning in the students' data, themes which inflected and wove through each stage of their journey. The first theme was 'Difference as Deficit'; followed by 'Outsiders on Privileged Territory'; and completed by 'Survival: Hiding and Protecting the Self'.

A focus on understanding the world in which the students lived, and the meanings ascribed by the students to their experiences, are core principles of hermeneutic phenomenology. This philosophy, approach and way of thinking were deemed to be the best way for me understand the experiences of ITE for this group of 23 disadvantaged students. Understanding with a capital U is used to emphasise the centrality of meaning and not just comprehension in this approach (Farrell, 2020). Understanding what it means to experience ITE as a student from a disadvantaged background, and what shaped this experience, was facilitated by a forwards and backwards movement, from the parts to the whole and back again, emphasising the circularity of understanding that is inherent in Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (1927/1996). This search for understanding underpinned all explorations of the students' narratives, and the meanings generated were interpreted and translated into coherent concepts, which are discussed in this chapter. Integral to this understanding and interpretation is an advocacy for change to further the wellbeing of others, reflecting a critical realist dimension (Coughlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

6.2 Structure

Part 1 of this discussion chapter explores how these students' lived experiences of schooling and undergraduate education were central in shaping their later experiences in ITE. This study revealed that the 'active presence of the whole past' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56) was

brought with the students on each stage of their journey. Habitus for these students was seen as not solely constituted from their individual histories but as being composed of 'the whole collective history of the family and class' of which these students were members (Reay, 2004, p. 434). The experiences of these students in education left them with an acute sense of what they lacked and where they belonged socially (Burke et al., 2020). Their prior lived experiences attested to the inseparability of a person from the world in which they live, and reflect Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' (1927/1996), which is central to this study.

Part 2 of this chapter discusses the central focus of this study, which is understanding the phenomenon of ITE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and how they managed to navigate their experiences. The desire to become teachers and the perception of education as the means through which this ambition could be fulfilled, belied the uncomfortable truth that the education system itself was a central contributor to many of the challenges these students faced (Lampert, 2016). The academic, cultural, economic and social insecurities that each student brought served to shape their experiences of ITE. As two different 'territories' had to be navigated in ITE, Part 2 of the discussion chapter is divided into ***Sections A and B***. Section A discusses how this cohort of students experienced the privileged, academic world of Southside University; and Section B looks at their experiences in the post-primary schools in which they undertook their placements.

Given the roles of education and social class in moulding the lens through which the students made sense of their experiences, this chapter begins by clarifying the terminology used in relation to social class, and then highlights some of the ways in which the cumulative effects of an unfair and unequal education system shaped these students' experiences at every stage of their educational journey, reinforcing their sense of difference as deficit and positioning them as outsiders on middle-class territory.

6.3 Social Class and Terminology

This study acknowledges the complexity of social class and the fact that it has 'become a confusing, contradictory and slippery concept' (Reay, 2017, p. 2), with many different ways of being socio-economically disadvantaged and working class or part of the sunken middle class. However, if we are to understand what it is to be a student in ITE from a disadvantaged background then it is essential that the 'class dynamics within which our students have been educated' are named (Van Galen, 2010, p. 267). Reay's (2006, p. 290) contention is that social class is 'everywhere and nowhere, denied yet continually enacted' an 'absent-presence'. While Socio-Economic Status (SES) is an important aspect of social class, it does little to explain how income, education or occupation affects peoples' lives and experiences in the world, their 'ways of being' (Cook and Lawson, 2016, p. 450) that are core to Heidegger's philosophy of being-in-the-world.

There are often 'specific difficulties' with the language and categorisation of social class (Gazeley and Dunne, 2007, p. 412). Individuals do not fall neatly into homogeneous groups of working-class or middle-class that the description might imply (Lehmann, 2012). Neither class is viewed here as a unitary mass. The term 'disadvantage' has been used for several decades in Ireland in both official and unofficial discourse. For ease of use in this research, the term 'socio-economic disadvantage', also shortened to 'disadvantage' is used to denote a relative social class position and is not a categorical label to distance others or to imply a deficit that needs to be corrected. Not all of these students were disadvantaged in the same way, and experiences of social background differed. While the majority of students in this cohort identified as working-class, not all were. The student who was a member of the sunken middle- class experienced poverty in a way that not all students from a working-class background did. The common thread that joined all students was their experience of disadvantage, socially, economically and educationally, relative to the middle-class students.

The relational aspect of social class was central to this study, as was the reality that any discussion of social class inevitably becomes a discussion on inequality (Tyler, 2015). While not all students faced the same challenges, it was the challenges they recalled when they spoke of their experiences, with many finding themselves positioned as onlookers and outsiders relative to the more privileged students.

As the focus of this research is on meaning rather than measurement, the affective impact of social class and its impact on broader social relationships and ways and places of living (Reay, 2017), was acknowledged as central to the lived experiences of this group of students at all stages of their educational journey to ITE. In line with Reay (2015, p. 21), this study revealed that the 'psychic economy of social class' was deeply felt and lived out every day in individuals' lives, a fact which is often overlooked in much academic research. These students were not only 'beings-in-the-world' but they were beings in very specific social and educational worlds. The centrality of home and schooling, the major creators of habitus, were seen to lay the foundation for many of these students' later experiences, and are discussed in the next section.

6.4 Setting Out on their Journey

Aware that 'there were not many ways out' of their circumstances except through education (Tom, 172), many students spoke of education as an escape from the world in which they lived, a choice which was later seen to carry the risk of dislocation (Reay, 2017). While the students identified a myriad of reasons for setting out on their educational journey, the challenging circumstances in which many lived acted as a strong impetus. Remaining at home 'in a toxic environment' (Brian, 37) was often more challenging than the risk of setting out for many of these students. Protecting himself from 'a pretty violent father' meant leaving home

for Tom, even if he had to sleep in a carpark: 'It was truthfully a lot better…I have never been back' (Tom, 234).

Education was seen to symbolise hope for these students given the challenging circumstances in which many lived. Anne revealed that the social and economic deprivation that she saw in her area 'represented failure really' for her, leaving her feeling that she was 'stuck in a rut and not being able to escape' (Anne, 103). Jane saw education as her 'only option' to leave behind what she perceived to be this 'awful life', and avoid 'getting pregnant and living on a council estate for the rest of my life' (Jane, 48). Education for Gary was seen as the only means whereby he could 'get the things we needed' to support his parents and two siblings with complex needs (Gary, 34). On each stage of their journey, the movement 'away from' and 'upward' socially, was revealed as profoundly challenging for the majority of these students, despite the ease that is often implied in getting a good education and becoming socially mobile (Kirk, 2008).

6.5 Laying the Groundwork: Family Background

The conditions that laid the groundwork for the students' sense of difference, socially and academically, started at a young age. The impact of their family histories in terms of their educational experiences cannot be overstated. What the narratives of these students showed was that what happened 'outside the school gates' had an even bigger impact on their academic achievement 'than what happens inside' (Reay, 2022, p. 24). Having had negative experiences of school themselves, many of their parents failed to see the value of education. Lucy explained that she 'wasn't allowed to go to school' at certain times of the year in order to work on the farm (Lucy, 593) Tom's parents refused to bring him to school (Tom, 285), and Jane 'just didn't go to school. I didn't have to' (Jane, 42). These barriers to education were, as Tom (285) commented 'a very tough thing to rectify for me'. Their parents' disadvantage and lack of

access to the kind of capitals that would have advantaged them educationally and socially (Bathmaker et al., 2016), highlighted the reproductive aspects of social class and education (Bourdieu, 1984), and now played out in the lives of their children.

Having parents and a brother who 'left school at 14' (Clare, 312), meant that Clare's family did not have access to the kind of cultural capital that highly educated parents possess and which can advantage their children educationally (Bourdieu, 1986), thus reproducing social and educational inequalities in the process (Bourdieu 1977; 1984; 1998). The students' stories showed how the educational achievement of disadvantaged children in school is *'very* highly correlated with their parents' social class position', and how children's life opportunities are profoundly impacted by their parents' own education and family background (Heller and Lareau, 2019, p. 31, italics authors' own).

6.5.1 Family Background and Language

Without access to the 'concerted cultivation' of middle-class families, where language and communication skills are promoted from an early age (Lareau, 2011), and with parents who did not have 'the expertise or confidence to do it themselves' (Reay, 2017, p.67), these students did not experience the type of informal instruction which helps children to achieve academically and which dovetails with the teaching that middle-class children receive in school. The narratives of these students provided an important insight into the crucial role of language in educational attainment (Bernstein, 1977), and how lack of equal access to this essential skill contributed to the students' sense of deficit and academic insecurity, issues that many of these students were seen to struggle with at each stage of their educational journey. Clare's narrative revealed an acute awareness of the connections between her parents' early school leaving, the lack of books at home, her own lack of interest in reading, and the fact that she 'was just falling behind' in school (Clare, 315). Implicit in her account was a 'deficit

model' (Lucey et al., 2003, p. 289), a belief that not possessing the type of capital that could be educationally advantageous, reflected a personal and familial inadequacy. Without access to the linguistic resources of privileged families, but being assessed and ranked as if they had, many students internalised that deficit as personal failure, and as something that positioned them as always coming from behind relative to the middle classes. The fact that a middle-class mode of English and way of speaking are promoted as not only correct but also superior (Shim, 2012), did little to ease the students' sense of linguistic lack.

6.6 Schooling

Schools have the distinction of being promoted as both the means of achieving social equality as well as being 'centrally implicated in the reproduction of inequalities' (Reay, 2010, p. 396). These students were doubly disadvantaged. Not only did their socio-economic backgrounds place them at a disadvantage relative to their middle-class peers, but the inbuilt bias towards middle-class norms that lies at the core of the education system, ensured that these students were participating in an educational race that was inherently unequal from the start (Lynch, 2022). Lacking access to the social, cultural and institutional capital that would have helped them navigate the educational system easily (Lampert et al., 2016), but being assessed, measured and ranked as if they did, was seen to result in academic under-performance for many of these disadvantaged students relative to their middle-class peers (Elwood and Murphy 2015). Those who struggled academically in school carried these insecurities with them on every stage of their educational journey. As they discovered later, their lack of academic achievement also carried the added risk of being judged by others as failures (Lynch and Crean, 2018). The narratives of many students in this study revealed how their experiences in school left them with fragile learner identities (Reay, 2017), an acute sense of where they belonged socially (Burke et al., 2020), and a sense of being different and not belonging on middle-class

territory. Some of the ways their schooling contributed to their sense of difference as deficit educationally and socially will now be explored.

6.6.1 School Choice: Segregation and Selection

A profound sense of their difference as deficit was reinforced throughout their schooling by the many ways that the students in this cohort were subjected to a process of selections which separated and segregated them socially and educationally from an early age. These selections served to set the students on different educational pathways, which often manifested in the disparity of their educational experiences and outcomes (Lynch and Moran, 2006). A key factor in how children are 'selected' at an early age and positioned on different educational pathways, is parental school choice.

Education has become a highly competitive market-place and being able to choose where to send your child to school positions parents within a consumerist paradigm, with those who can afford to choose the 'best' school for their children seen as 'successful' consumers (Smyth, 2016). The most 'meaningful and authoritative' voices (Ball, 2006, p.49) in the case of school choice, are those of middle-class parents (Cahill, 2015). While not all students who are disadvantaged attend DEIS (disadvantaged) schools, the majority of the students in this study did attend DEIS schools, and there can be stark differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, resulting in different educational experiences and challenges for students (HEA, 2022). Teacher supply issues can impact all schools, but more privileged schools have access to better resources with which to counterbalance such challenges. Kate spoke about having no Spanish teacher for a year and not being able 'to afford grinds' (Kate, 693). School choice serves to accentuate differences and widen inequalities, carrying with it the danger of increasing ghettoization in schools designated disadvantaged (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). Certain value judgements can also be implicit in school choice, and the segregation of the

'haves' from the 'have nots' that follows can act as key players in reinforcing and consolidating the sense of social distance that these students experienced relative to the middle classes (Reay, 2017). Many of these students were seen to have internalised negative value judgements about the DEIS schools they attended, reinforcing their sense of difference and of not being 'not as good' as their privileged peers: 'No one wants to come to our school because it's a DEIS school' (Gaye, 237).

6.6.2 Streaming

A school's intake can also predispose schools to adopt certain processes and practices which can play an important role in shaping student outcomes (Donnelly, 2014). Streaming, which is more likely to be found in DEIS schools (Smyth, 2018), can perpetuate social inequalities in education (Lynch and Lodge, 2002) and reinforce low academic esteem (Reay, 2017). Gaye commented that being placed in a low stream meant that 'you were screwed from day one in First Year', a situation that was compounded by the 'better teachers' teaching the higher streams (Gaye, 466), reflecting the ways more disadvantaged children are often taught (Savage, 2000). The ranking, selecting and dividing of school children into 'good' or 'not as good' groupings is often viewed by parents, teachers and pupils on both sides of the social divide as a reflection of personal ability and effort rather than the result of systemic and structural inequality and classism (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The impact of being ranked in such a manner is now explored more fully.

6.6.3 Ranking, Selecting and Dividing

While the education system cannot be held responsible for all of society's inequalities (Bernstein, 1970), this study found, in line with Hargreaves (2004, p.33) that the sense of being different and inferior that is common 'among those holding low status in society' begins for

many in school. A focus on assessment and ranking contributed to many of the students experiencing their education as an 'enormous academic sieve sorting out the winners from the losers', so that their schooling became 'more about failure than success' (Reay, 2017, p. 65). Being assessed, divided and ranked against middle-class norms created the right conditions for positioning many of these students on the 'losing' side, and was revealed as contributing to the fragile learner identities that many carried with them at all times. Worryingly, many students were seen to rank themselves according to the same norms: 'I always struggled academically…I was never more than a C student' (Brian, 276). Kirstie (192) commented that she 'was not the smartest person in my class in school'. Linda (79) revealed that she 'always doubted' herself and her 'capabilities' in school (Linda, 79).

Jack's struggles in school, particularly around undiagnosed dyslexia, left him with a sense that doing his best 'was never good enough', a fact confirmed for him when he was rejected as 'not educated enough' by the local religious schools (Jack, 72). Attending a DEIS school, but being ranked according to middle-class norms, led many students to see both themselves and their schools as somehow inferior to 'normal' schools. Publishing detailed accounts of which schools are top or bottom of a 'League Table' place DEIS school lower on a scale relative to more privileged schools (McAvinue and Weir, 2015), fuelling negative perceptions of DEIS schools, perceptions which can often extend to those who attend those schools (McGinley and Keane, 2021). The stories students shared of their schooling were seen to reinforce a sense of shame and failure that stayed with them throughout their adult lives, internalised as a belief that 'there is no room for failure in our schemes of respect' (Sennett and Cobb, 1972, p. 183).

6.6.3.1 Leaving Certificate Examination

The most public and significant of all ranking, selecting and dividing of students in school in Ireland is to be found in the terminal Leaving Certificate Examination, which was revealed as having a profound impact on these students personally and professionally, consolidating already entrenched academic insecurities and shaping their educational pathways: 'My Leaving Cert results haunt me to this day' (Brian, 273); 'Everything leads back to the Leaving Certificate' (Tara, 532). The neoliberal approach to education where meritocracy is valorised and winning matters, positions students like those in this study as failures, left to manage their shame, humiliation and isolation on their own. Given the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate terminal examination as gatekeeper to further and higher education (HEA, 2022), academic underperformance at post-primary level is a key barrier to students achieving their goals (Keane, 2015). As entering teacher education privileges academic criteria (Dolan, 2017), this was seen as a challenge for many of the students in this study.

The performative aspects of their schooling which ranked these students and found many of them 'lacking' academically relative to the middle-class students, tended to hide the key role that social class played in their underachieving, rendering social class almost invisible (Hall and Jones, 2013), but not quite. Revealed in many of these students' narratives was a keen awareness of the reproductive role that social class plays in education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Kate spoke of the 'vicious cycle' of parents 'having to drop out of school at 13 or 14' and linked this clearly to 'their children's struggle in school' (Kate, 336). Part of the inequality and unfairness at the core of the education system was seen in Kate's comment that 'we're all sitting the same exam' regardless of whether parents can afford to pay school fees or 'can't even afford half of the books'. The conclusion that Kate arrived at in relation to this terminal examination was that it had 'nothing to do with intelligence' and everything to do

with ‘family connections’ (Kate, 342). Kate’s conclusion revealed an understanding of how social class and privilege can both shape and determine educational pathways.

6.6.4 The Psychic Cost of Failure

Awareness of the many ways that the inequalities at the core of the education system can impact academic achievement for those who are disadvantaged, did little to lessen the emotional sense of failure that was so deeply felt by many of the students. Their narratives provided uncomfortable insights into the psychic cost of always being positioned on the losing side in an unfair game (Bourdieu, 1984). Joe spoke of his ‘disappointment’ and ‘feeling of failure’ when he received his Leaving Certificate results (Joe, 249). Her poor results were so upsetting for Tara that she swore that she ‘would never feel like that again’ (Tara, 535). Reay (2017, p. 147) contends that the many ways that academic achievement, social class, and future destinies are interwoven, leads to disadvantaged students inhabiting a ‘psychic economy of class’, defined by ‘fear, anxiety and unease, where failure looms large and success is elusive, a space where they are positioned and see themselves as losers in the intense competition that education has become’. This study echoes Reay’s findings. Instead of widening opportunities for these disadvantaged students, the education system was narrowing the field, pitting them against those who were more advantaged and reinforcing a mindset of always coming from behind, of never being good enough, and often questioning whether higher education was for them at all: ‘I didn’t get the points; it was really shattering’ (Anne, 83); ‘I’m never going to get the points. Maybe college is not for me’ (Linda, 75). Not having access to the same cultural capital as middle-class parents was evident in the stress that Tara’s father felt wondering where he needed to go to get ‘some points’ for his distraught daughter (Tara, 521). Instead of schooling raising their expectations, and creating opportunities for these students, they learned instead to put protective limits on their hopes. Linda (79) learned to ‘settle for low points’ and

to ‘always expect the worst’, while Kate maintained that ‘the only way to survive is to reduce your horizons’ (Kate, 192). The fact that many of these students were seen to experience their education as reinforcing of both their fragile learner identities and sense of difference, with the potential to limit their horizons, is concerning.

Left with feelings of failure and inadequacy from their schooling, hopes of becoming a teacher seemed remote for many of these students: ‘I had a vision and a goal to be a teacher and when I thought I might not reach it with my Leaving Cert results, it really hit me’ (Tara, 163). Not doing well academically is not just about grades, percentages, achievement gaps, and life opportunities, it is equally about the deep emotional stigma that is attached to failure and how this plays out in people’s lives. The stories many of these students told themselves were ones of academic failure and deficit, of being outsiders on middle-class educational territory, and of occupying ‘an inferior, devalued position in the educational field’ (Reay, 2017, p. 183). These beliefs were carried with them on each subsequent stage of their educational journey.

While the majority of students in this cohort attended DEIS schools, three out of 23 attended fee-charging schools, two in Dublin and one on a different continent, and the impact of their different schooling will now be discussed.

6.6.5 Schooling: Fee-Charging Schools

While the experiences of the three students who attended fee-charging schools differed in many aspects from the majority who attended DEIS schools, their perceived disadvantage was still seen to have similar outcomes in positioning these students as outsiders and in reinforcing their sense of difference. The narratives of these three students were of particular interest in relation to this study as they revealed the many ways in which fee-charging schools served as a microcosm for the later lived experiences of this group of students as a whole in higher education and ITE. Very few disadvantaged pupils attend fee-charging schools, and the

three students in this group who did attend experienced an acute sense of their difference on this middle-class territory. It was not just the material advantages of the middle-class students that differentiated them, it was also the 'confidence, entitlement, a sense of belonging within education that come with a family history of privilege' (Reay, 2017, p. 16). Relative to their privileged peers, these three students were positioned as different and as outsiders. The psycho-social consequences of being disadvantaged in a privileged education setting were seen to have a deep impact on how these students felt and experienced their education (Reay, 2005), and were strong harbingers of how the cohort as a whole would experience higher education and ITE.

6.6.5.1 *Fee-Charging Schools: The Price of being Different*

In line with Chesters (2018), the narratives of the two students who attended fee-charging schools in Dublin revealed higher levels of academic achievement relative to those students who had attended DEIS schools. Their good Leaving Certificate examination results got them a 'quick pass' into higher education, thus avoiding having to repeat examinations, do Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, or take a more circuitous and relatively more financially onerous route (Cahill, 2015), as was the case for many of the other students who had attended DEIS schools.

However, all three students who attended fee-charging schools paid a high price for being outside the dominant privileged group. The insecurity of being different and outsiders provided important insight into how their experiences on this middle-class school territory would replicate almost exactly the experiences of the whole cohort in higher education and in ITE. These feelings of not belonging on more privileged ground were found in previous studies such as Jackson and Marsden's 1966 study of working-class pupils attending grammar schools, and Walkerdine's account of attending grammar school in 1958: 'For years I would no longer

feel any sense of belonging, nor any sense of safety' (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 74). Gary's feelings of not belonging were seen to be reinforced by the deliberate exclusion he experienced whenever he tried to connect with the middle-class pupils who would 'just disappear' when he came over 'to say hello', which he subsequently internalised as his own fault (Gary, 82).

Not having access to the various types of organised private education or grinds outside formal schooling that their middle-class peers had, and unable to participate in the myriad cultural and social activities that middle-class parents see as advantaging their children in the educational success game (Cahill, 2015), positioned these students as different and outsiders. While Sandra's middle-class accent and appearance allowed her to blend in with the dominant middle-class students in her fee-charging school, her lack of economic capital was revealed as affecting her deeply on a personal level. Unable to afford what other pupils in her school had access to was felt as exposing for Sandra, resulting in 'fights at home' and constantly 'trying to hide it' (Sandra, 83). The need to cover up and hide her disadvantage had strong echoes of the strategies the majority of students would resort to when in university. Fear of exposure and the need for protection were also revealed in Neil's narrative. It was not the 'large house with a swimming pool' compared with his 'council house' that Neil experienced as most challenging for him, it was the psychic cost of hiding his background and the 'shame' he carried in hiding the menial job his mother had undertaken in order to pay his school fees and provide 'that leg up' (Neil, 133): 'I was protecting myself and her' (Neil, 131). Shame was also seen to lie at the core of Sandra's experiences in her fee-charging school. Unable to afford the school books she needed, having to get her school uniform from the school 'lost property', and receiving 'one of those same hampers' that she and other pupils were preparing for needy families at Christmas, were experienced as profoundly shaming for Sandra. The narratives of these students provided important insight into the emotional cost of being different on middle-class territory, and

protection for these students was seen to lie in hiding who they were: ‘I never talked about it because I was ashamed. I was trying to hide it’ (Sandra, 85).

Difference in terms of educational pathways are often connected to expectations, and the next section briefly explores how different approaches in DEIS and fee-charging schools served to reinforce differences for these students.

6.6.6 Schooling and Expectations: DEIS and Fee-Charging Schools

The different experiences these students had in school in terms of higher education expectations shed a light on how classed expectations can be (Allen, 2014). Many of those who attended DEIS schools spoke of the low expectations that many of their teachers had for them, forecasting the students’ sense of not belonging in higher education: ‘Higher education was not promoted as something that we were able to do’ (Kirstie, 644). Several students’ stories reflected the negative expectations of some of their teachers, which did little to lessen already fragile learner identities or promote higher education as something that belonged to them in the same way as the middle-classes (Reay, 2017): ‘You weren’t supposed to do well in school’ (Liam, 45). Teachers are also ‘Beings-in-the-world, with their own biases and prejudices, and given the middle-class demographics of the teaching profession in Ireland, teachers’ backgrounds can have implications for whether students should consider higher education or not (Shim, 2012). The challenge many of these students faced in accessing higher education in terms of expectations merely reinforced their sense of being outsiders in a privileged world.

In comparison, the narratives of the students who attended fee-charging schools in Ireland showed a very different ‘taken-for-granted’ progression to higher education among the pupils in those schools, revealing a strong sense of belonging in this world and a perception of university education as middle-class territory. Having a mother who was university educated meant that the pathway to higher education had already been navigated for Sandra, and that,

consequently, university ‘was probably always in my mind’ (Sandra, 52). So normalised was the progression to higher education in Gary’s school that he felt that there was no need for career guidance at all as it was part of their everyday lives and discourse at home: ‘They just know about these things… and how the system works’ (Gary, 198), echoing Bourdieu’s ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1996). Gary’s account showed how the middle-class pupils in his school strategically consolidated their advantage by refining their expectations for higher education and aiming for high status, high points and high-earning ‘respectable careers’ such as medicine, law, engineering and accountancy, and ‘it’s always a chartered accountant’ (Gary, 201). Out of sight in Gary’s story, but very much present, are the fee-paying parents who understand and have access to the ‘highly refined cultural scripts’ of fee-charging schools (Cahill, 2015, p.306). The experiences of the students who attended fee-charging schools in terms of expectations revealed some of the ways that the middle classes are able to maintain their ‘privileged position in education’ (Bernstein, 1977, p. 18), which served to position those who are less advantaged on the educational periphery, reinforcing and replicating wider societal inequalities.

Without access to the cultural capital of highly educated parents, the role of the career guidance teacher for those who attended DEIS schools was crucial. A school’s expectations for its pupils is often reflected in its approach to career guidance (Danic, 2015) and the narratives of many of the students who attended DEIS schools revealed how the low expectations that many guidance teachers held for them positioned them at a disadvantage and reinforced their sense that higher education was not for them. Karl talked of how his desire to be a teacher was dismissed, with the guidance teacher setting a ‘low’ bar for him (Karl, 66), which did little to promote a sense of belonging in higher education. Clare revealed how low expectations and lack of support from her guidance teachers meant that she had to ‘google information’ in order to fill out her college forms (Clare, 57). Kate commented on the whole

experience with her guidance teacher as ‘dreadful’ (45), with Lucy describing her experience as ‘horrific’.

The students’ narratives showed a keen awareness of how their expectations were impacted and constrained by social background and the cultural expectations of those around them (McCoy et al., 2014). The students understood how different cultural norms positioned them differently to their middle-class peers. Embedded in the DEIS schools these students attended were complex cultural patterns that impacted not only on their academic performance but also shaped the ways these students thought, felt and acted (Dale and Peterson, 2016). Echoing Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) theory on reproduction, Gaye observed that the girls in her DEIS school ‘were just dropping out and having babies’ (Gaye, 272), whereas she felt that this might not be the same in fee-charging schools: ‘It’s like a knowledge that’s passed down’ (285). Implicit in Gaye’s story was an understanding of not just a different knowledge but a sense of a ‘superior’ knowledge that can advantage those who are already privileged in terms of higher education. Liam explained that it was a ‘normal occurrence’ when a 12 or 13 year-old boy in his school became a father, serving to highlight the cultural and social differences between him and the middle-class pupils that he had met in Irish college who ‘couldn’t fathom that this was a real thing’ (Liam, 85). In terms of expectations, attending a DEIS school was seen to position these students at a disadvantage relative to their middle-class peers. Chesters’ findings (2018) highlight the correlation between the number of pupils attending schools from more disadvantaged backgrounds and the likelihood of pupils enrolling at university. Despite their challenges, all of these students managed to find a way through their schooling and some of the ways in which they managed to do this will now be examined.

6.6.7 Navigating School: DEIS and Fee-Charging

Although the two students who attended fee-charging schools in Dublin were privileged educationally, being disadvantaged on middle-class territory meant that these students had to find a way of coping every day with their difference and their outsider status, captured in Sandra's admission that she always felt 'like an alien' (Sandra, 80). The narratives of these students provided an insight into a key navigational strategy which would be repeated by the majority of the cohort on later stages of their journey in higher education and ITE. This strategy involved finding a group of 'outsiders', or non 'natives' as Gary said (Gary, 120), who were similar to themselves in status or background. Implicit in the search for others like themselves is a sense of isolation, lack of belonging on this territory, and a desire for protection. Sandra spoke of how she coped by 'trying to mix with other people who would understand and who were similar' (Sandra, 85). She also explained that trying to navigate between the privileged world of her schooling and her disadvantaged circumstances at home was emotionally challenging, and that she found herself 'always between two worlds' (Sandra, 28), echoing the struggles the cohort as a whole would experience in higher education and ITE.

While the students in the cohort who attended DEIS schools were already mixing with others 'like themselves', they were without the social, economic and academic capitals of the middle-classes, and so they turned to their teachers for support. The role of teachers was seen to be of great importance in these schools and while some may have fallen short, not all did. Lareau (2019, p. 36) points out that behind everyone she has ever met who was 'upwardly mobile' a teacher was to be found, someone who helped their pupils not only navigate the intricacies of college applications but supported these children whenever they needed a helping hand. Brian spoke of the teachers in his DEIS school as 'a godsend' (Brian, 122). When Jane's career guidance teacher told she had ability it 'was the first time anybody had ever told me that I was smart' (Jane, 206). Clare got free piano lessons from her teacher which, in turn, opened

the door to higher education for her. The narratives of the students in DEIS schools revealed the importance of teachers in providing the support they needed to help them navigate their way successfully through their schooling and onwards to higher education and ITE.

6.6.8 Conclusion

By the time the majority of these students finished their schooling, the baggage they were carrying was heavy and packed full of insecurities. The narratives they told revealed the impact on their lives of the inbuilt systemic inequalities within the social and education systems. Being positioned at a disadvantage educationally and socially relative to the middle classes reinforced the students' sense of being outsiders in a two-track education system. Measured and selected against middle-class norms was seen to encourage fragile and insecure learner identities for many, creating barriers that had to be overcome at every turn (Scanlon, 2019). The lack of a smooth, pre-determined educational pathway to higher education did little to create any real sense of belonging within the education system (Reay, 2017).

The social and educational divide between fee-charging and DEIS schools, particularly in Dublin where many of the students lived, results in different social classes being educated in 'increasingly segregated spaces' (Reay, 2022, p.431). The socially segregated schooling that these students experienced was found to have serious implications for their sense of integration and inclusion at higher level and beyond. How the baggage that every one of these students carried with them into higher education shaped their experiences as undergraduates, is explored in the next section.

6.7 Undergraduate Education

6.7.1 Introduction

The different life and educational experiences of this cohort of students were carried with them onto the middle-class territory of higher education. An unequal and unfair educational system (Lynch, 2022) had reinforced the students' sense of difference as deficit and of not belonging in education in the same way as their middle-class peers. For some, this difference was felt most acutely in an academic arena. For others it was social, or cultural, or economic. For many, it was experienced in all of these areas. The general acceptance of the middle-classes as 'the ideal normative class' within education was shown to have serious implications for the experiences of this group of students in every aspect of their educational journey (Reay, 2017, p. 131).

It was not merely how different they were to the middle classes that was revealed as challenging for these students. Many students were seen to hold strong beliefs that the capitals they possessed were somehow the 'wrong' kind of capitals, the less valuable kind (Reay, 2017), feeding their sense of not belonging and reinforcing their difference as deficit. The students were also seen to carry deeply held beliefs about what 'people like me' can hope to achieve (Van Galen, 2010, p. 256). These 'injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb, 1972) were experienced affectively by this group of students and were underpinned by complex emotions such as shame, guilt, anger and fear (Reay, 2017).

6.7.2 Rocky Start

The cumulative effects of the students' prior experiences resulted in a challenging start for many of them in higher education, evident in the 'fragile, unconfident learner identities' that often come with disadvantaged territory (Reay, 2017, p. 16), and in an acceptance of a meritocratic belief by many of the students that places academic failure as 'a failure of the self'

(Reay, 2010, p. 530). Under-achievement in school resulted in many students having to take more circuitous routes to higher education, which reinforced the students' insecurities and sense of difference relative to the middle-class students: 'It meant that I was two years behind' (Kirstie, 511). Jade was one of the few to access a level 8 programme directly from school, but she explained that the course was 'too hard….and I failed' (Jade, 103).

The students discovered just how 'immersed in social class' higher education was (Hurst and Nenga, 2016, p. 6), and the many ways that this new territory had already been claimed by the middle classes as their own. Evan's narrative provided insight into what it felt like to be isolated, alienated and different in this privileged world:

> *I didn't understand how college worked…I never made any real friends there at all. Nobody (Evan, 168).*

The stories the students told displayed their lack of belonging on university territory compared to the students that they perceived as more privileged, and how, having been successful in accessing higher education, they now found that they were 'outsiders on the inside' (Reay, 2010, p. 531), and in a place where they did not belong (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The impact of their fragile learner identities is discussed more fully in the next section.

6.7.3 Academic Insecurities as Undergraduates

Language challenges, impacted by a generational reproduction of inequality in education (Bourdieu, 1977), had proved problematic for the students in their schooling and were now revealed as contributing to many of the students' struggles as undergraduates: 'Language is a huge issue for me' (Clare, 142). The students' narratives showed how lack of facility with language at higher education was an important contributor to the negative and fragile learner identities of many of these students. Lucy explained that she always 'struggled with English,' and felt constantly 'overwhelmed' studying the subject in Westside University

(Lucy, 359). The majority of these students were sharing learning space with middle-class students for the first time and experienced at first-hand how privilege manifests in ease of language and communication skills, accentuating their own struggles with language. Linda found that having been 'quite strong' in English in her DEIS school, that she was now in a situation in Southside University where she felt like 'someone who had never studied English in their whole life' (Linda, 264). Negative comparisons with the advantaged middle-class students served to reinforce feelings of difference as deficit for many students:

> *I wasn't as knowledgeable as the others. They were travelling words that I hadn't a notion about. It was hard (Linda, 266).*

For many students, their challenges around language were experienced as a marker of their difference and outsider status in higher education, reinforcing a belief that they did not belong here. Kate commented on what she felt was the 'huge chasm between the two (social) class groups' in higher education (Kate, 300), feeling that the middle-class students were 'genuine', and deserved to be there, unlike Kate herself who positioned herself 'at the bottom' (Kate, 305). Many students internalised their academic struggles as personal failure and shameful (Reay, 2017).

Gaps in their knowledge from earlier systemic social and educational inequalities such as lack of books at home or parents who left school early, began to manifest as key challenges in higher education for many of these students. Studying children's literature in university but never having heard of any of the children's stories that were familiar to the middle-class students, was revealed as hugely challenging for Jane:

> *I started to notice all the gaps that I had …I didn't know what they were talking about…any of the facts. College was really stressful for me (Jane, 376).*

Assessment of any kind brought up the same kind of uncomfortable feelings of being ranked and found wanting (Reay, 2010) that the majority of these students had already experienced

throughout their schooling. Examinations were revealed as being 'absolutely terrifying' for many of the students, resulting in many of these students feeling like 'a complete imposter' (Martina, 448). The academic insecurity that many students brought with them to higher education (Scanlon, 2020) contributed further to the inequalities that these students experienced by impacting on their academic grades in higher education. Martina's fears of not being good enough shed light on the high price that many students paid for participating in higher education. Martina revealed that she was so uncomfortable in her college tutorials that she would be 'physically sick' and unable to attend, thus missing out on her overall marks for attendance (Martina, 25). Not able to face her tutorials, which she internalised as a 'failure of the self' (Reay, 2010, p.530), Martina explained that she was 'upset that I wasn't able to do it as a person…but I just couldn't manage it' (Martina, 59). Not only did these students feel judged by others but their stories told of even harsher self-judgement, a manifestation of Sennett and Cobb's injuries of class (1972).

The narratives of so many of the students in this cohort showed a constant striving to do better and be better (Reay, 2022). The next section explores how the physical markers of social class that separated these students from their more advantaged peers deepened the social divide and strengthened the students' sense of not belonging in higher education.

6.7.4 Markers of Difference

6.7.4.1 Introduction

The habitus of middle-class students ensures a 'feel for the game' that makes particular actions or choices appear self-evident and natural (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 63). This dovetailing of a personal habitus with an institutional one normalises certain ways of dressing, ways of walking and talking, and behaviour for the middle classes and differentiates them from the less advantaged (Bourdieu, 1984). Many students felt that their own ways of dressing, talking, and

behaving were judged as inferior by the middle classes who were perceived as the arbiters of these distinctions (Shim, 2012). As with their academic insecurities, judgements on issues such as accent or the way someone dresses, can be felt as shame by those on the receiving end, and turned into personal deficiencies rather than symptoms of inequality (Loveday, 2016). Some of these markers of difference are now explored in more detail.

6.7.4.2 Accents

Social class is embodied in how someone talks (Maguire, 1999) and this study showed how strongly accent is associated with 'a hierarchy of social positioning' (Hey, 1997, p. 140). In the middle-class habitus of higher education, accents can identify and differentiate between those who belong and those who are outsiders. In terms of accent, coming from outside Dublin was experienced as advantageous by many students as it was harder to place them socially but this was certainly not the case for many of the disadvantaged students from Dublin: 'Accents are the biggest stand out for me. I only live 20 minutes away but I have a totally different accent from someone maybe 10 minutes away (Liam, 160). Echoing research by Reay et al., (2009), and Abraham and Ingram (2013), the students' experiences provided insight into the key role that accent played in terms of fitting in or standing out. Not only did Anne reveal that her 'bit of a bad accent' accent made it 'very hard to fit in' (Anne, 188), but she also felt that her accent was often conflated with personal value judgements when perceived through the 'middle-class gaze' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 487):'She's a bit rough…and probably not a nice person' (Anne, 190). For Linda, not being 'well spoken' was experienced as too exposing in this privileged environment and so she protected herself by not speaking 'for 12 weeks' when she started her undergraduate degree (Linda, 257).

Embedded in many of the students' narratives was the 'fear of being summoned before some hidden bar of judgement' (Sennett and Cobb, 1972, p. 33) by the middle classes. For

many of these students, their accents were seen as markers of both difference, deficit and outsider status. Their experiences merely confirmed what Skeggs had found in 1997 that their cultural capital, here their accents, was of 'limited value' in a middle-class environment (p. 129), lacking the distinction that made them acceptable (Bourdieu, 2010).

6.7.4.3 Where You Live

Inextricably linked to accent was the importance of place as a personal signifier of class, identity and belonging, as was revealed in the experiences of all of these students. It was impossible to separate who these students were from where they lived or were from: 'People would know from our accents where we were living' (Martina, 412). Living in working-class areas was shown by this group of students to be a key component in being seen as both different to the middle-classes and being ranked in an inferior position. The 'very dismissive' comments many students experienced about where they were from (Gary, 289) were felt as a deeply personal rejection: 'People don't really want to know you if you're from a particular postcode' (Anne, 139).

Judgements on what is permissible given where you live were also seen to come from the students' own communities, highlighting the physical and emotional challenges involved in trying to break away from these 'powerful boundaries' (Ingram, 2009, p. 422). Tara's experiences showed how local beliefs about 'not fitting in' at university and having to change and 'become a certain type of person' (Tara, 269), were internalised by Tara into 'self-doubt' about whether she 'deserved' to be in higher education or whether she should do as others in her area had done and 'get a job'. Coming from an area where the pathway to higher education is not straightforward, there was a real fear evident in Anne's narrative that the minute people like her 'stepped through the gate' they 'might get kicked out… that it's not a place where the working class would go' (Anne, 143). As with accent, the stories the students told showed an

awareness of how the middle classes often conflate place with someone's calibre or worth as a person: 'People think that you're like a rough person, that you're a bit of, and this is a horrible word, like a 'scanger' or a 'knacker' (Anne, 134). The fallout of social and educational segregation, with little understanding of one side for the other, was experienced as stereotyping and bias by many students (Cook et al., 2021): 'People think…that these areas are full of crime and of antisocial behaviour' (Anne, 136). There were emotional challenges for the students in feeling morally evaluated by others (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012): 'What am I going to do? Rob you or something? (Gary, 296).

6.7.4.4 School Attended

The students' narratives also provided an interesting insight into how the schools they attended could be used by the middle-class students as a marker of social difference. As the majority of these students attended DEIS schools in the areas in which they lived, the students felt that the middle-class students 'would know from our accents' where they went to school (Martina, 414). Again, fear of being judged and of being ranked as inferior relative to the middle-class students came through: 'I'd be afraid to say that I went to a DEIS school unless I knew that the people were from the same background' (Martina, 414). The DEIS schools attended by the majority of students were perceived to act as a barrier to any real sense belonging: 'She was all ready to be my friend…but I never heard from her again… because of where I went to school' (Kirstie, 341). Social and educational segregation were seen to play an important part in fuelling the misinformation, stereotyping and bias that were revealed in the experiences of these students, a divide that Tara noted is there 'in preschool, primary school, and secondary school' (Tara, 270), resulting in many students not knowing 'how to respond' to each other (Tara, 272) (Reay, 2017).

6.7.4.5 Dress

One of the many variables that is guided and scripted by social class is how to dress (Lubrano, 2003). Knowing what to wear and how to dress in the middle-class territory of a university was revealed as another form of distinction that positioned these students differently: 'The middle-class students had all the designer stuff. They were from different worlds' (Linda, 287). There was an acceptance of the superiority of the middle-classes and their sartorial distinctions (Ingram, 2009) evident in how the students' spoke of their own poor dress style. How these disadvantaged students dressed marked them, not only as different to the middle-classes, but also as non-natives on middle-class territory: 'We could be spotted a mile away' (Martina, 512). In rejecting their own cultural norms of dress as somehow inferior, while validating those of the middle-classes, a form of symbolic violence was apparent (Bourdieu, 2000).

The experiences of many of these students showed that how someone dresses can embody social class inequalities in 'cultural form' (Ingram, 2009). The only student in the cohort to come from a middle-class background, albeit sunken and impoverished, possessed the 'ease and confidence of the well-born' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 163): 'My accent, and how I walked and dressed made it easier for me to fit into a middle-class university' (Sandra, 159). Markers of economic difference are explored in the following section.

6.7.4.6 Markers of Economic Difference

Other markers of difference linked directly with the students' lack of economic capital and were seen to play an important part in limiting the students' opportunities to experience university life in the same way as their middle-class peers (Reay, et al., 2010), further isolating them socially and reinforcing their difference and outsider position. The students' stories of their financial struggles shed an uncomfortable light on the price that many paid to further their

education. Unable to access her grant for a laptop or books, Linda had to start university with just a ‘pen and paper’ and was forced to ‘beg, borrow and steal notes from everyone’ (Linda, 177). Surviving financially in higher education meant that the majority of students were working long hours off campus, often juggling several jobs at a time, affording few, if any, opportunities to socialise, play sport, join college societies or access any extra-credential experiences like trips abroad (Lehmann, 2012).

Time spent working off-campus can also impact on time that students can devote to their academic studies, positioning university life further down students’ list of priorities (McCoy et al., 2014). Many students revealed how lack of money was the cause of great anxiety: ‘College was extremely stressful for me financially and also emotionally (Sandra, 161). Other students highlighted the menial jobs they had to undertake in order to survive. Gaye talked of the ‘hard money’ she earned spending long hours washing pigs (Gaye, 151). Living off ten or fifteen euro a week, Tom revealed how grateful he was that the hotel where he worked as a waiter provided him with ‘a doggy bag to take home on a Saturday and that would do me until Wednesday’ (Tom, 462). Their sense of being outsiders on middle-class territory was once more emphasised for these students, and as always, their experiences were seen to be underpinned by a profound affective element: ‘It’s the shame of not having enough money’ (Sandra, 167). Many of these feelings of exclusion, difference, and isolation were reinforced even further by the social experiences of these students as undergraduates.

6.7.5 Out of Place Socially

At the core of many students’ narratives was their sense of not belonging, of being outsiders, of being ‘out of place’ on middle-class territory (Martina, 512), echoing the experiences of Diane Reay, 50 years earlier, who felt that as a working-class student in an elite university, she had ‘no right to be there’ (2017, p. 151). While most students can find their first

year in university challenging, finding themselves positioned always as outsiders in relation to the native middle-class population saw many of the students in this study struggling to belong and integrate, feeling isolated and often inadequate (Lehmann, 2012): 'It was bad…it's just lovely to have someone to say hello to' (Ivan, 104). Something as simple as joining other students for coffee or lunch was not an option for many of these students: 'My mother sent me up food for the week' (Lucy, 320). These different classed experiences served to further segregate the social classes, a state of affairs that, as Reay points out does little to benefit either social group and is 'damaging for all' (Reay 2017, p. 127).

The educational advantaging of the middle-classes in their schooling results in high numbers coming into the university providing ready-made social networks, in contrast with those students who are disadvantaged and often arrive alone (Keane, 2009). Gary noted that 'the posh students coming to Southside came with their secondary school friends' (Gary, 350), while Ivan commented that 'there's not a lot of people from my area there' (Ivan, 107). Attempts to make friends across the social divide were usually met with failure, reinforcing a lack of self-worth and a sense of having little value for many students (Coulson et al., 2017): 'There is no value for them in making new friends' (Gary, 353). Being excluded socially as undergraduate students also meant that these students had no access to the networks and other forms of valuable social and cultural capitals of the middle-class students (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and served to reinforce their difference and lack of belonging: 'I just had to suck it up' (Sandra, 163). Their experiences confirmed how different and separate they felt from the middle-class students (Reay et al., 2010), often revealed the isolation and loneliness many experienced as undergraduates: 'I sat alone…I can't do this' (Ivan, 94). Strong emotional discomfort and fear was seen to be associated with their difference (Lehmann, 2007a; 2007b): 'It was just a new situation and I had no experience of any of this' (Ivan, 106). By comparison, the disadvantaged students perceived the middle-class students as being at ease in their home

territory, with more self-confidence and sense of belonging (Reay, 2017): ‘They were just sailing through, because it was so normal for them to be there’ (Kirstie, 691).

While trying to create a better social mix within a student population cannot guarantee social mixing among any groups, let alone those from different social backgrounds who have so little in common, this study found that it was almost too late at this stage for much social integration after a lifetime of educational and social segregation. Despite their challenges as undergraduates, however, the students survived, and some of the strategies they used are explored in the next part of this chapter.

6.7.6 Navigating Higher Education as Undergraduates

Choosing which university to attend was revealed as a navigational strategy used by the students, highlighting the connection between social class and university choice (Ball, Reay, and David, 2002). Clare decided on Northside University ‘where there were more students from disadvantage and where I felt more comfortable’ (Clare, 8). Tara chose Westside University outside Dublin, deliberately avoiding the middle-class students who were more likely to attend Southside, and where she felt that students like her ‘would be looked down upon…and students would have that kind of attitude towards you’ (Tara, 240).

Just as belonging to the dominant, middle-classes confers protection on students in higher education and reduces their sense of being marginalised (Waterfield et al., 2019), a protective strategy for the students in this group was seen to lie in finding others like themselves, their own tribe (Bourdieu, 1987): ‘I stuck with people that I knew from the same background …it was like a safety blanket and I didn’t go outside that comfort blanket, I stayed inside it’ (Anne, 195). The instinctive need for a shared identity was revealed the students’ stories of finding others like themselves, highlighting the importance of belonging in feeling

secure and safe (Ingram, 2009). Fitting in for these students was not merely social but was also about a sense of 'psychological safety and comfort' (Stephens et al., 2015, p. 9).

An interesting navigational tool that many of these students spoke of was mixing socially with students from outside Dublin, from 'the country', who did not understand the classed nuances of accent, school attended, or area lived in. Revealed in this strategy was the students' need to hide and protect their social backgrounds from the judgement of the Dublin middle-class students who 'would know the difference', unlike their country friends who 'didn't understand the difference of where we were from' (Tara, 319). Clare explained that her four friends 'were all from the same background', and 'the two country girls knew nothing about our background' (Clare, 133). Protection from judgement was also seen in Karl's comment that country people 'didn't see me as being from a DEIS school', or care 'whether I was from the flats or a big house on the South side (Karl, 118).

A further strategy chosen by many students was changing and camouflaging who they were in order to blend in. Within this strategy is a belief that, as they are, these students are not acceptable. Noticing how expensive handbags were a signifier of being middle class, Gaye told of how she saved up and bought herself 'a Michael Kors bag' (Gaye, 211). The relief of being able to be herself was evident in Linda's remarks that she 'didn't have to put on a different personality to impress my country friends' (Linda, 291), unlike the pressure she felt to change her appearance and behaviour in order to blend in with the middle-class students:

> *I would change the way that I talked one hundred percent. I took more care pronouncing my words and I pretended that I'm from Dublin and not the country. And I'd cross my legs. And I would wear different clothes into different lectures (Linda, 347).*

While the safety and protection of being with their own was key support for these students (Conley et al., 2020), it also prevented any real integration into the universities as a whole, serving to reinforce and consolidate, even further, the social class divide.

6.7.7 Conclusion

The financial, familial, academic, social and cultural differences and constraints of their social class that these students carried with them into higher education, the second stage of their journey, were reinforced and consolidated, and served to maintain the hierarchies of difference and distinction within the field of higher education (Reay, 2001). Many students spoke of feeling that they were not wanted and did not fit in. They often felt excluded and isolated, reinforcing their feelings of insecurity and of being outsiders, chiming with Reay's findings that it is working-class and disadvantaged students 'who suffer most' (Reay, 2017, p. 127). University, therefore, was not the social equaliser it might have been for these students. Unlike the opportunities that are afforded for the middle classes in higher education enabling them to 'exploit their advantages' to the full (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p. 739), these disadvantaged students experienced constraints and limitations, and the shadows of unfulfilled opportunities. In fact, Mahon (2021b) suggests that finding any sense of personal or professional fulfilment in this arena is only possible by holding out against the increasing marketisation and credentialization of education.

Stage three, the final stage of their journey to ITE, brought these students to their destination, the Professional Masters in Education. Two distinct territories had to be navigated. The first was the strongly middle-class Southside University, for the academic component of their masters, and the second was the school(s) in which these students did their teaching placement.

6.8 Initial Teacher Education

Section A: The Professional Masters in Education in Southside University

6.8.1 Introduction

Part 1 of this discussion chapter highlighted the inseparability of the person from the world in which they live and revealed how the students' experiences in school and as undergraduates served to create a sense of their difference as deficit relative to the middle classes, and how the students felt themselves positioned as outsiders in the middle-class territory that is education. **Part 2** reveals the centrality of the students' earlier educational experiences in shaping how they experienced and navigated Initial Teacher Education (ITE), a central focus of this study. Part 2 is divided into two sections, corresponding to the two separate territories that the students now find themselves on. *Section A* explores the students' experiences of ITE on the Professional Masters in Education (PME) in the privileged Southside University; and *Section B* looks at how the students experienced the school placement component of the PME.

6.8.2 Middle-Class Territory

Many of the insecurities carried by the students from their earlier educational experiences were seen to surface before the students had commenced the programme: 'I was terrified accepting my place on the PME' (Martina, 572); 'Will I fit in?' (Mary, 214); 'How will I live?' (Sandra, 289). There was no evidence of the taken-for-granted progression to a master's degree that many of these students noticed in relation to the middle-class students, where the PME was 'a natural progression' (Evan, 265), and 'just the next step' (Martina, 191), contrasting with Ivan's 'how the hell did I do that?' (Ivan, 247).

In the baggage that the students brought with them to Southside University were beliefs that education did not 'belong to them' in the same way as it did to the middle classes (Reay, 2017, p.76). The students' experiences shed an important light on how their sense of not belonging translated into strong beliefs that they lacked parity in terms of 'territorial rights' relative to the middle-class students, who were perceived to have prior ownership of this territory. The vastness and privilege of Southside University reinforced the sense that these students were now on 'upper-middle-class territory' (Gaye, 269): 'It's like another planet' (Joe 592). The students' narratives revealed a perception of their lower ranking relative to the privileged students in Southside, a sense of the moral superiority of the middle-classes in being rightfully there, while the less privileged, like themselves, were merely 'allowed in' (Reay, 2017). This was evident in the self-doubt that John explained went 'back all the way through my education' and which manifested in feeling that he 'shouldn't be there' (John, 339). Fear was seen to permeate many of the students' accounts of their experiences in Southside. Clare was worried that coming from Dublin's North side and being 'a HEAR' student' (Higher Education Access Route) would identify her as 'non-native' and therefore not one 'of us' (Reay, 2017). Weaving through many of the students' stories were fears that their 'background' might be exposed, (Martina, 729), that they would be caught for being 'in the wrong place' (Ivan, 280). Even though Gary knew Southside from his undergraduate degree, he revealed that he 'never actually thought of it as my university…I'm coming in, but it's their territory' (Gary, 449). These feelings reinforced the students' beliefs that they were 'from different worlds' (Clare, 7). This sense of coming from different worlds was captured in a strong sense of 'trespassing' (Lucy, 337), of 'just visiting' and being 'lucky to be there' (Kirstie, 421), as opposed to any real sense of being deserving of a place in this middle-class world. The students' sense that the physical territory of Southside University did not belong to them translated into feelings that they did not belong, which is explored more fully in the next section.

6.8.3 Not Belonging on Middle-Class Territory: PME

The undergraduate experiences of these students confirmed their beliefs that the middle-class habitus of a university carries the more legitimised values and preferences of the dominant groups, which translated into the challenge of belonging in a world where the various capitals they brought with them were not only different but also deficient in some way. This difference that was a key factor in contributing to their feelings of being like social and cultural outsiders (Bourdieu, 1984). Echoing their undergraduate experiences of being few among many, there was a strong sense of being excluded from the ready-made social networks of the middle-class students. Gary noticed that the middle-class ITE students come in 'cliques' (Gary, 427) or 'gangs', while Kirstie commented that they had no need to 'talk with anyone' (Kirstie, 450). Gary's phrase that the middle-class students in ITE belonged to a 'kind of club' that they were 'very protective of', emphasises the exclusivity of the middle-class networks and how difficult it was for the students to break in socially. In line with Lareau (2011), there was a strong perception by this cohort that the middle-class students were 'very comfortable' on this middle-class territory in Southside (Ivan, 242). Gary used the word 'tribal' to describe the privileged networks from which these students were excluded, reinforcing their sense of difference and also their sense of social inferiority. There was a plea for respect evident in Gary's comment that 'we are all human' (Gary, 430).

The 'historically derived dispositions' (Shim, 2012, p. 211) that students from both sides of the social divide brought with them to ITE had the effect of reinforcing the segregation and alienation of both social groups. Revealed in the students' narratives was the chasm they experienced between the social classes: 'They're just a different breed altogether' (Kate, 164); 'They weren't the same as me' (Martina, 186). 'Our paths never crossed' (Kirstie, 447). The social chasm was seen to isolate this cohort of students, differentiating them from the dominant privileged groups and accentuating their outsider status: 'I was never asked to join anybody…

they didn't want anything to do with me' (Kirstie). Many in the group, like Jack 'tried crossing the social boundaries', a choice of words that reveals both the barriers to integration that were experienced, and the width of the social divide. Words like 'alienated' and 'isolated' and 'being judged' (Gaye, 370) revealed how deeply the emotional impact of being outsiders is felt. As with their undergraduate experiences, many students felt judged by the middle classes. Jack's pejorative use of 'country bumpkin' in describing how he felt he was perceived by the middle-class students, was telling. While the students' narratives showed that they all came to Southside University with an awareness of the hierarchical ranking of social class, it was in Southside that many in this group first really understood the Darwinian overtones of inferiority that were connected to class. Gaye's analogy, linking her experiences of social isolation in Southside with the experiences of those who are marginalised and ostracised because of their colour, is revealing:

> *Southside was the first time when I felt properly marginalised. I looked around and I thought, and this is probably racist of me to say, but my God, is this what black people feel like on a regular basis? (Gaye, 250).*

The experiences of this group confirmed that different modes of exclusion are still the experience of those from disadvantaged backgrounds on middle-class territory (Kirk, 2008). As Gaye commented: 'It's harsh here, and they're only teachers… I can only imagine what medicine is like' (Gaye, 534). Their achievement in accessing ITE was seen to be overshadowed for many in the group by strong feelings that they should not and did not deserve to be there, and that they did not belong. The next section looks at the many ways that this cohort of students were marked out as different to their middle-class peers

6.8.4 Markers of Difference: PME

Once again, the experiences of these students revealed that where they lived, the schools they attended, the clothes they wore, and the money they possessed, were all '*profoundly* classed experiences' (Weis and Dolby, 2012, p. 2). These identifiers not only marked them out as different and out of place, but positioned them as inferior relative to the middle-class students. The same markers that might serve the middle classes as identifiers of belonging were experienced as differentiators for this group, and were as relevant in ITE as they were in their schooling and as undergraduates. Nothing had changed. It could be the case that the hierarchical rankings by the privileged are so ingrained in the habitus of the middle-class PME students that they perceived them as natural and normal, and were unaware of how they were predisposed towards discriminating against others (Shim, 2012). Whatever the case, the impact on those disadvantaged students who felt ranked and positioned as inferior was the same as always.

6.8.4.1 *'Epicentre of Wealth': Southside University*

The privileged positioning of Southside University in one of the wealthiest suburbs in Dublin was commented on by all as particularly accentuating of their difference relative to the middle-class students: 'There was a huge difference in wealth and money' (Clare, 280); the wealth was 'insane' (Gaye, 258). The cultural markers of privilege (Bourdieu, 1984) such as mobile phones, clothing, or cars, symbolised lack and inferiority for those students who could not compete on the same level as the middle-class students. Coming from a place of privilege thoughtless remarks could be made by the middle-class students (Shim, 2012). Unable to understand why Martina and her friends did not have the latest iPhones, some middle-class students enquired if their iPhones were broken: 'We didn't understand what they meant. And they said "are you just using those until your iPhones are fixed?". Yeah! We all broke our

phones at the same time. But we just never took our phones out again. Never' (Martina, 271). Choosing to keep their older phones hidden spoke of protection from middle-class judgement and evaluation, as well as revealing feelings of frustration and embarrassment, and even shame (Loveday, 2016).

Many in this group of students continued to experience middle-class norms as the measure of what was culturally consonant in terms of how they dressed (Weis and Dolby, 2012). Linda's experience of wearing a tracksuit into Southside differentiated her from the middle-class students who 'were nicely dressed'. Fear of being judged negatively as a person based on what she was wearing came through in Linda's comment: 'They're probably like "who is this weirdo…she looks kind of rough"' (Linda, 69). Linda's fear of judgement also impacted on her identity as a teacher, revealing how she ceded the position of arbiter to the middle classes (Shim, 2012): 'I felt I couldn't look like a teacher, you know' (Linda, 64). Being identified as 'non-native' was experienced as a disadvantage by the students, positioning them always in an inferior position relative to the privileged students (Bourdieu, 2000).

6.8.4.2 Accent: PME

The subject of accent emerged time and again as a challenge for many of these students, representing the type of cultural capital that many felt was not valued as worthy of possessing (Bourdieu, 1973a). How they spoke continued to be experienced as both a differentiator of social class (Maguire, 1999) and as a measure of personal worth (Addison and Mountford, 2015). The accounts of the students revealed strong elements of frustration at both the negative connotations their accents elicited, as well as the personal value judgement associated with their accents: 'I'm being judged on the first thing they hear. They don't know me as a person. I'm sick and tired of explaining myself' (Linda, 600). Being judged through the eyes of the

middle classes for the way they spoke was often internalised as maybe ‘you’re not good enough’, and ‘maybe you don’t deserve to be here’ (Mary, 434).

Their anxiety about being judged negatively for the way they spoke, impacted on how they engaged in their lectures. Linda revealed that she would be ‘shivering in a lecture and ‘dreaded being called on to speak’, that someone would comment ‘oh, the way she speaks is really common’ (Linda, 77). Of interest was Gaye’s awareness that being from outside Dublin was a form of protection from Dublin middle-class judgement as ‘you can’t be judged in the same way if you’re from the country’ (Gaye, 349). While accent was experienced as a social barrier in terms integration with the middle-class students, it also served as a form of protection in identifying their own tribe. Ivan looked out for students who were from ‘where I’m from’ (437), and Gaye also searched for an accent ‘similar to my own as I knew there’d be some semblance of normality’ (Gaye, 445). In line with Abraham and Ingram (2013), the experiences of these students highlighted how having an accent that differed from the dominant norm impacted on their sense of belonging.

6.8.4.3 *Where You Live: PME*

The narratives of many in this group revealed how questions about ‘where did you go to school and where are you from’ (Evan, 266), were experienced as social class identifiers by the students, marking them as both different and inferior, and of being ‘out of place in middle-class spaces’ (Finnegan and Merril, 2017, p. 315). Once these students identified where they lived, they felt that their value and worth in the eyes of the middle-class ITE students diminished (Bourdieu, 1990): ‘their faces changed…they became more wary…I could see the change in attitude’ (Clare, 281). Martina’s story of one particular incident offers rich insight into what it meant to be disadvantaged and feel like an outsider on the PME. Martina used the

word ‘courage’ to describe the effort it took for her to approach two middle-class students, who asked her where she lived:

> *When I said where I was from, the two girls just turned around and walked away. I was more angry than hurt. That’s a terrible thing to have done. But I try not to take it personally. I just wanted to be friends with them (Martina, 292).*

The narratives of these students demonstrated the challenges they faced in dealing with the ‘stigma’ attached to their area, with the privileged PME students being ‘almost afraid to talk to you’ and the disadvantaged students being ‘afraid to say where they were from’ (Tara, 349). It was revealing that Linda felt the need to hide her working-class origins by ‘pretending’ to be from a middle-class area instead of ‘where I’m really from’, and as a means of avoiding the ‘pitying looks that kill me’ (Linda, 601). The experiences of this group of students revealed how deeply personal they felt the negative judgements of the middle-classes (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012): ‘Maybe they looked down on me because of my social class’ (Clare, 279). Hope of a better future in terms of escape from ‘where I live’ was evident in Brian’s comment that ‘I won’t be from there when I get my teacher salary’ (Brian, 422).

6.8.4.4 *Finance as a Marker of Difference: PME*

The substantial financial demands of a two-year, full-time Professional Master’s in Education (Dolan 2017) emerged as central to the many struggles that these students faced in ITE. The Union of Students in Ireland (2018) reported that ‘42% of student teachers who completed their placement in 2017…said they have considered dropping out due to financial pressures’ (p. 13). Money was identified as ‘a bigger issue on the PME’ by Gaye (494) than on her undergraduate degree. The students’ lack of economic capital and the consequent financial challenges they faced continued to differentiate, alienate and isolate them. Their experiences provided insight into the many financial and emotional challenges they faced when they made

the decision to become post-primary teachers. It was not merely high fees that were seen as problematic for many students, it was worry about 'the small things', paying for 'bus fares' and 'lunches' (Kirstie, 12). The combination of long commutes and long off-campus working hours 'I was working until '11 o'clock some nights in order to be in college' (Tara, 497), had health and academic implications for many of these disadvantaged students. 'Slumped' over her desk in her tutorial, Gaye experienced her first year on the PME as 'horrible…I was completely emotionally and physically exhausted' (Gaye, 509). Sandra, unable to afford to replace a broken laptop in her first year, was 'still struggling' in the second year of her PME: 'I couldn't ever fully relax and enjoy it' (Sandra, 130).

Reliance on grants (McCoy et al., 2010) differentiated these students from the middle-class PME students. Brian's comment that he ranked himself 'as lower socially than others because they don't need a grant' (Brian, 43) spoke volumes about the ways that these students positioned themselves relative to the more privileged students. Linda spoke of how 'really upset' she felt when an older, middle-class PME student made 'snarky, disparaging comments' about her grant (Linda, 751). The students also understood that without access to a grant, becoming a teacher would have been impossible. Grants were seen to impact on other important aspects of the students' lives and Tom explained that access to a grant 'changed my life', enabling him to go to a dentist 'for the first time since I was 14' (Tom, 291).

Their lack of economic capital was revealed as exclusionary and differentiating in a myriad of ways. A form of social apartheid was evident in Martina's account of how she and her friends 'ate outside while the other PME students who are better off ate in the cafeteria' (Martina, 228). Linda brought in 'packed lunches every day', resulting in 'no chicken fillet sandwiches for me. And I'd be starving looking at the well-off students eating them' (Linda, 725). Their experiences of trying to cover up the shame and embarrassment they felt shed light on the emotional cost of surviving in this privileged world of ITE. Many 'tried to keep face',

like Sandra, by constantly ‘stretching’ their meagre resources (Sandra, 236). Aware of their unequal positioning relative to the middle-class students came across in Sandra’s remark that ‘not having enough money’ should not be viewed as ‘shameful’ but ‘unfair’ (Sandra, 370).

6.8.4.5 Difference Online

The students’ narratives offer rich insights into the many challenges they faced online during the global pandemic. Lectures online were experienced as a positive by some students as they ‘could post comments without people watching’ (Martina, 69); or could leave the ‘posher ones to ask all the questions’ (Mary, 10); or had time to ‘gather my thoughts’ (Lucy, 321). However, the majority experienced far more challenges than benefits online, including issues with their internet; social isolation; issues of confidence; lack a suitable place to work; family problems; and lack of privacy.

Many could not afford Wi-Fi and Sandra revealed that she was ‘too embarrassed to say that I had no money’ (Sandra, 433). For others, ‘rural Wi-Fi isn’t great’ (Lucy, 430). Lack of technical connections was seen as an issue with many students either ‘zoning out’ (Lucy, 321) or feeling ‘totally disconnected from college’ (Linda, 651). Their lack of social connections, however, was revealed as far more damaging for these students than any issues with technology, reinforcing their sense of being ‘outsiders’ (Bufton, 2003, p. 230), of being socially isolated and of not belonging: ‘I made no new friends at all’ (Linda, 656) and had ‘no friends to go for coffee with’ (Mary, 395). Given the protective factor of finding other disadvantaged students like themselves in ITE (Keane, 2011), a key challenge for many was not being able to identify others who were ‘in a similar boat…it’s completely isolating, there is a terrible lack of integration’ (Jane, 768). Trying to build relationships was experienced as extremely challenging online (Hargreaves, 2001), again reinforcing the sense of isolation and lack of

integration these students felt: ‘I didn’t say how hard I was finding everything. I didn’t know if anyone else was feeling it as hard as I was’ (Lucy, 191).

Many of the students’ narratives revealed the discomfort that they felt at having their homes and private lives exposed to the gaze of others online: ‘It’s very exposing. Everything is on show about you… it felt like an invasion of privacy’ (Jane, 37). Relying, as many did, on covering up their backgrounds and perceived shortcomings as a coping strategy, there was stress and anxiety in having the middle-class students, the perceived arbiters of what is acceptable or not, being able to see into their homes and family life: ‘My family are really noisy with lots of screaming and shouting’ (Linda, 630). Linda also revealed that how she taught her pupils was impacted by her family circumstances and that she resorted to using mainly video clips to avoid speaking as she was ‘very nervous doing stuff on the mic’ in case her pupils could hear her family in the background (Linda, 193). As a form of protection, many students avoided contributing online and kept their cameras off, reinforcing their sense of difference and invisibility relative to their middle-class peers. The middle-class PME students were seen to be happy to ‘have their cameras and mics on, and their offices or library or fancy kitchen’ on view (Jane, 41), unlike Linda who feared exposure of the ‘cramped, loud household’ in which she lived (Linda, 621). The following section looks at some of the students’ continuing challenges around language which now manifested on the PME.

6.8.5 Language Challenges on the PME

Despite their achievements in accessing ITE against the odds, the narratives of many of these students continued to reveal a lack of academic ease and security, and a feeling of being academic imposters (Lehmann, 2012). One of many concerning outcomes of always playing on the losing side in an unfair educational game was revealed in some of the students’ beliefs: ‘I personally think that the middle-class students just have more brains’ (Brian, 558),

linking with Kate who felt that 'the middle class know more…they're just better' (Kate, 94). Jane remarked that the 'common knowledge' of the middle-class students was '100% different to mine' (Jane, 172). A feeling of always falling short when compared to the normative middle-class student (Van Galen, 2010), was revealed as being heightened in relation to language use.

Struggles with their English, especially vocabulary, was seen as reinforcing the students' sense of difference as deficit and their outsider status relative to the middle classes on the PME. The seemingly straightforward task of sitting in a lecture was experienced as being fraught with anxiety for many of these students, particularly in relation to language and meaning. Kate spoke of how she 'didn't understand what's actually happening' in the lecture, and 'switched off' (Kate, 576). Lucy explained that she 'had to google the words' if she 'wanted to have some understanding' (Lucy, 541). Fear of being 'found out' and being judged as being of 'little value' (Reay, 2011, p. 343) came through in experiences of many students, like Martina, who tried to hide the 'glow' of their phones as they googled these words: 'I'm always afraid that they will catch me out' (Martina, 643). The inequality and bias towards the middle classes in the education system, particularly in terms of language (Bernstein, 1977), allied with the professional and technical language of teaching (Mahon, 2021a), were played out in the feelings of academic inferiority that many in the group experienced in relation to the advantaged middle-class students on the PME, internalised again as personal failure (Reay, 2018a). Martina revealed that she and her friends were all experiencing 'the same sort of feelings' of being 'thick' (Martina, 637), or of feeling 'kind of panicky…how do they know so much…I should know those words but I don't' (Kirstie, 761). Clare's revelation that she had difficulty understanding 'what any of the lingo means' (Clare, 15), highlighted her non-native positioning in terms of language. Lucy spoke of having 'no real knowledge in English' even though she was teaching the subject (Lucy, 628). In contrast, this group perceived the middle-class students as being 'all able to read the academic articles' and 'using words that I've never

heard of' (Kate, 655). A fallout from an unfair education system with a strong bias towards the type of language and communication skills that are valued by the middle classes (Lareau, 2011), was a sense of always having to struggle against a middle-class tide, trying to bridge the gaps and catch up with the privileged students: 'I'm aware of improving my vocabulary. Some people are in the same boat as me and we have to try hard' (Kate, 657). The emotional stress of their challenges with language was accentuated when it came to academic writing. Martina's choice of words revealed the strength of her feelings: 'I'm still terrified of academic writing' (Martina, 635), again reinforcing and consolidating the feelings of many in the group that they were never 'good enough' (Mary, 440). The power of language to confer advantage on the privileged and to lessen the voice of those without it was evident in Tom's remark that 'using words that everyone around you doesn't use…would be like they have the power…like you feel a bit powerless' (Tom, 611).

While those in this cohort who identified themselves as readers appeared to be more advantaged and protected in ITE, their lack of cultural capital was a constant reminder that they were from different social backgrounds to the privileged students (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017). Evan revealed what he felt to be a cultural lack when he commented that he 'didn't know what to read' until he left school, in contrast to the middle classes who 'know what to read at a young age' (Evan, 321). The normalisation of middle-class cultural capital and values in education reinforce the role that culture and social class play in terms of what it means to be 'educated' (Bourdieu, 1992). Tom's use of the words 'quite malnourished' in relation to the 'education…and interests' of those from a disadvantaged background were revealing, highlighting some of the cultural 'deficits' that many of these students felt they possessed. Tom's comment that coming from a disadvantaged background means that 'your interests haven't been cultivated' (Tom, 619) reveals a perception that the capital he possessed was less cultivated relative to those of the middle-class students (Bourdieu, 1973a).

The constant striving ‘to catch up and be as good as’ the more privileged students was often underpinned by a fear that ‘you’ve missed something; that you’re not quite there…that you feel different’ (Tom, 14). These feelings translated for many in this group into believing that the middle-class PME students were better teachers, evident in Brian’s suggestion that a way of levelling the educational playing field was to have the middle-class PME students teaching in disadvantaged schools: ‘They’re great teachers and everyone should have access to them…to give students who don’t have money the best chance of achieving’ (Brian, 108). Implicit in Brian’s remarks were beliefs that teachers who come from a disadvantaged background could not advantage disadvantaged pupils in the same way as teachers who were more privileged. These perceived shortcomings fed into anxieties and insecure teacher identities (Holappa et al., 2022), often exacerbated by struggles with language: ‘I know what I want to be but I don’t know how to be a different teacher’ (Lucy, 646). Mahon (2021a), in fact, suggests the reading of literature as a pathway for the development of teachers’ identities. Many of the students in this cohort were students on the PME during the global pandemic. The next section explores some of the challenges the students experienced in terms of confidence and voice on the PME.

6.8.6 Difference in Confidence and Voice on the PME

The educational and social advantages of the middle-classes position them differently in terms of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The confidence and strength of voice of the middle-class students on the PME was commented on frequently by the students in this cohort as marking them out as different to the less advantaged students. Whether onsite or online, the middle-class PME students were perceived as ‘much more self-confident and self-assured’ (Clare, 312), and the strength of the middle-class voice was revealed as accentuating

the lack of voice of the less privileged students in this study: ‘They speak freely. You could hear their voices far more than someone like me’ (Linda, 161).

A certain frustration and sense of unfairness emerged in this group of students at the perceived loudness of the middle-class voice drowning out their own voices: ‘There is 150 of us on the course but they always get their voices heard’ (Lucy, 418). Many students talked of their amazement at the sense of ‘authority’ the privileged students felt in being able ‘to question’ their lecturers (Kirstie, 378) about grade expectations or perceived entitlements. There was frustration also in the voice of the dominant group being accommodated on the PME: ‘Middle-class people interrupt people. They think they have the power to do that. It is frustrating…but they got their way’ (Lucy, 422). A few students in this study questioned the perceived superior knowledge of the middle-class students: ‘Some say absolute rubbish’ (Gary, 505); ‘They belt it out…even though they may be very wrong’ (Gaye, 451).

The experiences of the disadvantaged students allowed a light to be shone on the many ways in which they felt the strength of the middle-class voice further advantaged the privileged students. Strength of voice and power were seen to go hand-in-hand, accentuating the lack of voice and power of the disadvantaged students. The middle-class voice also served to highlight and consolidate differences between the two social groups and positioned many in this cohort as outsiders.

> *The lecturers just automatically presume a middle-class audience. I’ve sat in lectures and what I heard was 95% of middle-class students. I felt invisible and marginalised for the very first time. It was totally different to my undergrad (Gaye, 172).*

Fear of asking ‘a stupid question’ (Kate, 71) was seen as too exposing for many in this cohort and so a self-imposed code of silence was observed, echoing the working-class pupils in Hartman’s study (2006) who felt that saying nothing was preferable to making a mistake. This silence was reinforced by a belief that it was not their ‘business to say anything’ (Jane, 507),

that it was literally not their 'place' to speak (Jane, 135), that 'you shouldn't be here, never mind taking up the space to ask any questions' (Jane, 512). Fear of judgement and of subsequent exposure, was emotionally challenging and created 'so much anxiety' (Jane, 514) for these students. Their own negative judgements were often strengthened by the negative lens through many believed the middle-class students saw them, particularly as Gaye commented, if any of the disadvantaged students showed 'any intelligence': 'Wow! I wasn't expecting much from you' (Gaye, 231).

Not all in this group were afraid to speak out. Being older with life experiences and being secure academically appeared to advantage some students in having a voice. Gaye, older and with 'an A1 in English', felt more comfortable speaking, despite the 'judgements made by middle-class students on the PME' (Gaye, 230). Sandra revealed an awareness of how the combination of her 'middle-class background' and attending a fee-charging school made it 'easier for me to speak' (Sandra, 115).

Section A discussed the many ways in which the students' socio-economic disadvantage continued to position them as outsiders on middle-class educational territory. In addition, the impact of the students' earlier educational experiences and insecurities and their impact on how the students experienced the PME in Southside University, were also explored. How these students fared on their school placements is discussed in Section B of Part 2.

6.9 Initial Teacher Education. Section B: School Placement

6.9.1 Introduction

All of the students in this study brought narratives about themselves in the baggage they carried from prior educational experiences and these narratives played important roles in shaping both their lived experiences as teachers on placement, and their teacher identities. The

normalising of middle-class values and practices in education at every stage of their journey to ITE, ensured that these students were positioned at a disadvantage from the outset, as outsiders in a middle-class race. Ranked and measured against the privileged, their status as outsiders was continually reinforced as they attempted to close the gaps that seemed to get wider as they progressed through their education, gaps that were often internalised as personal deficit (Young, 1999; Lamont, 2000). The inseparability of man from the world in which he lives (Heidegger, 1927, 1996), was played out in the different ways that the shaping of their teacher identities was inextricably linked with the context of their teaching practice. The environment in which the students taught, the type of pupils they taught, and their relationships with other teachers, were all influential in shaping how these students experienced their placements and how they saw themselves as teachers (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The first section explores how classed their choice of school placement turned out to be.

6.9.2 School Choice

The majority of students in this cohort opted to do their teaching placements in schools that were similar to the type of school that they themselves attended (Heinz, 2011): 'PMEs definitely gravitate towards their own social backgrounds'(Kirstie, 433). The students' narratives showed how their 'choice' of school placement was impacted and constrained by their prior educational and social experiences, and by their classed identities (Jones, 2019). Their stories revealed a perception of the '100% 'hierarchy' of schools' on the PME (Lucy, 228), with fee-charging at the pinnacle and DEIS at the lower echelons. All of the students revealed a belief that middle-class schools are 'top of the ladder' (Gaye, 47), and that 'everyone knows that fee-paying schools… are better than DEIS schools' (Tom, 55). Given that the majority in this cohort of students had attended DEIS schools themselves, and chose school placements which reflected their own school experiences (Allard and Santoro, 2006), beliefs

in the superiority of middle-class schools automatically positioned these students as somehow inferior relative to the middle-class students who chose a school placement in a privileged school. The experiences of many students also revealed a belief that their choice of school placement was being used by the middle-class PME students as a form of ranking and as a means of 'placing' them socially, echoing the 'placing questions' that they had experienced as undergraduates. Instead of being asked outright where she was from, Tara revealed that she was instead being asked where she was teaching, which for her 'went hand-in-hand with where I was from, so I couldn't escape the question' (Tara, 461).

Just as they experienced their choice of school placement in DEIS schools as positioning them in an inferior position relative to a middle-class yardstick, they also felt that the gold standard of worth and value for the middle-class students was doing a school placement in a fee-charging school, particularly the schools that were in close proximity to Southside University in Dublin, further reinforcing their sense of difference as deficit and of being outside what was regarded as of value. Kate's comments were revealing about the strategic approach in 'gravitating towards prestigious schools' that some of the middle-class male students, in particular, took towards their school placements, echoing a neoliberal, consumerist approach of trying to 'get into the best law school because it's all for the name' (Kate, 200). Not doing a school placement in a 'prestigious' school was experienced as a form of judgement by these students. When Lucy said that she was teaching in a rural community school 'it was the end of the conversation' (Lucy, 235). When Anne revealed that she was teaching in a working-class area, the middle-class PME students 'were very dismissive…where is that? I've never heard of that' (Anne, 424). Disturbingly, many in this group felt that the ranking of schools also extended to those who taught in such schools.

The next section provides important insight into why the majority in this cohort of students avoided choosing a fee-charging school for their placement.

6.9.3 Avoiding Placements in Fee-Charging Schools

Past experiences of being ranked against middle-class norms academically, socially and culturally, and of being positioned as outsiders, resulted in the majority of the students in this group now choosing to self-exclude from fee-charging and middle-class schools, thus imposing a restrictive code on their choice of school placement. The reasons these students gave for avoiding school placements in more privileged schools were revealing and often reflected 'a sense of limits…a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471): 'I'd never get in. You're not wanted. It's as simple as that' (Gaye, 310).

A key reason revealed for avoiding teaching in a fee-charging school linked with the many insecurities that these students brought with them from prior educational and social experiences, encapsulated into a fear of being exposed in middle-class settings (Skeggs, 1997b). Having experienced feelings of deficit at other points in their educational journey, the prospect of opting to teach in such privileged institutions was seen as a step too far for most to contemplate: 'I do not think that I would be as clever as the other teachers in a fee-paying school… I got a very average Leaving Cert so that would rule me out anyway (Brian, 157); 'I am genuinely not smart enough or academic enough to be a teacher in a fee-paying school' (Jane, 557), echoing once more Sennett and Cobb's injuries of class (1972). A protectionist strategy was also revealed among the many reasons put forward for avoiding fee-charging schools on their placements: 'I would definitely feel exposed in schools like that…and what I do lack would be noticed' (Jane, 398). This fear of exposure for not being 'good enough' was revealed as central to why these students chose not to do their placements in fee-charging schools: 'You'd have to know all the answers… and I don't think I'd be able to do that' (Lucy,

99). Clare worried that in a privileged school her pupils 'might have more skills than me' (Clare, 137).

However, even those in the cohort who had done 'well' academically in school still experienced fears of being judged as 'not as good as someone produced out of a fee-paying school…you would have to keep quiet that you went to a DEIS school because they might think that your standard is lower…' (Gaye, 100), revealing a belief that the academic value of their credentials carried less weight if their other capitals did not align with the middle-class habitus of a school (Maguire, 1999). Anxieties of not fitting in socially were shown to underlie Clare's fear of being judged as both different and inferior by the staff, highlighting the segregation that she felt existed between the social classes 'They'd catch my accent and what would they think? Would they associate with people from disadvantaged areas…or have experience of someone from a DEIS school?' (Clare, 148). A consumerist view of education, where paying for an education equates to having the 'best' teachers, came through in the accounts of many students, whereby 'if you're paying you should be getting the best' (Kirstie, 367), a belief that was further translated to mean that this automatically excluded her. An awareness of the role played by school image in projecting excellence in a competitive market (Cahill, 2015) was also revealed as something that would exclude these students: 'If parents are going to pay money, they don't want a teacher who went to a DEIS school' (Jane, 400).

The reasons put forward by these students for not wanting to do their school placements in fee-charging schools reveal strongly held beliefs that they would be judged as not good enough to meet the academic standards expected of the middle classes and that they would be positioned as outsiders socially, culturally and academically. The stories told by the students also revealed an equally strong self-judgement of their own inadequacies. As a consequence, many students opted instead to work within a self-imposed restrictive code in terms of school placement choice. A normalisation or acceptance of this situation would have troubling

implications for future teachers from all social backgrounds (Jones, 2019), but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and serve to further reinforce educational segregation along class lines. The experiences of the few students in the group who opted to do their placements in fee-charging schools will now be explored.

6.9.4 School Placements: Fee-Charging Schools

Given the reasons put forward for self-excluding from fee-charging schools, it is not surprising that of the five students (out of 23) who chose to do their placement in such schools, only two had attended DEIS schools. All five students had done their undergraduate degrees in Southside University, and carried experiences with them of being social and cultural outsiders on privileged territory, and of being judged as both different and inferior relative to the middle classes. These experiences were both replicated and consolidated on their school placements in the privileged schools. The narratives of these students were important in revealing whether the fears outlined by the majority who opted not to do their placements in fee-charging schools had any basis in fact.

The stories of the few students who opted for fee-charging schools revealed stark differences between the worlds of privilege and disadvantage, and served to reinforce and accentuate their own less- advantaged position: ‘Seeing how the other half lives completely opened my mind’ (Evan, 226). These students now experienced first- hand the benefits that accrue from having access to a highly privileged education (Ball, 2006). Evan spoke of fee-charging schools as a means of providing ‘more one-upmanship’ for pupils, parents and schools (Evan, 327). The word ‘one-upmanship’ was also used by Sandra when talking of the ‘extra kind of kind of one-upmanship that comes from attending a privileged school’ (Sandra, 348). The word itself, originally coined in the title of a satire by Stephen Potter published in 1952, is revealing of what these students identified as the ‘leg up’, the competitive advantage on one’s

opponent, that attending a fee-charging school provides. There is also the corollary that if some students are to be 'one-up', then others must be 'one-down', encapsulating the bias and inequality at the core of the education system (Bourdieu and Passeron,1977). The primacy of parental school choice, as upheld in an Irish Constitution that purports to promote equality for all, was witnessed in action by this small part of the larger cohort: 'These schools are businesses… perpetuating the social divide…to keep certain people separated…and at a disadvantage' (Sandra, 352). Embedded in the experiences of the students in fee-charging schools was class segregation, which translated into separating people 'like them' from the privileged, further consolidating wider societal social hierarchies (Reay, 2017).

6.9.4.1 Feeling Out of Place

Not having come from privilege themselves, teaching in these schools was experienced as accentuating their status as outsiders in a privileged world, exposing their differences and often placing them in a 'devalued' position relative to the middle classes. The sense of 'being very out of place…in another world completely' (Evan, 726) was revealed as having the most profound impact on these students. The use of the word 'outsider' by the students was a powerful reminder of how they perceived themselves in this world, almost as trespassers who should not be there. Feeling that they did not belong was often translated into a fragile teacher identity, believing that they were not on a par with their middle-class colleagues, showing low levels of teacher efficacy and confidence in their professional abilities (Ross, 2013). In this world of privilege, middle class equates with quality and often becomes the yardstick against which both social groups measure the other.

> *I just feel like a little bit of an outsider…that I'm not a real teacher…when I compare myself to others. I feel that I'm always doing something wrong (Kristie, 576).*

Evan's use of the word 'alienated' to explain his experiences of not 'fitting in' (Evan, 338) emphasised his sense of 'belonging to another' and being an outsider here. However, what was most revealing in Evan's narrative was his strong belief that his background would be blamed if any of his pupils failed: 'He's from there. He's not one of those people who are cut out to be a teacher…I was really stressed about it' (Evan, 341). While proud of his working-class identity, Evan's social background was experienced as problematic in this privileged school, as something on which any failures could be blamed, when judged through middle class eyes (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012). Evan's experiences showed the extra effort needed in order to validate the fact that he was a non-native on middle-class territory: 'I felt more was expected of me because I have to try and prove myself' (Evan, 348). The synchronicity of cultures between the habitus of the middle-class teachers and that of the schools in which they taught (Bourdieu, 1984), served to accentuate the students' difference and the class boundaries the students were expected to navigate. The students spoke of the effortlessness with which the other teachers integrated in this privileged world and spoke the same 'language' as the pupils: 'There is a natural confidence, a familiarity with their surroundings …they talk the talk with the kids. My background is very different' (Evan, 61). The stories these students recounted showed the many ways in which certain 'forms of presentation and positioning' are validated over others, and how challenging it is to create a strong teacher identity in these 'contexts of power' (Devine, 2011, p. 52).

6.9.4.2 *Pupils and Parents in Fee-Charging Schools*

The different value systems, societal perspectives, material wealth and codes of behaviour that this small group found in their privileged school placements, accentuated the different worlds that these students had come from. Despite her 'research', Kirstie revealed that 'it was a lot more extreme' than she had anticipated. The stark contrast between the world

of privilege in which they were teaching and their own experiences was captured in Kirstie's disbelief that one of her 12 year- old pupils, who 'actually had his own company already' was totally focused on 'making money', and dismissive of the low-status Arts subjects that Kirstie was teaching (Kirstie, 674). Kirstie's narrative highlighted how conversant with the rules of the educational game (Bourdieu, 1996) these pupils were. The students' accounts of their experiences showed, in line with Lareau (2011), that a key focus in middle-class schools is on academic achievement over personal development: 'It was almost a life or death situation' (Kirstie, 91). The valorisation of academic success, however, translated into a transactional imperative whereby every student must succeed if fees are being paid: 'We were told not to fail them…it's keeping the parents happy' (Kirstie, 468).

In Evan's account, the world of privilege was clearly seen as being inextricably intertwined with the business and marketing aspect of fee-charging schools, where 'big donations' from parents resulted in every child receiving a prize at the end of the year regardless of merit (Evan,618). The ease of wealth and the advantages of privilege that Evan saw around him, accentuated what a 'different world' this was to his own, where merely belonging to a particular background privileges an individual: 'You will always achieve because of who you are' (Evan, 622). Revealed in the experiences of these students is the lie of meritocracy and the unfairness at its core (Lynch, 2022), an inequality that went unacknowledged by the teachers in Evan's school who were 'gloating' at how well their pupils had done academically. More 'shocking' for Evan, was the conflation of the pupils' academic success in the State examinations with their worth and value as human beings, a perspective that would rank middle-class pupils as superior to their less academically successful working-class peers: 'It was almost like the students are a better quality of human being and we're better teachers. It made me feel sick…' (Evan, 214).

The experiences of these students showed how their social background was an ever-present shadow, accentuating difference and positioning them as outsiders in relation to pupils, teachers and parents. The sense of being from a different world, as almost alien, was captured in Kirstie's comments that her pupils 'don't know how to interact with someone like me' (Kirstie, 412). The strong linguistic abilities of the 12 year-old pupils that Kirstie taught English served to accentuate her own academic insecurities: 'I had to google some of the stuff they were saying…what does that even mean?' (Kirstie, 168).

Their different social backgrounds did not go unnoticed, and once again the students experienced 'placing questions' as a means of differentiating them from 'people like us'. Kirstie spoke of a 'very uncomfortable phone call' she had with a parent who questioned her about her background: 'She wanted to know where I come from…why did I even tell her?' (Kirstie, 204). Exacerbating Kirstie's own insecurities was the pressure of being quizzed by parents who were 'doctors and professors', (Kirstie, 53) revealing how class and privilege appear to confer certain rights and power over another (Bourdieu, 1996), and how privileged parents can 'assume acquiescence from those they consider socially subordinate' (Van Galen, 2008, p. 102). Of the five students who did their teaching placement in fee-charging schools, the experiences of the two students who came from DEIS schools were revealed as the most challenging in terms of the class borders that they had to cross and the challenges they had to overcome. The next section looks at why the majority of students chose to do their placements in DEIS schools.

6.9.5 Why Choose a DEIS School for School Placement?

The choice to do their schools placements in DEIS schools was revealed as very much influenced by the students' life and educational experiences. Previous research has also explored the role of social background in aligning student teachers' choice of school with their

social background (Maguire, 2005a; Hall and Jones, 2013; Lampert et al., 2016). Social class was key in how these students viewed and understood the world and was seen to underpin and shape the students' choice of placement, with many viewing their choice as a form of 'risk-reduction' (Maguire, 2005b, p.431). 'A lot of PMEs do their placement in their old school and don't go much further for the other one' (Linda, 438). Given their prior experiences in education, the need to feel 'comfortable' in a familiar environment was understandable (Kate, 182). Research underscoring the caring aspect of teaching as a strong motivator for working-class student teachers (Maguire, 2005a; Van Galen, 2008; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Lampert et al., 2016), aligned with the findings in this study: 'It's more rewarding' (Evan, 246); 'I want to help students be better' (Tara, 613). Gaye's image of territorial occupation shed an interesting light on the need for radical change, and conjures up the idea of teaching as a training ground for future students to 'infiltrate' middle-class space and 'break through the barriers' (Gaye, 211). Given their past experiences, however, it is impossible not to acknowledge the importance of choosing a DEIS school as a means of protection from middle-class judgement. Choosing DEIS schools would provide more social and cultural alignment, and there would be less likelihood of the students' academic insecurities being exposed. Ultimately, choosing a DEIS school provided more protection from being outsiders, although not full protection.

Revealing to the middle-class students that they were doing their teaching placements in DEIS schools was usually met with expressions of horror, highlighting the sense of difference between the two social groups. The imagery used by the students when discussing these responses shed an interesting light on the perceptions the middle classes had of teaching in DEIS schools, 'like a soldier going to war… like a kind of battlefield' (Gaye, 31) or 'as if someone had been thrown into the middle of Iraq' (Linda, 456). The lack of awareness

exhibited by the middle-class students showed the tendency of teachers to stereotype those who are most socio-culturally different to themselves (Hargreaves, 2001).

6.9.5.1 *DEIS Schools and Teacher Identities*

Having attended DEIS schools themselves, the students in this cohort had first- hand experience of the challenges their pupils faced and the many ways that disadvantage could impact on their pupils' life opportunities (Bathmaker et al., 2013), all of which were revealed as providing this cohort of students with a sense of belonging and an insider status when doing their school placement in a DEIS school. The disadvantage of the pupils they taught was shown as influential in the approach these students took in the classroom, which was often one that prioritised pupil welfare over academic achievement (Hargreaves, 2020): 'You have to adapt to the emotional and social needs of the kids in front of you…education is the last thing that the kids are thinking about' (Tara, 651). However, the experiences of many of these students revealed that the fragile learner identities that many brought with them into ITE played an important role in shaping both their teaching practice (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), and how they presented themselves as teachers in the classroom. Not possessing the confidence to be the 'knowledgeable' teacher, and fearful of being exposed as not knowing, students like Martina chose to present a 'less knowing' teacher identity in the classroom as a form of protection: 'Not being the teacher who knows the answers was more suited to me' (Martina, 226). Unable to take on the mantle of the assured teacher at the top of the classroom, Martina assumed a more deferential approach, choosing 'to kind of sit down and chat rather than lecture…it took a little bit of the pressure off really…I work best at the level of confidence I have' (Martina, 213).

Fragile learner identities, predicated on years of being ranked in a competitive and individualistic education system and always coming in second place, was shown as manifesting

in feeling ‘not as good as other people’, which translated into ‘not being a good teacher’ for Brian (Brian, 126). While Brian’s narrative showed how hard he worked in supporting his pupils, his experience also revealed an attitude among some teachers in his DEIS school that with the ‘low literacy levels, there’s almost a sense that we don’t have to be brilliant teachers’ (Brian, 133). Given the fragile learner identities of many in this group, choosing to do a placement in a DEIS school and adopting a less ‘knowledgeable’ and more ‘supportive’ teacher identity, was revealed as a form of protection for some in the cohort. While caring for pupils is an essential part of being a good teacher, an emphasis on caring to the detriment of learning can jeopardise the chances of pupils like themselves making ‘their escape permanent’ (Hargreaves, 2020, p. 813). Having explored the experiences of the students in both fee-charging and DEIS schools, the following section looks at the important role of relationships on their school placements.

6.9.6 Social Apartheid in the Staffroom

Staffs and staffrooms are middle-class territories regardless of whether they are fee-charging or not, and this cohort of students found themselves, once more, trying to find their way on occupied territory. The habitus these students brought from their class of origin automatically set them apart from the middle-class teachers (Bourdieu, 1996): ‘I’m not from the same background at all and I don’t fit in’ (Evan, 106). The lack of synchronicity with their middle-class colleagues placed this group, once more, as outsiders, and as somehow falling short of middle-class norms, academically, culturally and socially. Students recounted how they felt ‘looked down upon a little by the teaching staff and definitely judged by a few colleagues…’ (Evan, 109). Kirstie ‘felt judged for not being in the same social circle as them’ (Kirstie, 557). The life experiences of these students, and their different cultural capital in

particular (Bourdieu, 1984) were experienced as barriers to integration and as accentuating of difference.

Our lives are lived in relation to others and the experiences of the majority of the students in this cohort revealed, in line with Maguire (2005, p.440), that schools can be 'excluding places' for working-class teachers: 'My co-operating teacher made a point of highlighting that we're going to have nothing to do with each other on the first day and pretty much never spoke to me again' (Jane, 245). Being treated in such a manner positioned Jane as outsider reinforcing her sense of difference as deficit. What the narratives of the students in this cohort shed light on was the emotional impact of feeling like outsiders in a staffroom, their place of work, and how the more 'distant' teachers are from each other, and the less valued teachers feel, the more it impacts on the emotional wellbeing (Hastings, 2010):

> *I couldn't say to anyone how hard I was finding everything. Like I really struggled with the school… I would say hello and they would never say hello back (Lucy, 144).*

In a world where being positioned as outsider was already familiar to the majority of these students, teacher relationships with colleagues on their school placements were shown as being of central importance, and capable of generating the 'most heightened expressions of emotionality' among teachers (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 506). A form of social class apartheid was being performed almost daily for many of these students and was experienced as highly stressful. Linda explained that she was nervous 'going around the teachers in the staffroom. Where will I sit? I feel they won't want me to sit with them' (Linda, 280). When Linda eventually went to sit at a table, one of her colleagues 'put a scarf on the chair and said "sorry, that seat's taken"' (Linda, 283). Finding a place to sit became almost synonymous with being accepted as a teacher of worth. Martina's sense of being of less value in relation to her colleagues emerged in her comment that 'I feel that I shouldn't be taking up a seat really as it's their staffroom' (Martina, 798). When Martina, like so many others in the group, attempted to

approach her colleagues ‘they sort of stayed away from me’. The sense of not belonging, of not being accepted, of being excluded were summed up in Martina’s words: ‘I was just thinking, oh please, please be my friend’, leaving her with no option on many occasions but to ‘just pick up my bag and walk out’ (Martina, 272).

6.9.6.1 Different in the Staffroom

Part of what makes a teacher successful depends on forming close bonds with colleagues as well as pupils, and working in an environment of mutual emotional understanding (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 508). Given the challenges of teaching, being able to turn to colleagues for advice, support, and acceptance is crucial in reducing isolation and feelings of not belonging (Hargreaves, 1998). The students’ narratives revealed the emotional cost of being outsiders among their teaching peers and how emotions are deeply embedded in relationships and social contexts (Zembylas, 2005). Positioned outside the middle-class Christian norms of an Irish staffroom was seen to accentuate both Jade’s difference and distance from her teaching colleagues, highlighting the challenges inherent in any intersection between marginalised groups. Jade’s narrative revealed the centrality of belonging in a staffroom and how, without ‘teacher friends’ she questioned her ability to be a teacher:

> *It really detrimentally affected me. At times I felt that teaching was not for me. There is no point in being a teacher that has no teacher friends (Jade, 144).*

Not fitting in or being accepted by colleagues can lead to a reproduction of wider societal divisions and hierarchies, as was seen in Evan’s narrative. In seeking other outsiders like himself with whom to relate, Evan was also distancing himself from his new professional more ‘middle-class’ identity. Uncomfortable and unable to align himself him with the middle-class teachers with whom he did not ‘fit in’ (Evan, 95), Evan chose a different tribe, one that had more resonance with his background of origin:

> *I chat more with the Moldovan cleaning staff, I chat with the canteen staff, and I chat more with the groundsmen than I do with my own colleagues (Evan, 106).*

In addition to the personal price these students paid for being social and cultural outsiders, there were also professional implications in terms of teaching careers. Fitting in with a school ethos and culture can act as a yardstick for suitability, and the teachers whose cultures best reflect that of a school's are more likely to be successful in securing a teaching position (Hastings, 2010). Evan's understanding of his potential 'unsuitability' as a full-time member of staff in the privileged school where he was doing his placement, came through in his frustration at this unfairness: 'Why can't I be a teacher in this fee-paying school? It is not just the middle-and-upper-class people who are entitled to drink champagne' (Evan, 725). Symbolised within the word 'champagne' is everything that these students are excluded from but which is perceived to be the birthright of the privileged.

6.9.6.2 Teacher Relationships and Identity

A teacher's identity is complex and is seen as being 'socially situated within lived experiences' (O'Connor, 2008, p. 126). Feelings of belonging are core to forming a professional teacher identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Zembylas, 2005; Hargreaves, 1998; 2000; 2001; Timostuk and Ugaste, 2012; Shapiro, 2010), and that sense of acceptance and belonging were shown to be missing in many of these students' accounts of their teaching placements: 'I always felt like I was a burden on the staff' (Linda, 293). The lived experiences of these teachers in their interactions with others played a vital role in how they saw themselves as teachers and how their identities were being shaped. Feeling 'different to other teachers' (Jane, 451), and not being accepted as being on a par with their middle-class colleagues, was often internalised as not being 'as good as' the middle-class teachers, of not being 'real' teachers (Kirstie, 574). While the contexts in which they did their placements provided

important external information of these students as 'beings-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1927/1996), how the students spoke about their emotions revealed that it was the internal that created the 'meaning-making aspects' of identity formation', especially in the early stages of becoming a teacher (Timostuk and Ugaste, 2012, p. 423).

The narratives of these students revealed not only the centrality of teacher relationships to teacher identities (Hargreaves, 1999), but also that any real sense of flourishing and well-being involves the relational for teachers (Shapiro, 2010). Their stories highlighted the profound impact of being excluded by colleagues on their school placement. Many of their feelings reflected what Reay (1997, p. 435) called 'a deeply felt sense of working-class inferiority that comes from seeing ourselves through middle-class eyes'. Students like Martina protected herself by self-excluding from the middle-class territory of the staffroom, echoing insecurities from all the other stages of their journey: 'I shouldn't be here. I don't know anything. I don't have anything of value to add' (Martina, 268). The next section looks at how markers of difference continued to play a role on their school placements.

6.9.7 Markers of Difference on School Placement

6.9.7.1 Area

Area, accent and dress continued to differentiate these students from the middle-classes and was experienced as a reinforcing of their outsider status. Where these students lived, particularly in Dublin, was shown to serve as a negative 'placing' marker and as an invisible boundary over which they did not cross. Being asked 'point blank' where he was from by a 12 year- old pupil in a fee-charging school was experienced by Evan as a way of both judging him and reducing him as a person: 'Why does it matter where I'm from? But it definitely does…I'm completely put in a box and it explains to them who I am…and I'd be sensitive to that' (Evan, 80).

6.9.7.2 Dress

The role of 'dress' on their school placements was revealed as being particularly stressful and challenging for many students regardless of school type. How these students dressed was now experienced as a signifier of 'quality' which was felt to reflect on their professionalism as teachers. Their narratives exposed the hidden, tacit cultural rules of their school placements (Yuan and Lee, 2016), in relation what they wore. Unsure what to wear on their teaching placements, many of the students spoke of having to turn to Google for guidance for 'how to dress like a teacher' and 'teacher outfits' (Kate, 32). The price paid emotionally for not knowing the insider rules in relation to dress was considerable, differentiating them from the middle-class teachers on their placement: 'Where does their sense of style come from? Is there a book you read?' (Kate, 28). Unaware of the conservative nature of teachers' dress-code in Ireland (Walsh and Dolan, 2009), Kate revealed that she made 'the mistake of wearing shorts into school', an incident that was experienced as demeaning and humiliating for her, and reinforced her sense of difference as deficit: 'I was called into the principal's office and sent home. I felt stupid… and really small…I felt like a child' (Kate, 52). What these students discovered was that the culture and history of teacher education had shaped what it is to be a teacher, including how to dress and how to be 'professional', often a substitute for middle class (Maguire,1999). Many of the students' narratives exposed the shame of being judged as falling short of the middle-class ideal: 'I was concerned that other teachers would look down on me… that they were thinking that I wasn't professional' (Brian, 57). In the commodified world of education, a teacher's dress code can often become a filter for 'people like us' or 'people who are different to us', and can be played out in acts of inclusion or exclusion, as many of these students discovered.

Lack of cultural capital in having access to the 'rulebook' of how to dress (Bourdieu, 1984) was exacerbated by a lack of economic capital. All students were deeply conscious of the need to fit in, particularly in these marketized times, when how teachers dress can be used by schools as a reflection of a school's image (Maguire, 1999). Their lack of a 'professional' wardrobe accentuated their differences relative to other teachers in the staffroom. Negative comments from some staff and pupils about wearing the same outfits were experienced as 'upsetting' (Lucy, 48) and several students resorted to rotating their outfits, with Lucy explaining that she kept a detailed account of what she wore and when, making 'sure that there was a long distance between wearing it again' (Lucy, 56). Sandra revealed how she also rotated her outfits in order 'to be a professional, but I don't feel like a professional' (Sandra, 387). Fear of being judged as unprofessional was shown to be highly stressful: 'I was kind of wearing the same clothes all the time and I was kind of like, oh Jesus, someone is going to be like "look at Miss Smelly" (Linda, 343). The psychic struggles of the students, revealed in their feelings of guilt, shame, anger, fear and frustration in middle-class territory (Reay, 2017), served to confirm their perceptions of their difference and of their inferior position relative to the middle-class teachers

Dress code was also revealed by many students as a symbolic barrier to belonging on their school placements. The shirt and tie uniform of many middle-class male teachers was seen as symbolising 'middle-classness' and power, representative of both 'wealth and prestige' (Lucy, 61). A shirt and tie also represented middle-class territory: 'I'm in the wrong place…I'm trespassing' (Kate, 144). Feeling that they were trespassing, and being positioned as outsiders, again had implications for the future prospects of these students in schools, where 'matching' teachers with a market image is important when attracting customers (Maguire, 1999).

6.9.7.3 Accent

Once again, the role of accents and the manner in which language was used were experienced by the students as 'defining social class', and positioning them as 'lower on the scale' (Kate, 44). The emotional impact of coping with these negative judgements every time they spoke on their placements cannot be underestimated. Staff and pupils commented on these students' accents, just as they had on the areas they lived in and how they dressed, positioning them as different to the middle classes: 'In the staffroom last year when I would say "me ma" and "me da", the teachers would look around and say "oh, where are you from?"...so I have to watch my accent' (Clare, 370). Some of Kirstie's middle-class pupils would correct her pronunciation of certain words: 'At the start it was really bad but I wouldn't be getting upset in front of them. I just have to make a joke out of it and then they'd be fine about it' (Kirstie, 160). Her story revealed the amount of 'heavy lifting' that these students are forced to undertake in adapting to a middle-class territory, just as with every other stage of their educational journey, reinforcing the ideal of the middle-class norm as a measure of worth (Reay, 2017).

Referencing Bourdieu, Evan's narrative showed an understanding of the 'soft power' conferred by a middle-class accent, and how his working-class accent not only excluded him as a professional-in-the making from his colleagues in the staffroom, but also signalled firmly that he did not belong to a 'professional' tribe: I'm not a teacher-teacher… and not validated unless I have a certain accent' (Evan, 87).

At the core of many of the students' narratives was a profound sense that their accent was used to judge them and exclude them from accessing the same professional parity of esteem as their colleagues. Given their desire to become teachers, being judged as not being a 'real' teacher had an emotional as well as a professional impact. Becoming a teacher involved crossing social divides for most of these students and trying to adapt to middle-class norms and

behaviours that were at odds with their own, and some of the strategies they used are now discussed.

6.9.8 School Placement: Navigational Strategies

Little is known about how teachers from disadvantaged or working-class backgrounds navigate professionally (Van Galen, 2017), but what has already been revealed in the students' narratives was that the 'terrain can be unexpectedly rocky (Van Galen, 2010, p. 257). Navigating the difficult terrain of their school placement was experienced as challenging for the students, accentuating their differences and outsider status on the staff. Uncomfortable, anxious, and sometimes ashamed of being 'found out' (Waterfield et al., 2019), the strategies chosen by the students revealed a focus on self-protection, and keeping who they are well hidden, in line with many of their previous strategies. As noted earlier, choosing a school placement that would 'align with their own background' (Evan, 554), was perceived as a protective strategy by the students. Their narratives reflected a belief that there was less risk of doing 'violence to their psyche' (Maguire, 2005b, p. 431), by adopting such strategies. While serving as protections, the strategies also served to narrow the boundaries and 'territory' of the students, preventing many from fully integrating into their school communities, and further consolidating and reproducing social class segregation.

The students' narratives also revealed a conviction that the cultural capital they brought with them into their school placements was somehow deficient relative to middle-class teachers, and that acceptance was only possible if they changed and adjusted their 'physical presence' (Lehmann, 2012, p. 7). Conscious of the inferior value of their cultural capital on middle-class territory, many of the students felt an imperative to alter the way they dressed, spoke and behaved in order 'to be a bit more acceptable to the target audience' (Evan, 11). Evan's comment reflected both the neoliberal marketisation of schooling, and an understanding

that acceptance means becoming more 'middle-class' (Lampert et al., 2016). Several students revealed that they became 'a bit more of a chameleon in order to fit in on the staff' (Sandra, 298). The psychic cost of this was high for students and reinforced their sense of insecurity and a belief that they were only acceptable if 'modelled on the image of someone else' (Allen, 2014, p. 765).

It was not just how they presented themselves physically that they students felt under pressure to change, but many revealed that they dampened down key aspects of who they were in exchange for the security of belonging. In her work on emotional labour, Hochschild (1983) talks of the effort required to 'suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (p. 7). Data in this study reflects that in Keane's most recent research (2023), which explores how student teachers perform 'class chameleoning' behaviour, by either performing 'up', as a way to belong in the middle-class environment of a school, or performing 'down', in order to adapt at home. Tom identified a 'skill' that he could 'whip out' at any time (Tom, 91), which involved assuming the 'façade of an actor' and moulding his personality to whatever was acceptable to the person with whom he was speaking in the staffroom (Tom, 638).

> *I will do my best… to be as close as possible to something that they would find acceptable (Tom, 641).*

The students' narratives provided important insights into the various aspects of themselves they felt needed changing in order to blend in or be accepted by the middle-class teachers (Thein, Guise and Sloan, 2012). As with every stage of their educational journey, the students in this cohort, as outsiders, had to change and adapt if they wanted to survive in the middle-class world of education. Already on their own territory, the middle classes merely had to maintain the status quo, reflecting the authority of the privileged in owning these classed spaces (Maguire, 2005b). The stories of these students revealed the high emotional cost and the

'painful processes of assimilation into middle-class culture' (Waterfield et al., 2019, p. 386) that they experienced on their school placements.

Having crossed over the divide to become teachers, the next section explores the uncomfortable position the students now found themselves in of being caught between two worlds and belonging to neither.

6.10 Between Two Worlds

Although becoming post-primary teachers was their goal, it was not the end of the journey for these students. While the movement onto middle-class territory is typically presented as a positive, beneficial force (Friedman, 2016), the narratives of this cohort of students provided important insight into the high personal price the students paid for their success. The stories the students told revealed that, not only were they outsiders, isolated, judged, and perceived as different on middle-class territory, but that many closest to them on their home territory were now regarding them through a similar lens. The middle-class gaze had how been replaced by the 'working-class gaze'. There was a huge psychic cost to be paid for finding themselves strangers where they had once belonged. Becoming 'educated' was seen to have impacted on those close to the students, as well as on the students' sense of who they now were (Friedman, 2016). Unlike the middle-class students, this group of students experienced a 'break' in their habitus and found themselves 'caught between' two worlds and not feeling that they belonged fully in either (Lehmann, 2012, p. 12):

> *I definitely feel that I'm between two worlds…. I don't know who my people are or what my area is (Gary, 646).*

Having experienced the often 'painful and disorientating struggle' to find a sense of place on middle-class territory (Friedman, 2016, p. 139), an equal struggle was seen to occur on their home territory: 'What world do we belong to?' (Evan, 729). Examining the emotional cost of

this success is central to understanding what it really felt like for these students to become teachers. For many, the story of their achievement was also a story of loss, seen in the students' sense of dislocation, discomfort and unease, evidence of the fallout when the distance between a new habitus and an old one is too wide (Bourdieu and Passeron,1977).

The stories many students told were of 'living class as a conflicted identity' (Ingram, 2011, p. 301), with a sense of misalignment between who they once were and who they had now become, between their habitus and the new field of teacher education. Many did their best to straddle both worlds but felt an internal conflict and a feeling of being pulled in two opposing directions, conceptualised as the 'habitus tug' by Bourdieu (2002, p. 31). Switching between two worlds was not as seamless for these students as it was in Abraham's and Ingram's study (2013). Their new distance from family, friends and community, was experienced as a deep insecurity, evident in the profound ontological questions found in many students' narratives about who they now were. For Evan, his working-class background would define him: 'You'll always be where you come from and I can't ignore that' (Evan, 731). Many students began to wonder where exactly they belonged, and who they should or could now align with, and most narratives made clear that whatever choice they made, the fit would be uncomfortable (Waterfield, et al., 2019).

6.10.1 Those Left Behind

Leaving others behind was experienced as a deep guilt and betrayal by many students (Maguire, 2005a, 2005b; Ingram, 2011; Lee and Kramer, 2013). The students' narratives exposed an emotional conflict that troubled many of them, which was how to reconcile their new privileging with the reality that those closest to them had now become 'less equal' (Reay, 2017, p. 116): 'It's kind of putting other people down and all of a sudden you're stuck up' (Jane, 537). Just as they had struggled when 'facing upwards' on middle-class territory, they

now faced painful feelings of 'guilt, estrangement and abandonment' when facing downwards (Friedman, 2016, p. 144). 'I don't really belong because your family and friends don't have a masters. I'm just very different to them all now' (Mary, 431). In addition to coping with their own emotions, the students also had to manage the emotional fallout for their families and friends. Jack discovered that some people from 'his past' were resentful of his educational achievement and felt that it would 'nearly be held against you', (Jack, 469). Leaving their home territory was seen to position many students as socially different, accentuating a sense of loss for those left behind.

> *Why are you trying to come out of the environment you were born into? …You were fine as you were. You didn't need to go on. Why didn't you wait for us? (Jack, 532).*

6.10.2 Teaching: Going over to the Dark Side

The price these students paid meant that many experienced their success as a form of failure, or even more profoundly as 'transgression' (Reay, 2017, p. 108). Many stories highlighted the psychic tug felt by the students when friends and family now perceived them as joining the ranks of the class that had oppressed them (Waterfield et al., 2019). Abandoning their tribe of origin to become teachers was experienced as delivering almost a 'double-dose' of disloyalty given the negative connotations the profession held for many of their friends and families: 'There's such a negative opinion of teachers. They think that what happened to them years ago still happens and that now I am doing it' (Jane, 544). Becoming teachers was also experienced as creating barriers between the students and their working-class friends, replicating the sense of isolation and alienation they experienced on arrival in higher education: 'The minute they heard I was a teacher, their hackles went up. I think there is a class perception that you must be middle-class and well-off and be snotty as a consequence of being a teacher' (Gaye, 342). Becoming a teacher was not experienced as an unalloyed positive in their lives,

with many students losing friends and the sense of belonging to their own tribe: 'Most of my friends are from disadvantaged areas and they know I'm a teacher but they look at you differently, not so much because I'm in college but because I'm a teacher. It's the career itself that sets you apart' (Clare, 198). Other friends were seen as unable to reconcile being from a disadvantaged background and being a teacher, showing how classed and socially segregated the teaching profession is, positioning many of these students as outsiders at home: 'How are *you* a teacher? They can't put me and teaching together. They see teachers as teachers. They wouldn't see teachers as common people like me' (Linda, 506).

Becoming teachers meant coping with the psychic unease of being judged harshly by those who were once their own tribe. Many of the students felt that they had betrayed those closest to them by joining the ranks of the 'enemy': 'My brother said "You're one of them now". I've become a traitor and I'm on the other side' (Martina, 449). Reflecting Reay's findings (Reay, 2017, p. 115), the students faced the real risk of 'alienation and dislocation, of never finding a place to belong'. Becoming teachers was seen to involve feelings of guilt and shame, loss and pain, as students tried to find their way in this in-between world while managing the cultural and personal affiliations to two different social realms (Sennett and Cobb, 1972):

> *There's a disconnect between who you are and your people… There's a kind of shame and guilt to it. You're disconnected from yourself just to satisfy what's kind of expected of you as a teacher (Evan, 36).*

6.10.3 Becoming More Acceptable on Home Territory

Many of the narratives revealed the double-edged sword embedded in the process of becoming teachers. Just as they had felt the need to change who they were in higher education and on their school placement in order to become more 'acceptable' to the middle classes, they

now felt the need to change again, to hide who they now were, and adopt an identity that was more acceptable to their friends and families. Whereas higher education was once alien territory for Gaye, she revealed that who she was now aligned more with an 'educated' self.

> *I have to watch myself and the words I use… My mother would say "we speak English in this house, you know"'(Gaye, 566).*

Uncomfortable accentuating the educational distance that had now been created between them and their families, and sensitive to the feelings of those around them, many students once more changed how they spoke and the vocabulary they used in order to be more acceptable at home. Martina opted to 'dampen it down a bit' (Martina, 439), and Karl used 'quite basic' words at home (Karl, 217), as otherwise some parents, like Linda's, would be at a loss: 'What does that mean?' (Linda, 481). The price of trying to manage this dissonance was evident in many of the students' narratives and aligned with research done by others such as Friedman (2016, p. 145) who acknowledged the 'exhausting amount of mental work' that is necessary to negotiate this psychic space. A coping strategy used by one student was to remain silent and not to speak, just as she had done in university: 'I just don't talk at home. It's so much of an effort trying to swap what you were originally going to say… because it will make them feel uncomfortable and they will just be angry at you for no reason' (Jane, 540).

Becoming a teacher meant that these students now found themselves caught between two worlds and not fully belonging to either. They were now positioned differently among their own people, perceived by many as outsiders: 'You don't sound like you're from here' (Jane, 830). There was a deep psychic cost in this loss of belonging. But it was not just the students who paid a price. Families also experienced loss and were seen to struggle with the divide that becoming teachers had now created between them and their children:

> *I am struggling with my family and they are struggling with me… The more I do, the more alien everything is (Jane, 817).*

What these students had learned was that becoming acceptable on any territory involved both changing and hiding who they were. They also found that their differences now isolated them just as they had on middle-class territory.

6.10.4 Conclusion: Teacher Education

Achieving academic success and becoming teachers came at a high cost for the majority of these students, bringing with it 'a slew of hidden emotional injuries' (Friedman, 2016, p. 144). In an interview with Eagleton in 1992, Bourdieu discussed his own journey from a less privileged to a more privileged position (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992, p. 117), and emphasised the importance of acknowledging 'what was lost' on this journey. The price paid for becoming a teacher was that many students now found themselves culturally homeless (Friedman, 2016), experiencing the painful 'double isolation' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 107) of finding themselves between two worlds and not belonging to either. The only people they could now identify with were other 'veterans' like themselves: 'It feels like I don't fit in anywhere, only with others who have been through the same process' (Gaye, 559).

6.11 Conclusion: Chapter 6

The discussion chapter centred around the three questions that guided this study, and focused on the lived experiences of 23 students from disadvantaged backgrounds on their journeys in ITE, what shaped their experiences and how they managed to navigate their way through. The phenomenon of ITE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is complex. The students tried to make sense of their experiences of ITE in terms of their prior educational experiences, which had reinforced and consolidated the sense of difference as deficit that they brought with them to ITE. This sense of difference and the students' lack of congruence with

the middle-class world of the PME in Southside University, positioned them as outsiders and not belonging on privileged territory.

The structure that underpinned the chapter was guided by the students' own attempts to make sense of their experiences in terms of an educational journey through their schooling, undergraduate education, and ITE, with three themes infusing each part of their journey. An understanding of the phenomenon of ITE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds can only be arrived at if we understand what it is actually like to experience the phenomenon and this chapter provides important insight into what it was like to be one of those students in ITE. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach, guided by Heidegger's focus on what it means to 'be in the world' (Farrell, 2020, p.3), facilitated this understanding and was central in revealing the nature of the lived experiences of these 23 students. The concluding chapter in this study now follows.

Chapter 7 *Conclusion*

7.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a global focus on promoting a more inclusive agenda in universities, including widening participation for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (HEA, 2015; 2022; Scanlon et al., 2020). This call for diversity has been matched by a call for a more inclusive and diverse teaching profession (Santoro, 2015) but, to date, there has been little or no research done on understanding the experiences of students who come from less privileged backgrounds into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Keane et al, 2020). This study set out with the aim of understanding what it means to be a student from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), (**research question 1),** and to understand how students from such a background might navigate their experiences (**research question 2**). Acknowledging the impossibility of separating a person from the world in which they live (Heidegger, 1927), understanding how the students' prior experiences in education might have shaped their lived experiences in ITE, provided a third, contextual, research question (**research question 3**).

7.2 Methodology and Structure

Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to enter the worlds of 23 socio-economically disadvantaged students, from three consecutive years, who were participating in a Professional Masters in Education (PME) in a university in Dublin, and to search for an understanding of the meaning they gave to their experiences. The focus of phenomenology is on people and how they understand or experience a phenomenon, and hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of these lived experiences (Dibley et al., 2020), which in this study centred on providing some understandings of the phenomenon of ITE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Gadamer (2003) asserts that all understanding is, in fact, interpretation. How these students chose to tell their stories, over the course of 40 interviews, exemplified a prior interpretation through language. This focus on achieving a deeper understanding of both the nature and the meaning of individuals' everyday experiences, and what it means to be human, was central to this study

The role of this researcher was not to present a definitive answer or a single 'truth' but to present 'a plausible, contextualised and credible account' (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 129) of what the experiences of ITE meant for this particular group of students. This researcher is just as much a part of the world as are the students who participated in the study, and therefore, a 'neutral' interpretation of human experience is impossible (Moran, 2000, p. 197). In terms of Heideggerian hermeneutic research, how both the students and the researcher understood the experiences is what helped create the interpretation. Three dominant themes were constructed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022): a) '**Difference as Deficit'**; b) '**Outsiders on Privileged Territory'**; and c) '**Survival: Hiding and Protecting the Self'**. The centrality to the students' stories of moving from a less privileged to a more privileged territory provided the structure of a journey for organising the students' experiences, a structure which is also followed in this chapter.

7.3 Structure of Thesis

Chapter One of this study began by providing a broad outline of the rationale for the research, along with the aims, objectives and methodological approach. This was followed in Chapter Two by a discussion of the close relationship between social class and education, and looked at some of the ways that schooling, and educational processes in particular, can contribute to social and educational inequality. Chapter Three considered similar themes and issues in higher education and ITE, highlighting how past inequalities can continue to manifest

personally, socially and educationally for those who are already disadvantaged. An historical overview of the philosophical approach that underpinned this study began Chapter Four, locating hermeneutic phenomenology within the interpretative tradition, followed by an examination of the practical concerns of the study, with a strong focus on the quality of the research in terms of ethical standards and trustworthiness. Chapter Five presented the findings generated from this methodology, guided by the structure of a journey and the three key themes. Chapter Six discussed these findings and explored how the students understood and made sense of what it meant to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE. This final chapter, Chapter Seven, aims to highlight some of the key insights generated from the research, along with the implications, recommendations and limitations of the study. The key learnings from the role that education played in shaping the experiences of the students are now discussed.

7.4 Education: Schooling

7.4.1 Introduction

The central aim of this study was to understand what it is like to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE, and the findings from this study often shed an uncomfortable light on the reality. The facts of the students' educational trajectories to ITE tell only one part of the story. The real stories are more completely understood in terms of the challenges many of these students experienced at each stage of their educational journey to becoming post-primary teachers. The study revealed how many of their struggles in ITE could be traced back to unfair and inequitable social and educational systems and structures which do not work in the best interests of those who are disadvantaged but rather serve the interests of those who are more privileged. The students' stories demonstrated how the seeds of fragile learner identities, of experiencing their difference as deficit, and of feeling like outsiders in the

world of education that so many of these students experienced in ITE, were sown and nourished throughout their schooling. The consequences for the students were profound.

7.4.2 Inseparable from the World

It is impossible to separate the students who took part in this study from the world in which they live and the social context of their lives. Meaning is not found in isolation to the shared interactions of a being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927). The findings highlighted the many ways in which these students were shaped by the familial, social, cultural and educational environments into which they were born, and by past, present and future influences (Dibley et al., 2020). The students' past histories and experiences formed part of how they made sense of the world, and their new understandings of the world were mediated through these older perceptions. Most of the students in this study were unaware of how their past experiences and histories had shaped their ways of thinking and being-in-the-world, so that an unconscious, and often internalised negative belief system, was seen to guide how many of the students experienced education and lived their day-to-day lives. The study demonstrates how the processes, people and structures of the social and educational contexts in which these students lived impacted hugely on their experiences.

7.4.3 An Inequitable Education System

A primary objective of this study was to gain insight into the impact of social background on these students' experiences of ITE. The findings show that the origins of many of the issues that the students identified as challenging within ITE could be traced back to the inequities at the core of the educational system, in particular how the participating students experienced their schooling. Schooling for the majority of these students was seen to reinforce the wall that separates the social classes (Olmeda and Cruz, 2012), and to widen the gap

between the classes educationally, socially, culturally, and psychologically. This study confirms that an equality of opportunity approach to education merely provided these students with the opportunity to participate in a game that was unfair and unequal from the start (Lynch, 2022). Without an equality of conditions approach, the students' education only served to add to and reproduce existing educational inequalities (Lynch and Crean, 2018).

The data gathered indicates that the education that these students experienced was predicated on an approach that valorises competitive individualism and ignores the unfairness at the core of the education system (Lynch, 2022). How the students perceived themselves as learners, and how they viewed themselves socially and academically relative to middle-class children, was shaped by their experiences of coming through an inequitable educational system, in particular a school-based pedagogy that was firmly orientated towards a middle-class habitus (Reay, 2017). The majority of students in this cohort had parents who had left school at a young age and who were therefore unable to advantage their children with the type of highly valued linguistic and cultural skills that are particularly prized in schools (De Keere and Spruyt, 2019), and whic are associated with the middle classes. Being assessed and ranked throughout their schooling as if they had equal access to the same linguistic, cultural, and financial resources as middle-class children was seen to provide a legitimate mechanism for schools to sort out the 'winners' from the 'losers'. This academic ranking was revealed as having a deep and lifelong impact on the students' academic identities and academic confidence, highlighting the reproductive link between social class and education. Such classed bias in schools results in the cultural hegemony of the middle-classes being normalised in education (Lynch, 2022).

In such an educational approach, students are held responsible for their own success or failure, regardless of the lack of resources and the virtual impossibility of succeeding to the same extent as their more privileged peers (Lynch and Crean, 2018). Obscuring the role of

social class in educational success left many of the students in this study with a lifelong view of themselves as 'inadequate learners with inadequate cultural backgrounds' (Reay, 2017, p. 81). For many of these students, the 'injuries of class' that Sennett and Cobb referred to (1972) were evident in the fact that not only were these students continually ranked within school, and externally ranked in state examinations, but now many in the group were seen to rank themselves accordingly, internalising these rankings as personal shortcomings rather than structural inequalities (Young, 1999). These insecure learner identities were reinforced and consolidated as the students progressed through their education and were carried fully formed by many in the cohort into ITE.

The students' narratives revealed that the psychic impact of this 'failure of the self' (Reay, 2010, p. 530) was immense. Many students paid the price of always coming from behind in a system where the middle classes are in their element, like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127), and where middle-class learners are held up as the ideal (Reay, 2017). Trying to succeed against the odds contributed to the fragile learner identities of many students in the study, resulting in what Reay (2017) refers to as a 'psychic economy of class', characterised by 'fear, anxiety and unease' (p. 147). The students' stories provided valuable insights into the academic challenges faced by many of the students and the hurdles they had to overcome if they wanted to become post-primary teachers. An educational approach without equality of conditions was seen to reproduce existing educational inequalities, and contributed to the strong sense of fear and shame that many of these students carried with them from their schooling into their adult lives.

In contrast to more privileged students, the pathway to higher education for these students was never clear and often in doubt, and did little to create any real sense that higher education was for 'students like them'. Despite their challenges, the students' stories were also stories of survival, often with the strong support of committed and understanding teachers

(Heller and Lareau, 2019), and seeking out others who were like themselves. This support enabled the students to find their way to higher education, even if the routes they took were circuitous, and the next section looks at some of their experiences at third level.

7.5 Higher Education

The students' stories revealed how their experiences in school laid the foundation for the academic insecurities that many carried with them into higher education, shaping deep beliefs that they did not belong in this world in the same way as the middle-class students did. These findings reveal how the students' past histories and experiences shaped the ways they made sense of their present experiences, creating an unconscious belief system (Dibley et al., 2020), that saw many students position themselves as weak academically. The study exposed the ways that the students felt and perceived their difference as deficit, one of three central themes constructed from the data analysis. They talked frequently about feeling a sense of lack: lack of confidence and belonging; lack of the type of knowledge that is valued in education; lack of power and capitals; lack of social networks; lack of access; lack of privilege; lack of value and recognition; lack of self-worth; and lack of voice. Side-by-side with this sense of what they lacked, equally profound fears were uncovered: fear of not knowing and fear of failure; fear of being exposed; fear of being seen as trespassers on privileged territory; fear of being different; fear of not fitting in; fear of judgement. Underpinning this lack and fear were feelings of anxiety and shame. While not all students experienced these struggles to the same degree, the study showed that all identified with the belief that they did not fit in or belong in higher education in the same way as their more privileged peers did, which only served to reinforce their deep sense of being outsiders on middle-class territory (Reay, 2017), another of the three core themes generated from the coding of 40 interviews. Reay (ibid.) points out that it is hard for a different story to be told when middle-class practices 'add to such a powerful collective class action' in the field of education (p. 150).

While there is no doubting that accessing higher education provided opportunities for these students, the findings in this study show that many experienced higher education as just another difficult stage on the challenging road to ITE. Instead of improving their sense of value and worth, higher education was seen to reinforce and consolidate many students' sense of inferiority and not belonging. The disadvantage these students articulated in relation to their experiences is better understood in terms of the relative privilege of the middle-class students in higher education, whose backgrounds chime more with the middle-class habitus of a university (Bourdieu, 1987), equipping them to 'exploit their advantages' (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p. 739) in ways that are denied to the less privileged. Without access to the same resources as the better-off students, this cohort were unable to participate on an equal footing and were once more positioned at a disadvantage, educationally, financially, culturally, and socially.

The students' stories showed how the educational and social trajectories that had separated, divided, segregated and marked each social group as different and 'other', were now being reinforced in higher education, reproducing and maintaining the hierarchies of difference and distinction that had started with their schooling (Reay, 2001). The findings revealed that it was not just the fact of being different that was problematic for these students, it was the belief that the capitals they possessed were the 'wrong' kind for this world of higher education, and therefore of less value than those of the middle-class students (Van Galen, 2010). How these students experienced these 'markers' of difference formed a central part of the students' stories of higher education.

7.5.1 Markers of Difference in Higher Education

Despite their success in accessing higher education, the study revealed that getting in the door now merely positioned these students as outsiders on the inside (Reay et al., 2010).

Their schooling had been shown to contribute to the sense of academic insecurity that many students brought with them to higher education. A key finding was how generational social and educational inequalities which manifested in classed differentials in terms of language and language skills (Bourdieu, 1977) played a central role in the students' academic struggles in higher education. Being exposed for the first time to the facility and ease of oral and written communication that are the hallmarks of the middle-classes, many of these students spoke with embarrassment of their own struggles with the type of academic language used in lectures and literature, finding the writing of academic essays hugely stressful. The findings demonstrated how the earlier systemic inequalities in their backgrounds and education were now being exposed in the many gaps in their knowledge that the students struggled to hide, petrified of being exposed as 'not as good as' the middle-class students. Many of the students' narratives showed how their lack of facility with language served to reinforce their sense of difference as deficit, and to mark them as outsiders in higher education.

Also exposed in this study was just how 'immersed' higher education is in social class (Hurst and Nenga, 2016, p. 6), revealing the many ways in which these students from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced their class differences. The dovetailing of the middle-class habitus of higher-level institutions with the habitus of the middle-class students was shown to normalise middle-class ways of being, ways of talking and walking, of speaking and behaviour, that marked the students in this study as different. Embedded in the students' stories was a tacit acceptance of the middle-classes as both the arbiters of these distinctions (Shim, 2012) and the judges of what was of 'value' in terms of accent, schools attended and the area in which someone lived. An important finding was the key role that accent played, especially in Dublin, in differentiating, separating, and segregating these students from their more privileged peers in higher education. The students identified their accents as an immediate marker of their social class (Maguire, 1999) and consequently as an identifier of a 'lower'

social positioning (Hey, 1997). The study revealed the crucial role that accent played in terms of whether the students felt that they fitted in or stood out as not belonging (Abraham and Ingram, 2013). The students' narratives highlighted the discomfort of the students in finding out that, in terms of cultural capital, their accents were of 'limited value' in this privileged environment (Skeggs, 1997, p. 129).

Accent was also revealed as an identifier of where these students lived, and often the schools they attended, all of which were of particular relevance in Dublin, and which positioned these students as 'not one of us'. Many of the students discovered that the way they dressed was also an instant identifier of their class (Ingram, 2009), again positioning the students as both different and not fitting in on middle-class territory.

In line with international research, data from this study showed that being from a disadvantaged background and lacking financial capital marked and separated these students from the middle-class students, and deprived them of the opportunities to experience university life in the same way as their better-off peers (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). The findings revealed difficult truths about the struggles of these students to survive financially, with almost all of the students having no option but to work long hours off-campus to supplement any grants they may have received. Socialising, joining college clubs or societies, playing sport, were closed to the majority of these students, isolating and segregating them, and setting them apart from the students for whom all of these were possible. Surviving from day-to-day financially for many of these students involved prioritising off-campus work (McCoy et al., 2014), highlighting how 'being at university' can represent very different things depending on which social class a student belongs to. It was not just the lack of money that set these students apart from their more financially secure peers, it was also the emotional difference between those students who could just 'be' and students like themselves for whom higher education was just another, if important, part of their lives (Christie, 2009, p. 135).

7.5.2 Out of Place

Being positioned as outsiders and feeling that higher education was not 'theirs' in the same way as it was for the middle-class students (Reay, 2017) was revealed as being profoundly isolating for these students. The students spoke of their attempts to cross the class divide and how their overtures were usually rebuffed. Those students in the cohort who completed their undergraduate studies in Dublin, in particular, commented on the fact that the middle-class students did not have the same need to connect with those 'outside' of their circle as they arrived into higher education with ready-made social networks. The study highlighted how being excluded from these important social networks (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) reinforced the students' sense of difference in terms of their social class and cultural capital, which often resulted in strong feelings of loneliness and discomfort (Lehmann, 2007a; 2007b). The findings also showed that it is almost too late at this stage in the students' educational pathway to form any social bonds between students from such different backgrounds who have so little in common, and that any attempts at social mixing need to come much earlier in the students' education. The study found that the social and educational segregation of the classes throughout their schooling did little to improve the stereotyping and lack of understanding that can influence perceptions on both sides of the social divide (Cook et al., 2021).

Higher education was not experienced as the social equaliser it might have been for many of these students, and instead was seen to accentuate and widen the social divide, positioning the students once more at a disadvantage relative to their middle-class peers. The findings accentuated the primacy of context in shaping how the students made sense of their experiences (Palmer, 1998). Despite the challenges, all of the students managed to survive and some of their navigational strategies are discussed in the next section.

7.5.3 Navigational Strategies in Higher Education

Being a student from a disadvantaged background meant navigating an environment in which a middle-class culture was not only dominant but was seen as having more value than a working-class one. There was a huge psychic cost for these students in always feeling that they were positioned as having less value on a social scale relative to those who had the good fortune to be born into privilege. However, these value-judgements are often societal and before the students started higher education, their choice of university was revealed as being a protective navigational strategy, accentuating the connection between university choice and social class (Ball, Reay, and David, 2002). Many students chose to avoid the two historically 'privileged' universities in Dublin, and opted instead for those outside Dublin or on Dublin's northside where the students felt they would have a better chance of finding others 'like themselves' and would be less likely to be judged, two crucial strategies in self-protection that the findings highlighted.

Of central importance to their survival, as found in the analysis of the data, was finding their own tribe (Bourdieu, 1987), a strategy which reduced their sense of being totally isolated. Finding others like themselves is understood not only in terms of the avoidance of loneliness or isolation but also in terms of fulfilling important needs such as the need to belong and share an identity with others like themselves (Ingram, 2009). Given the psychological and emotional challenges the students had experienced in being outsiders on privileged territory, finding their own 'people' provided not only social protection but also a deep sense of 'psychological safety and comfort' (Stephens et al., 2015, p.9).

Within their chosen tribe, other subtleties emerged in terms of who the students were seen to gravitate towards. In addition to choosing others like themselves from the same background, the study revealed how many of the Dublin students also mixed with students from outside Dublin, from 'the country', because these students were perceived to be less well

versed in the nuanced subtleties of social class and schools attended, in contrast to the privileged students from the leafy suburbs of south Dublin. Protection from negative judgement was an important strategy for these students.

Of central importance in the findings was the belief and the need of these students to cover up and hide who they were if they wished to survive in higher education. At the core of this strategy was a belief that, as they were, they were not good enough and would only be acceptable if they changed how they presented themselves (Reay, 2017). Many tried to hide their background by purchasing accessories that were seen as middle-class identifiers. Others changed their behaviour, appearance and how they dressed in order to blend in. While all of these strategies provided safety and protection for the students, they did little to reduce the widening social gaps in higher education, and also limited the scope of the students' integration into university life.

The final stage of the students' journey brought them to their destination, the Professional Masters in Education, where the students had to learn to navigate two very different territories: the solidly middle-class Southside University (Section A), and the world of their school placements (Section B), both of which are now discussed.

7.6 Section A: The Professional Masters in Southside University

The inseparability of the students in this study from their backgrounds and past histories was revealed in the many ways that their experiences in school and in higher education helped to shape both a conscious and unconscious belief system that guided how they perceived themselves socially, culturally and academically. The study demonstrates how these 'historically derived dispositions' (Shim, 2012, p. 211) and beliefs were then carried by the students into Initial Teacher Education and onto their teaching placements, influencing how they experienced and navigated both.

Being from a disadvantaged background meant having to cope with a slew of insecurities before the students had even arrived in Southside to start the Professional Masters in Education (PME). The location of this university in one of the wealthiest suburbs of Dublin merely reinforced the students' perceptions that the university did not belong to them and that the middle-classes had prior territorial rights. The findings indicated that many students believed that they were somehow trespassing on middle-class ground and were afraid that they could be 'spotted' and ejected at any time. In fact, fear was seen to permeate many of the students' accounts of their experiences in ITE. Their prior experiences as undergraduates had contributed to the students' beliefs that there was more legitimacy in the habitus of the middle classes in universities and that their own habitus was somehow deficient. These beliefs fed into the fear that their backgrounds might be exposed and that they would be 'found out' as interlopers, consolidating their beliefs that they were cultural and social outsiders in a world in which they did not belong (Bourdieu, 1984). The students also spoke of their fear of being judged and found deficient, with many revealing the overtones of superiority and inferiority that were identified with different social classes. Underpinning all of these beliefs and fears was a sense of isolation, of not belonging, and of being socially segregated because of their class. The external markers of difference that positioned these students as outsiders on their undergraduate degrees were once again revealed as identifiers of social difference on the PME.

7.6.1 Markers of Difference on the PME

Once again, the students' narratives revealed the many ways that accent, school attended, manner of dressing, and access to finance, are all '*profoundly* classed experiences' (Weis and Dolby, 2012, p. 2, italics authors' own). These social identifiers can be a means of finding others who are similar, or, as was experienced by the students in this study, they can be a means of 'placing' someone socially, of putting them in their place, and thus positioning

them as ‘out of place in middle-class spaces’ (Finnegan and Merrill, 2017, p. 315). A middle-class habitus can become so ingrained for the privileged that many of the middle-class students may not have been aware that what was natural and normal for them could be experienced as discriminatory by others (Shim, 2012). For the students in this study, their feelings of not belonging, of being outsiders, of not having the same parity of esteem or value in the eyes of the privileged, were very real and guided their beliefs and experiences on the PME.

Unlike their experiences as undergraduate, however, this Masters was a professional qualification and the students’ stories revealed the shame and fear of now being judged as unprofessional depending on how they dressed, spoke, or comported themselves. The students showed an awareness of how negative media representations or casual references in lectures could stigmatise the areas where they lived, and impact on how others now judged them personally. Their fear of being judged based on their accent, along with the fragile learner identities they brought with them to ITE, were seen to act as deterrents in terms of speaking in lectures, with several expressing terror at the prospect of being asked a question.

The students’ lack of economic capital emerged as one of the key contributors to the emotional and practical struggles that these students faced on a two-year professional Master’s programme. The financial demands of the programme meant that almost all of these students had to work to supplement their grants, with many working long hours and managing the fallout in terms of their health and academic work. While their grants were essential in enabling these students to participate in the Masters, the students also spoke of how the grants functioned as a further differentiator of social class, with many in the cohort uncomfortable acknowledging that they were in receipt of grants in front of the middle-class students. With echoes of their experiences as undergraduates, the students’ lack of money positioned them as outsiders, unable to access the many extra-curricular activities that can encourage a sense of belonging and integration for so many students in university. The study revealed uncomfortable stories

from several students of how their lack of money positioned them literally as outsiders in the university, with students eating their packed lunch outside the restaurant where the better-off students could afford to eat. The study showed that it was the shame of what they lacked that was most challenging for these students to manage. Their sense of difference was so great that many students were seen to internalise the judgements of others and question their own right to be on this Master's programme.

7.6.2 Challenges with an Online Teaching and Learning Environment

The findings from this study offered important insights into the challenges the students faced online in the course of the global pandemic. Very few students spoke of positive experiences online, and those that were mentioned were usually framed in terms of negatives: not having to speak and not being observed when they posted comments. The challenges identified by the students far outweighed any positives, and while the students spoke of problems with lack of access to the internet and not having a suitable place in which to work, it was their difficulties with social isolation and exposure to the judgement of others that were revealed as most problematic.

A core navigational strategy for the students was the protection afforded in finding others like themselves with whom to socialise (Keane, 2011). Being online, however, significantly reduced their chances of locating others like themselves as it was students from disadvantaged backgrounds who were least likely to have the confidence to speak out. Building relationships is challenging for all online (Hargreaves, 2001) but was seen to prove hugely problematic for the students in this cohort who were already feeling isolated and conscious of their difference relative to the dominant middle-class groups. Without any other students to talk to, many in this group struggled to survive on the programme.

Protecting themselves from the judgement of others was also an important strategy used by the students and many felt that this protection was being compromised online, with their homes and private lives being exposed and therefore susceptible to the 'middle-class gaze' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 487). Many students spoke of the stark contrast between their own homes and the homes of the more privileged PME students who were comfortable having their homes on view. While keeping their cameras and microphones off solved some of their problems online, this approach also ensured that these students were both invisible and unheard, doing little to encourage any sense of belonging but serving instead to reinforce the students' sense of being outsiders on middle-class territory.

The next section summarises how many of the students' challenges around language continued to play out on the PME.

7.6.3 Language and the PME

Being on a post-graduate professional programme with a majority middle-class group was seen to reinforce the students' sense of somehow falling short in comparison (Van Galen, 2010). The educational bias at all levels of their education towards the language register of the middle classes (Bernstein, 1977) contributed to many of the students' language challenges and insecurities, particularly in terms of vocabulary, with many struggling to understand the vocabulary used in lectures and academic articles. Echoing other stages of their educational pathways, the students were seen to have internalised an understanding of what being 'educated' means in terms of culture and class (Bourdieu, 1992). Perceiving their own class and culture as second-best relative to middle-class educational norms, served to reinforce the sense of deficit that many students felt, and their beliefs of not being quite as 'cultured' and 'cultivated' as their privileged peers. The findings indicate that many students felt these differences as a cause of shame, and as accentuating of their difference. These insecurities were

now seen to feed into the creation of fragile teacher identities, feeding many students' perceptions of being 'not as good' professionally relative to their middle-class peers.

7.6.4 Strength of Voice on the PME

There is a confidence and ease that can come from social and educational privilege (Bourdieu, 1984), and the students' stories revealed how class differentials were seen to manifest in power of voice on the PME. The strength of voice of the middle-class students was commented on time and again by the students in this cohort, with many noting the authority with which these privileged students spoke. They also noted, with some frustration, the self-assurance of the middle-class students in ensuring that their voices would be heard and listened to. This contrasted with those in this group, most of whom chose to remain silent, anxious and afraid of being exposed. The findings revealed the frustration of this group of students at the dominance of the middle-class voice in lectures, and the sense of their own voices being drowned out.

Being a little older and more successful academically appeared to offer some protection for the few students in the cohort who did speak out and had a voice. However, the privilege of the middle classes positions them differently in terms of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and the strength of voice of the middle-class PME students was perceived by many of the disadvantaged students as a manifestation of the power of privilege.

Section A, the students' experiences of the PME in Southside University, provided important insights into what it means to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE. How these students experienced their school placements is discussed in Section B.

7.7 Section B: School Placement

7.7.1 Choice of School Placement

The many ways in which the students' backgrounds, life histories and past experiences impacted on their beliefs, identities and perceptions at every stage of their educational journey continually reaffirms the inseparability of the students from the world in which they lived (Heidegger, 1927, 1996). Their experiences on their school placements were no different. What the students revealed about how they made their choice of school placement was an important finding in this study.

The study showed how the students' choice of where to do their school placement was a classed one and was impacted by their classed identities (Jones, 2019). Research has already shown that students tend to base their choice of school placement on their own schooling experiences (Allard and Santoro, 2006), and consequently, as the majority of these students had attended DEIS schools, these schools were seen as the logical choice for their placement. However, the students were also seen to have internalised beliefs of a school hierarchy in which middle-class schools and a middle-class education were seen as superior to the education received in DEIS schools. The students' perceptions of a school hierarchy were also applied to the schools in which they did their placements. Fee-charging schools were perceived to be at the pinnacle of this placement hierarchy therefore positioning the middle-class students and their choice of middle-class school placements on a higher rung of the ladder than the students who opted to do their placement in DEIS schools.

Data analysis from the interviews showed how the students' choice of school placement was not only classed but was seen by the students as a form of protection from exposure to middle-class judgement. The fragile leaner identities of many of the students were revealed in how they spoke of strategically avoiding fee-charging schools where they felt that any gaps in their knowledge could be more easily exposed in a world where academic achievement is often

valued over personal development (Lareau, 2011). The students' stories reflected their beliefs that if parents are paying fees then they deserve the 'best' teachers, which automatically excluded them. By choosing to self-exclude from these middle-class schools the students were imposing a restrictive code on their choice of placement, a strategy that reflected their fears of being exposed in such privileged environments (Skeggs, 1997). This study also demonstrated that the decision to self-exclude from fee-charging schools was connected to deeply ingrained beliefs that these privileged schools were not places for people 'like them', and that the staff and pupils may not understand how to relate to them, and vice versa.

The insecure learner identities that many of the students carried with them, the outcome of many years of being assessed and ranked in a competitive education, were found to have an important role in contributing to the fragile teacher identities of many of these students. These weak teacher identities were then seen to play an important part in shaping the students' approach to teaching and how they presented themselves as teachers. Uncomfortable assuming the mantle of the 'knowledgeable' teacher for fear of being exposed for 'not knowing', many students opted instead for a more relaxed, supportive, relational approach to their teaching. While this approach is both laudable and necessary, a focus on caring to the detriment of learning could put pupils from similar backgrounds at risk of making 'their escape permanent' (Hargreaves, 2020, p. 813).

While it is true that a strong caring aspect and a desire to make a difference emerged as important motivators for many of these students in choosing a DEIS school for their placements, the central role of school choice as a form of protection from negative judgement and exposure, was a key finding in this study. If it proves the case that choice of school placement aligns mainly along class lines it will merely serve to widen the social and educational divide and do little in terms of social inclusion for students in ITE from

disadvantaged backgrounds. A small group of five students chose to do one of their school placements in a fee-charging school and the next section looks at their experiences.

7.7.2 School Placement in Fee-Charging Schools

All five students who opted to do a school placement in a fee-charging school had completed their undergraduate degrees in Southside University and had already experienced what it was like to be social and cultural outsiders on middle-class territory, experiences which were further consolidated on their school placements. The students spoke of the stark contrast between their own backgrounds and the world of privilege in which they now found themselves. Once more, the study reveals that teaching in these most middle-class of schools served to accentuate and expose the differences between the students and those with whom they came in contact with in the schools: their colleagues, their pupils and the parents. The students again articulated their sense of being out of place and not belonging in this world. The students' narratives revealed the many ways in which they felt that they were not only outsiders but were somehow occupying a less valued position than their middle-classes peers. Their fragile learner identities showed in many students' low levels of teacher efficacy in their academic abilities (Ross, 2013), particularly in an environment where success was often seen in terms of academic achievement (Lareau, 2011). Some in the group expressed fears that their social backgrounds would be blamed if their pupils did not achieve academically, thus feeling under pressure to prove themselves as competent teachers in an environment where, as one student commented, examination results can become conflated with a pupil's worth as a human being, and by implication, the 'worth' of their teacher.

The synchronicity of habitus between the middle-class teaching staff and their pupils (Bourdieu, 1984), was revealed as accentuating the disadvantaged students' sense of difference and lack of alignment with staff and pupils. The findings showed how educational and social

differences continued in this new environment. The connection between privilege, educational advantage and inequality was evident in the story of one student who resorted to googling the meaning of some of the words used by the twelve-year-old pupils in her English class, reinforcing her sense of difference as deficit. Two of the five students who undertook their placements in these fee-charging schools had attended DEIS schools and had identifiable working-class accents. These students spoke of parents and students asking personal questions about their background, and in one case, their qualifications, which was experienced as both uncomfortable and exposing, with overtones of a certain power differential in operation (Bourdieu, 1996).

The study revealed that there were greater social differences and challenges, and more class boundaries to cross for the two students who had attended DEIS schools as children. However, regardless of where the students did their placements, they both identified and were identified as different and some of those familiar markers are discussed in the next part of this chapter.

7.7.3 Accent and Difference on School Placement

The findings demonstrated the many ways in which past markers of difference continued to play a role in positioning these students as outsiders in the middle-class world of education. Past experiences of 'placing' questions and the hierarchical overtones associated with where they lived or went to school, were often experienced as both a judgement and a diminishing of who the students felt they were. However, the study revealed the key role of both accent and dress as identifiers of social difference and their roles in placing many of the students as outsiders on their placements. There was a strong emotional impact in feeling the judgement associated with their accent and how they spoke. Teaching in a DEIS school was again seen to provide some protection as the students' accents reflected those of the pupils they

were teaching, and were perceived by many students as an advantage in connecting the students with their pupils. Teaching in a fee-charging school was more exposing as one student found when her pronunciation was corrected by some of her twelve-year-old pupils.

Regardless of school type, staffrooms were found to be more challenging to navigate in terms of accent and the stories of many students showed how they adapted how they spoke as a means of being more accepted on this middle-class territory. Underpinning many of these narratives was the role that the students felt their accent played in differentiating them professionally from other teachers, with implications of a value judgement. Accent was seen to play a role for many students in a perceived hierarchical ranking of people, and was experienced as often conflated with value, worth and professionalism, so that many of these students did not feel that they had the same parity of esteem and were not 'real' teachers in the same way as their more privileged colleagues. The findings in terms of 'dress' and the similar role that 'dress' played in the narratives of the students are now explored.

7.7.4 Dress and Difference on School Placement

The study also shed an important and interesting light on the role of dress in contributing to the stress and challenges many of the students faced on their school placements, regardless of whether the schools were fee-charging or DEIS. Differences in cultural and financial capital were seen to contribute to much of the stress the students spoke of. What their stories revealed was the tacit acceptance in schools of a middle-class norm in terms of dress, and that dressing professionally was often a substitute for reflecting a middle-class culture and history of what exactly it means to be a teacher (Maguire, 1999). The findings revealed that the students' lack of cultural capital contributed to their lack of understanding of the often-hidden cultural rules of a school placement (Yuan and Lee, 2016) or the 'rulebook' that pertains in schools in terms of how to dress (Bourdieu, 1984). Many students in the group explained

how they turned to Google and ‘teacher outfits’ before they started their placements. The emotional fallout of this lack of access to the cultural middle-class norms of school dress-codes was seen in the story of one student who wore shorts on her school placement and was sent home by the principal, an experience that was deeply shaming and humiliating for the student.

The shame and fear of being judged as unprofessional was seen to permeate many of the students’ narratives. Insensitive comments from some staff members and pupils about wearing the same outfits on several occasions were revealed as deeply upsetting for those students, several of whom resorted to ‘rotating’ their outfits, with one student keeping a log of what she wore and when. Lack of financial capital compound the challenges the students faced, adding to the guilt, shame and frustration many already felt (Reay, 2017). An interesting finding was the role of dress in acting as a symbolic barrier to belonging, with many of the students’ narratives identifying the shirt and tie dress code of many middle-class schools with ‘middle-classness’ and power, accentuating their sense of not belonging and of being outsiders in these environments.

In the marketized world of many middle-class schools, where dress code can be used to reflect a school’s image (Maguire, 1999), different cultural understandings of dress can have implications in terms of career, excluding students like many in this cohort. Given their desire to become teachers, being positioned as outsiders personally and professionally, and perceiving that they were being judged for somehow falling short of middle-class norms, was deeply felt by these students, with had important implications for their identities as teachers. The next section looks at the importance of relationships in the staffroom for these students.

7.7.5 Staffrooms

Revealed in the findings of this study are the many ways that the students’ backgrounds and life experiences and, in particular, their different cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), served

to position them as outsiders on the middle-class territory of their school placements, and to reinforce their sense of always coming from behind academically, socially, and culturally, relative to the middle-class norms. Coming from different backgrounds was experienced as exclusionary by many of the students (Maguire, 2005), and many spoke of how challenging and tricky it was for them navigating the staffroom. The emotional cost of many of the students' outsider status in the staffroom reaffirmed how deeply emotions are embedded both in relationships and social contexts (Zemlylas, 2005).

The importance of collegial relationships was highlighted in all of the students' narratives, and the less valued and the more different the students felt both personally and as teachers in the staffroom, the more it impacted on their emotional well-being (Hastings, 2010). Some students spoke of the emotional impact of often being deliberately excluded by some of their colleagues in the staffroom. Stories were told of greeting teachers who never replied, of attempting to join in conversations and being excluded, or of being rebuffed when attempting to join others at a table. Isolated, alienated, and feeling that they lacked parity of esteem in the eyes of their teaching colleagues, served to reinforce the students' sense of not belonging in the staffroom.

Feeling that they were not wanted, some students chose to self-exclude from mixing with their colleagues as a protective strategy, while others remained on the periphery, thus depriving many of these students from accessing the practical, advisory and emotional support of these important social networks that are so necessary for fledgling teachers and their sense of belonging. The intersectionality of social class and religious differences compounded one student's sense of isolation and lack of belonging to such an extent that they questioned whether they could or should continue on the programme. In many ways, the staffroom was seen to act as microcosm of wider societal hierarchies and divisions, with many students paying a high price for being cultural and social outsiders (Reay, 2017). Feeling that they were not welcomed

and did not belong in the same way as their middle-class colleagues also deprived the students from the emotional comfort and safety that comes with friendship. However, lurking in the background was an understanding, articulated by a few who did their placements in fee-charging schools, that as with dress code, fitting in with the culture of a school could serve as a measure of suitability in terms of career. In addition, the protective strategy of self-excluding from mixing with their colleagues also served to distance some of the students from their new, more 'middle-class', professional identity, which some found uncomfortable to carry.

7.7.6 Teacher Identities

Emotions and identity are inextricably linked (Zembylas, 2003). How the emotional experiences of student teachers during their teacher education shapes their teacher identities is still underexplored (Yuan and Lee, 2016), and this study provides important information to redress this gap. What is known is that being seen as a 'certain kind of person' is central to teacher identity (Gee, 2000), and that how student teachers see themselves provides a rubric for how to be, act, and understand where they stand in society (Sachs, 2005). The findings of this study showed that many students were deprived of that important sense of belonging, acceptance and equality of esteem in the eyes of their colleagues that is essential in forming a positive professional teacher identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Hargreaves, 1998; 2002; 2001). Their school placements provided important insights into the emotional experiences of how students from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced their 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1927/1996), and it was in discussing their emotions that the importance of the internal in making sense of what it means to be a teacher, was highlighted (Timostuk and Ugaste, 2012). The students' stories revealed the essential nature of the relational in fostering teacher identities (Hargreaves, 1998), and how collegial relationships are core to a sense of well-being for all teachers (Shapiro, 2010). But, as this study shows, feeling a sense of

belonging and fitting in with teaching colleagues is of particular relevance for students, like the ones in this study, many of whom already felt marginalised and a deep sense of what Reay (1998) termed 'working-class inferiority that comes from seeing ourselves through middle-class eyes' (p. 435).

Despite their obvious educational success in participating in or completing a level 9 post-graduate degree, the experience of social class for the majority of students in this study was one of *'class as struggle'* (Tyler, 2015, p. 508, italics author's own). Social class bubbled under the surface for the majority of the students on their school placements, often experienced as classed practices and unacknowledged by those who practised them (Holloway, 1997). A constant in their stories was the dominance of middle-class norms and judgements of what was acceptable and what was not (Skeggs, 1997b). The students' struggles were revealed in the emotional challenges that underpinned so many of the students' stories, evident in the feelings of shame, hurt, and fear, that many articulated for the first time. These powerful feelings are found where the teacher and their professional identity intersect (Day and Leitch, 2001), illustrating how teachers' personal histories play a key role in forming their teacher identities, and how these teacher identities were all the more insecure as a result of the students' experiences.

The next section looks at some of the ways that the students found of navigating these challenges.

7.7.7 Navigating School Placements

At every stage of their educational journey, the stories of these students showed the effort, energy and emotional cost of trying to survive in these middle-class environments. The students' experiences on their school placements were no different. The study revealed that the students adopted several strategies in order to protect themselves (Maguire, 2005b). One

strategy, identified in the previous section, showed the students choosing a school placement that aligned with their own class background in the belief that this would offer more protection for their fragile learner identities and expose them less to the negative judgements of others. The consequence of these self-imposed boundaries on their choice of school placement was to limit their 'teaching territory', narrow the scope of their professional teaching experience, and consolidate and reproduce wider societal inequalities.

The study highlighted the deep emotional component involved in the work of navigating the different social and cultural challenges that many of the students faced on their school placements. A key survival strategy that many students adopted involved both changing and hiding who they were, with many becoming chameleons in order to fit in (Keane, 2023), reflecting some of some of the 'painful processes' of cultural assimilation that the students' stories revealed (Waterfield et al., 2019, p. 386). Conscious of having a cultural capital that was perceived to be of less value, and fearful of being 'found out' as deficient in some way, many students were seen to alter and adapt their 'physical presence' (Lehmann, 2012, p. 7). The students' narratives provided important insights into some of the ways the students altered who they were in order to be more acceptable by the middle classes (Thein, Guise and Sloan, 2012). Several students use the word 'chameleon' to explain how they changed the way they spoke, their accents, how they dressed and behaved in an attempt to belong and be accepted on their placements, an approach that was underpinned by a belief that they could or would only be acceptable if 'modelled on the image of someone else' (Allen, 2014, p. 765), which in many ways turned out to be proxy for becoming more 'middle class' (Lampert et al., 2016).

At the core of the students' stories lay beliefs that they were not 'good enough' and that acceptance by others was only possible if they altered who they were and became more 'like the other'. These beliefs were seen to reinforce the students' feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and a sense of difference as deficit. Unlike the middle-class students who merely had to

maintain the status quo, many of the students in this cohort had to dampen down important parts of who they were in exchange for fitting in. Several students spoke of assuming a 'façade' or 'moulding a personality' in order to fit or blend in. There were echoes in the findings of Hochschild's (1983, p. 7) 'emotional labour' evident in the students' efforts to assume an outward demeanour that was more pleasing to those around them but which masked their inner struggles.

Having found a way of coping on their placements, many students now found themselves in the uncomfortable of position of being caught between two worlds and not belonging in either.

7.7.8 Between Two Worlds

Becoming post-primary teachers may have been the goal of each one of these students but it was not to be their final destination. The general discourse around moving from a less privileged world into a professional middle-class world is usually presented in positive terms (Friedman, 2016), but the narratives of many of the students in this study revealed the high cost of this movement. If we are to have any understanding of what ITE means for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, then acknowledging the psychic cost of becoming 'successfully educated' is essential. The students' stories shed an uncomfortable light on a new reality for many that, just as they were positioned as outsiders on middle-class territory throughout their education, as teachers they now found themselves positioned similarly, and were just as different, just as judged by many of those who were once closest to them but this time on their home territory. The 'working-class gaze' had now replaced Skeggs and Loveday's 'middle-class gaze' (2012, p. 487).

There were echoes for many students of their earlier, often painful educational struggles to find their place among the middle classes but this time there was a deep psychic

price to be paid for losing the security, safety and comfort of a place where they had once belonged. The students' stories spoke of the disorientation of finding that becoming 'educated' now served to separate and segregate them from those closest to them, with huge implications in terms of the students' sense of who they now were (Friedman, 2016) on what was once their home territory. Many students now found that they were 'living class as a conflicted identity' (Ingram, 2011, p. 301), with many attempting to straddle two different worlds and experiencing the 'habitus tug' of being pulled in two opposing directions (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31). At the core of the students' stories was a profound ontological question that centred on who they now were in the world, underpinned by an understanding for many that there would be no comfort found in whatever choice they made (Waterfield et al., 2019).

7.7.8.1 *Reconciling a New Reality*

The students' stories revealed the challenge of reconciling the privilege of their new professional positioning with the feeling that those left behind were now somehow 'less equal' (Reay, 2017, p. 116). The findings showed that by ascending the educational ladder and becoming teachers, the students had experienced a deep sense of betrayal in leaving those close to them behind (Lee and Kramer, 2013). The painful feelings that many of the students had experienced when 'facing upwards' on their educational trajectory were now equalled by the feelings of guilt as they faced downwards (Friedman, 2016, p.144). There was also a loss experienced by many students in being once again positioned as different to the norm.

Being successful professionally was experienced by many of the students almost as a form of 'transgression' (Reay, 2017, p. 108), and a sense that teaching positioned them as in some way joining the ranks of those who were once their oppressors (Waterfield et al., 2019). On their home ground, the very act of becoming a teacher was seen to position many of these students as 'other', creating barriers amongst family and friends. The findings showed that

becoming a teacher involved much loss for these students, particularly their sense of comfort and belonging with their own tribe.

There were psychic challenges in the stories the students told of what it means to be a student in ITE from a disadvantaged background Many students found themselves in the challenging position of trying to manage two different sets of cultural and social affiliations (Sennett and Cobb, 1972), while also risking finding themselves in the psychological painful position of 'never finding a place to belong' (Reay, 2017, p. 116).

7.7.8.2 *Navigating Home Territory*

There was a sad circularity in many of the students' stories of their navigating experiences on the road to becoming post-primary teachers. Belonging in any world was seen to be dependent on changing who they were. Just as the students had to hide and alter who they were on the 'way up', they equally had to hide and adapt their new selves in order to be more acceptable on home territory. Conscious of their new privileged position and sensitive to the feelings of family and friends, the students revealed that, once again, they changed the way they spoke, this time 'dampening down' their hard-earned linguistic skills. Few of these students could just 'be' in either world and the constant effort required to navigate this new home territory was seen to require an enormous amount of 'mental work' (Friedman, 2016, p. 145). The findings showed that for some students the effort required was so great at home, and the fear of being judged by family so strong, that they adopted the same strategy they had used throughout their education and chose to remain silent.

The reality of what it actually means to be a student in ITE from a disadvantaged background came through in each student's narrative and was facilitated by a hermeneutical approach, guided by Heidegger's attention to what it means to 'be in the world' (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). To 'be' in this particular world of teaching for many of these students was seen to involve

paying the price of ‘double isolation’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 107), of being culturally homeless in two worlds and not belonging in either. As before, the findings showed that it was only by finding others like themselves, ‘veterans’ who had been through similar challenges, that the students felt any sense of affiliation. Just as the students had experienced being ‘outsiders on the inside’ in the middle-class world of higher education (Reay, 2017, p. 117), many now discovered that they were still positioned as ‘outsiders on the inside’, but this time in their own homes and among their friends and community. Behind the facts and figures of what educational ‘success’ looks like for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lies the reality of what it actually means to be a student in ITE from such a background. Hand-in-hand with their achievement lay the reality of the students’ struggles, which were often accompanied by a profound loss that is rarely acknowledged, no matter how much the goal of becoming a teacher was desired.

The limitations, implications and recommendations of this study are now discussed, before moving on the concluding remarks.

7.8 Limitations

- The use of a single interviewer, alongside the hermeneutic approach undertaken in the study, made data collection and analysis subjective, a factor that was acknowledged as part of the reflexive thematic analysis.
- The findings of this study are restricted to students in ITE in one particular university.
- The specific context of the study, the subjectivity of the researcher, and the particular cohort of students involved in the generation of understanding means that the findings are not generalisable to a wider population.

7.9 Recommendations

Teacher Education: Management

- Greater investment is needed to fund diversity initiatives in initial teacher education.
- More streamlined and targeted financial supports for all student teachers from non-traditional social backgrounds are necessary in order to facilitate the full participation and engagement of this cohort in ITE.
- Funding is also important for the ongoing professional development of teacher educators, particularly tutors and supervisors (Dolan, 2014), with a strong mentoring-component focus (Walsh and Dolan, 2019).
- Given the importance of peer support for students from low socio-economic backgrounds in ITE (Keane et all., 2022), investment is needed to support a mentoring initiative for PME 2 students from similar backgrounds to act as 'buddies' for PME 1 students starting the programme.
- Investment should be made in the creation of a supplementary teaching support programme in all ITE providers, with a designated person available to support those students most in need.

Teacher Education: Policy

- Support for student teachers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds should be based on a coherent, integrated continuum, connecting different phases of support together. This could involve, for example, collaborative practice between schools, Access programmes, Higher Education Institutions, ITE providers, the PATH initiative, Droichead (the national induction programme for newly qualified teachers), and ongoing teacher CPD.

- A database should be created within and across all ITE providers with a view to providing core information on, among others, the numbers of students from minority backgrounds in ITE; their retention and progression; and their school placements.
- The importance of facilitating student personal development and well-being in ITE programmes (Teaching Council, 2020) should be foregrounded for all teacher educators, with a view to creating a positive learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Teacher educators should be supported to engage positively with the challenges of a growing number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE.

Teacher Education: Curriculum

- Given the pervasive influence of social class on the lived experiences of all students in ITE, and its key role in shaping teacher identities, the impact of social class should be made more visible across ITE curricula.
- In line with the integration and diversity aspect of programme content as outlined by The Teaching Council (2020), the centrality of the 'social context of practice in classrooms and schools' (p. 12) should be highlighted, where relevant, across several teaching modules in ITE.
- First person narratives of students' experiences of social class in ITE and in the classroom should be considered for inclusion in the curriculum.

Teacher Education: Leadership

- Initiating, cultivating and developing opportunities for open professional discussions on the centrality of social class in all students' experiences of ITE.
- Providing for the development of the necessary professional knowledge and pedagogical skills to support students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in ITE should be of particular relevance for tutors and supervisors.

- Student teachers are also leaders and space should be made for a bottom-up approach in teacher education policy for student voice, particularly for those voices which often go unheard.

Teacher Education: Pedagogy

- Teaching for and within social diversity should be the concern of all teacher educators. All teacher educators should be supported in understanding the different challenges that many students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds face in ITE. More formal support for the professional development of teacher educators (Dolan and Kenny, 2014) should be considered.
- Understanding the different ways that social class impacts on student teachers' learning and teaching can act as a guide in instructional refinement of language, for example, and an awareness of possible academic gaps in student understanding.
- Teacher educators should be encouraged to examine their own unconscious biases, assumptions and attitudes to students from diverse social backgrounds, and how these may inform and impact their teaching.

Teacher Education: School Placement

- The Teaching Council has stated that the development of 'quality school placement experiences is of particular importance' (2020, p.7). With this in mind, more formal supports should be put in place in all schools to aid the integration of student teachers on their school placement. The aim should be to include and value all student teachers on their school placements, regardless of social class.
- Understanding the challenges that many student teachers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds face in negotiating their outsider status on their school placement should be highlighted for all educators in schools and on ITE programmes.

- In line with Teaching council policy, all students in ITE should be encouraged, in as far as is practicable, to experience social diversity on their school placements in an attempt to avoid the reproduction of social class segregation.
- A review of ITE and school placement practices and policies with a view to exploring how students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds can best be supported, should be initiated.

Recommendations for Further Research

- To better understand the implications of the findings from this study, future studies could explore whether the professional career trajectories of this cohort of teachers, and others from similar backgrounds, continue to align on social class lines.
- The experiences of students from socio-economically disadvantaged students in other faculties and schools in the university should be explored to see if similar experiences pertain.
- How social class intersects with gender, race, or LGBT+, could also provide further insights into the experiences of non-traditional groups in ITE.

7.10 Conclusion

Reay makes the point (Reay, 2022, p. 437), that if schools are overly concerned with economic motives and rankings, then attention could be 'taken away from teaching, relationships, caring and all the other immeasurable aspects of school life that help improve not only performances in the narrowest sense but experience in the broadest sense'. Can the same not be said of universities? Placing the student at the core of what is valued in universities would necessitate 'creating new knowledges and understandings of how to care, and how to think with care' (Lynch, 2022, p. 212). Widening participation in teacher education is not just about getting more disadvantaged students into teaching. If we are serious about inclusion and

diversity in our teaching populations then we also need to give time and consideration to how social class is lived and experienced for our student teachers. It was Engstrom and Tinto (2008), who stated that 'access without support is not opportunity' (p. 46), and this study suggests that providing the support necessary for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is only possible if we *understand* what it means to be one of these students. There is also the 'haunting presence' (Reay, 2017, p. 175) of those who never made it as far as ITE but who also had hopes and dreams of becoming teachers. The stories of other students from similar backgrounds are still to be written. There has to be the hope that doing things differently in the future will ensure that those who are underrepresented in our universities are not made to feel like outsiders or feel the need to hide who they are in order to achieve the same legitimacy as their middle-class peers.

This study set out to understand what it was like to be a student from a disadvantaged background in ITE, how the students navigated their way through, and the role of their past educational histories in shaping their experiences of ITE. Despite the obstacles they encountered along the way, all of the students in this study graduated as post-primary teachers, making their stories ones of indisputable success in many ways. It would be naïve, however, to think that their achievement came without a cost. All of the students paid a price, some more than others. Paulo Freire (1970) saw education as fulfilling either a restrictive or a democratic function within society. For many of the students in this study, their experiences of education were restrictive and exclusionary. It is impossible to separate the experiences of the students from the world in which they lived (Heidegger, 1927/1996), and the findings reveal the many ways in which the process of becoming a teacher was shaped by the students' social class and past histories. All were deeply aware of their differences in the privileged surroundings of higher and post-graduate education, and the majority felt their social, academic and cultural differences as deficits. Many struggled to cope in an environment that they felt was not theirs

and where they did not belong. Others lost closeness with family, friends, and community. Many found themselves in no-man's land, unable to go back, and faced with future challenges, as yet unnamed. But each student found a way of navigating these challenges and achieving their goal. Not one of these students spoke of regrets. Not one said that they were sorry that they had embarked on this educational journey. Despite the cost, all spoke of their delight in becoming teachers. If we truly want to diversify our teaching population, honouring those who come in from a non-traditional social background involves not only celebrating their achievements, but also acknowledging the price they have paid. Asking those who have already sacrificed so much in order to access higher education to pay an even higher price if they wish to become teachers, is not merely unfair but serves to perpetuate the cycle of inequity.

By adopting a phenomenological point of view in this research, I was acknowledging a deep concern with people and how they make sense of their lived experiences (van Manen, 2016). Hermeneutics allowed me to understand what Gadamer (1992) called 'the justice, the truth' of others and their position (p.152), and to make that visible. Heidegger (1976) maintains that 'we come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think', and goes on to say that if we are to succeed in this endeavour 'we must be ready to learn thinking' (p. 3). I would like to think that this study has helped me to 'learn thinking'. By its very nature, all research is in some way incomplete, but my purpose in embarking on this research was to put forward the best possible understanding of what it was like to be a student in ITE from a disadvantaged background. A safe space was provided for the students to open the cases they were carrying and allow me to shed a light on what was inside. The position these students had in society often determined whether they could speak or be silent. The hardest thing for those who have 'learned silence through shame' is to 'find a voice' (Kuhn, 1995, p. 103). My sincere hope is that this study has done some justice to those who have entrusted me with their stories, and that those voices that have been silenced for so long can now finally be heard.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Introductory Email

Introduction

My name is Ro Aitken and I am currently undertaking doctoral research in the School of Education in UCD in the area of disadvantaged PME students on the Professional Masters in Education (PME).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore, understand, and give voice to the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the PME. The majority of students in Initial Teacher Education are from middle-class backgrounds, and so the experiences and views of under-represented groups are of value and need to be heard. This research aims to explore, among other things, how you experienced and navigated your social background on the PME; the possible challenges and supports you encountered while a student on the PME; and your motivation for going on to higher education.

Who can participate?

You are invited to participate in this research if for example, you were a PME student who attended a DEIS school; or were in receipt of a SUSI grant or similar; or who came in through an Access route like HEAR or similar; or who came from a disadvantaged background.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you agree to participate in this aspect of the study, it will involve participating in two semi-structured individual interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes, at a time that is convenient for you. They will take place on two separate occasions during the year:

1.November/December

2. April/May

- The interviews will take place online for semester 1 and will then be reviewed.
- Your written consent will be obtained before each interview.

Will my privacy be protected?

You will be assigned a pseudonym and all interview data will have personal identifiers permanently removed. The deidentified data will be stored on a password-protected computer. This study is compliant with UCD Ethics Policy: **Reference number: HS-E-20-35-Aitken-Harford Exemption.**

If I agree to take part, can I change my mind later?

Participation is voluntary and all participants can withdraw at any point in the process without any penalty, up until the researcher is writing up her research (end of November, 2020).

How will the data be used?

The data collected will be used in the completion of a PhD on the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the PME. The findings may also be used to form the basis of a research article which may be published in an academic journal. There will be no identifying information included in any such research paper.

What are the benefits of taking part?

While there are no additional personal benefits for participating in this study, there are many potential benefits for the students from similar backgrounds who come after you on teacher education programmes. There are also no known risks for taking part in the study or negative consequences if you decide not to participate.

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent Form for participation in a one-to-one interview

- I confirm that I have read and understand the Interview Participant Information Sheet.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there will be no negative consequences if I decide not to participate in the study.

- I understand that the interviews will last for 60 minutes approximately and will be conducted online at a time that is convenient for me. I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that data from my interview can be withdrawn up until the researcher is writing up the research i.e. November 30th 2020.

- I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and anonymised.

- I agree that the data collected can be used in completion of a PhD which gives voice to the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the Professional Masters in Education, and that it may be also contribute to research papers published in an academic journal.

Please tick:

I agree to take part in this study by participating in an interview.

Participant's signature:

Researcher's signature:

Appendix 3: Interview Participation Information Sheet: Interviews 1 and 2: November/December 2020; April/May 2021

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. The most important part of this study is your voice. The following information was included in an earlier email that you received on September 12th, inviting you to participate. I am so glad that you accepted my invitation.

Introduction

My name is Ro Aitken and I am currently undertaking doctoral research in the School of Education in UCD in the area of disadvantaged PME students on the Professional Masters in Education (PME).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore, understand and give voice to the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the PME. The majority of students in Initial Teacher Education are from middle-class backgrounds, and so the experiences and views of under-represented groups are of value and need to be heard. This research aims to explore, among other things, how you experience (d) and navigate(d) your social background on the PME; your motivation for going on to higher education; and the possible challenges or supports you may encounter while on the PME.

If you agree to participate in this aspect of the study, it will involve participating in two semi-structured individual interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes, at a time that is convenient for you. They will take place on two separate occasions during the year:

1.November/December

2. April/May

- The interviews will take place online for semester 1 and will then be reviewed.
- Your written consent will be obtained before each interview.

Will my privacy be protected?

You will be assigned a pseudonym and all interview data will have personal identifiers permanently removed. The deidentified data will be stored on a password-protected computer. This study is compliant with UCD Ethics Policy: **Reference number: HS-E-20-35-Aitken-Harford Exemption.**

If I agree to take part, can I change my mind later?

Participation is voluntary and all participants can withdraw at any point in the process without any penalty, up until the researcher is writing up their research.

How will the data be used?

The data collected will be used in the completion of a PhD on the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds on the PME. The findings may also be used to form the basis of a research article which may be published in an academic journal. There will be no identifying information included in any such research paper.

What are the benefits of taking part?

While there are no additional personal benefits for participating in this study, there are many potential benefits for the students from similar backgrounds who come after you

on teacher education programmes. There are also no known risks for taking part in the study or negative consequences if you decide not to participate.

Further Information

As the researcher works on the PME programme, care will be taken to ensure that participants will not attend the researcher's tutorials or be supervised or assessed by the researcher in any capacity.

To those of you who have agreed to participate, my heartfelt thanks.

Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions

INTERVIEW 1

(a) Contextual Questions:

- Are you in PME 1, PME 2 or have you just competed the PME?
- Was your primary school single sex or mixed?
- Was your primary school fee-charging or non-fee-charging?
- Was your primary school DEIS or non-DEIS?
- What type of school did you attend for your post-primary education?
- Was your post-primary school single sex or mixed?
- Was your post-primary school fee-charging or non-fee-charging?
- Was your post-primary school DEIS or non-DEIS?
- In terms of your parents' education, do you know what age their formal schooling finished?
- In terms of your parents' education, do you know what their highest educational qualification was?

(b) Further Questions

- Can you tell me about your experiences in primary school?
- Can you tell me about your experiences in post-primary school?
- Can you tell me about your experiences on the PME?

INTERVIEW 2

(a) Can you tell me about your experiences on the PME?

(b) Can you tell me about your experiences on your school placement?

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