Literacy Learning Care: Exploring the roles of care in literacy learning with survivors of abuse in Irish Industrial Schools

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Abstract

The links between literacy and care have received little attention. A general neglect of the affective domain in the academe is strongly echoed in traditional analyses of unmet adult literacy needs where economic causes and consequences dominate debates. The findings from a study of people who are survivors of institutional abuse and neglect suggest that the affective poverty that results from care inequalities has a major adverse influence on the learning of literacy and all the relationships that literacy should subsequently facilitate. Despite its lifelong impact, educational disadvantage can be overshadowed by more shocking aspects of abuse. Recognising the complex nature of literacy learning care may open up a new perspective on the environment in which literacy can flourish and on where responsibility lies to ensure equal access to those fertile surroundings.

Introduction

This paper describes the process and findings of a three-year ethnographic case study into the role of care in the learning of literacy. In the general field of education, the role of the emotions has only begun to be explored in depth in the recent past. Theoretical and empirical work has focussed on a range of issues such as: care and the school curriculum (Cohen, 2006, McClave, 2005), teachers' emotional labour (Hargreaves, 2000, 2001), the role of the affective domain in educational ideology (Lynch et al, 2007), a school ethic of care (Noddings, 1992, 2006, 2007) and mothers' care labour in children's education (O'Brien, 2005, 2007, Reay, 2000). Here, in research carried out with survivors of institutional abuse in Irish industrial schools the approach takes a new turn towards the field of adult literacy. In particular, the perspective moves from that of the teacher or parent as caregiver to the experience of the learner as a care recipient in a learning relationship.

The paper begins by describing the research design and methodology and outlining the current context in which survivors of institutional abuse participate in adult learning. Based on empirical findings, four types of learning care are described. They are primary, secondary and tertiary learning care relations and a fourth enabling duty of care, which is the care provided by the state. The paper concludes that this understanding of the pivotal role of care in learning literacy may contribute to our understanding of persistent high levels of unmet literacy needs and of low participation in adult literacy provision.

A relational method of inquiry

The research set out to explore the role played by affective aspects of equality in the learning of literacy. Both design and methodology required careful consideration and lengthy preparation because both literacy and care are sensitive areas not readily opened up to outsiders. After an exploratory period of working as a literacy tutor with a number of adult groups who had unmet literacy needs, the Lighthouse Centre for adult survivors of institutional abuse in industrial schools became the ethnographic research site.

The ex-residents of care institutions emerged as the most appropriate partners for a number of reasons. Although survivors were actually resident in state educational establishments they left with a higher proportion of unmet literacy needs than did their contemporaries in wider society (Government of Ireland, 1970; Raftery and O'Sullivan, 1999). In this, and in their experience of care, they were therefore extreme or critical cases that Patton (1980) cites as useful in that they point up issues of wider concern.

The study sample, aged between 40 and 65, reflected the mainstream grouping involved in adult literacy (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2006). At the same time, the diverse nature of the community made it possible to explore the experience of both those with met and unmet literacy needs coming from a comparable learning and care environment.

The cohesive nature of the community meant that the process of gathering data was not only less intrusive than with other groups but actually contributed to a wider, emancipatory process of reflection and dialogue within the Centre. The solitary nature of the group also provided a supportive base for participants who might potentially have been upset by revisiting the detail of a painful past.

Most significantly, the primary care role of the state in the research participants' childhood removed the usual distraction of family deficit discourse and allowed the pivotal state duties to care and to educate, to emerge untrammeled (Hillyard et al, 2004).

In total, twenty-eight survivors took part in semi-structured interviews and a series of follow-up, feedback focus groups. The research sample was purposefully selected to be representative of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and learning disability and snowballing identified potential participants. It was decided also to sample in terms of literacy status on leaving school so that comparison could be made between those who had learned literacy while in care in industrial schools and those who had not. Of necessity this required detailed insider knowledge and cooperation.

The data was further validated through methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1997) involving ten in-depth interviews with tutors, counsellors, legal representatives and others working closely with survivors. Cohen et al (2000: 112) cite triangulation as a powerful means of 'demonstrating concurrent validity' in qualitative studies. Originally a navigational technique that used a number of markers to more accurately pinpoint a destination, triangulation analogously describes the use of a variety of methods and sources of data collection to confirm the validity and reliability of research data. This is particularly pertinent in ethnography where a single community is being studied and the possibility of collective memory exists Olick and Robbins, 1998.

The affective focus of the empirical study, and the sensitive nature of the research topic, led organically to a relational research method. An ethnographic approach allowed time to build respectful relationships of trust with the research partners and to review and consult throughout the process with community members (Barton et al, 2000, Carspecken and Apple, 1992, Edmondson, 2000, Pardoe, 2000). When adults become motivated to learn literacy, time becomes a significant imperative and adopting a practitioner research paradigm (Fowler and Mace, 2005) allowed this vital literacy work to proceed, and to ground the study throughout. It meant that the research agenda recognised and did not supersede the priorities of the research partners and my role within the community became one of reciprocal learner.

Irish industrial schools

The industrial school system in Ireland existed since the late nineteenth century with the remit of providing state care and education for children whose family life was judged as no longer viable. Although known to be exceptionally punitive, the schools were allowed to operate virtually without either challenge or sanction for almost one hundred years. In 1970, the Kennedy Report (Government of Ireland, 1970) was highly critical of the system and the decades that followed saw survivors speaking out about their experiences and the extent of their multiple abuses becoming public (Doyle, 1988, Fahy, 1999, Flynn, 2003, 2003a, Tyrrell, 2006). In 1999, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, admitted the awful reality of the repressive state care system and apologised to the survivors.

> On behalf of the State and all its citizens, the government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue… all children need love and security. Too many of our children were denied this love, care and security. Abuse ruined their childhoods and has been an ever present part of their adult lives reminding them of a time when they were helpless. I want to say to them that we believe that they were gravely wronged, and that we must do all we can now to overcome the lasting effects of their ordeals
>
> (An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, 11 May 1999 as cited in Health Board Executive, 2002)

The Taoiseach acknowledged the importance of affective factors in the lives of children and the detrimental impact of a loveless and careless childhood on later adult lives. An inquiry was instigated to hear evidence of abuses and make compensatory payments to victims. In June 2002, the State signed an Indemnity Agreement with eighteen of the religious congregations who, for their part, contributed 12.5 million to enable the establishment of an Education Fund for survivors and their families (www.educationfinanceboard.com). This was (implicit) recognition of the long-term, generational, harmful impact of affective and educational inequalities. The Lighthouse Centre was established by a group of survivors in 1999 to provide healing through adult learning opportunities and adult literacy is a core part of that work.

In 2009, the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse published its findings in five volumes known as the Ryan Report. Amongst its findings is a catalogue of

examples of educational disadvantage that were evidence of neglect in their own right and also the inevitable consequence of other deeply traumatising abuses.

Four types of learning care relationships

The term *learning* care was developed in the course of the research to denote the complex affective attitude and effort involved in enabling the acquisition of literacy. Activity in the affective domain has a dynamic influence throughout every aspect of our interdependent lives (Engster, 2005). In particular, learning care refers to the impact of care relationships on our capacity to absorb and retain new knowledge and skills. The process and outcome of literacy acts and events, and learning how to perform them, is almost always social and relational. Nevertheless, until recently, learning to read and write has been viewed as a purely cognitive matter (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). Conceptualisation of the affective domain, in general, has also moved beyond the field of psychology. Where psychologists were primarily concerned with individual behaviours, work in sociology and philosophy brings the added insight of the influence of culture, ethics and social structures (Nussbaum, 2001, Turner and Stets, 2005). The importance of recognising affective matters as an important part of how and what we learn is increasingly being recognised in other areas of education (Cohen, 2006, Lynch et al, 2007, Noddings, 1992, 2006, 2007). Here, the four types of learning care that this study has identified are proposed as a set of signposts for further reflection on how care, as praxis, might become transformative in literacy work.

The findings of this study have indicated a model of literacy learning care that builds on the work of Lynch (2007). She proposed a model of three concentric circles of care relations - primary, secondary and tertiary contexts where care is given and received. The history of survivors of institutional abuse is a stark reminder that not everyone in society benefits equally from care-giving. This in turn has a knock-on effect on all aspects of human development that care promotes and sustains, including literacy. The data suggest four discreet but interconnected sources of learning care, each of which has a contribution to make to literacy attainment.

1. The primary learning care relationships experienced within the family or alternative primary care centre.
2. Secondary learning care relationships in school and adult learning centers.
3. Solitary learning care experienced with peer learners and communities of interest.

4. State learning care describes the attentiveness given by the state to ensuring structural equality (equality of condition) across all the contexts that influence family, school and community capacity to support literacy learning.

Below, these four different types of learning care are explored from the survivors' perspective on how this care, or lack of it, impacted on literacy learning. The voices of survivors are prominent in the presentation of the findings

1. Primary learning care relationships

For most people, the 'natural' locus of learning care is undoubtedly the family or primary care centre, where nurturing relationships promote and model all aspects of human development, including literacy. For the twenty-eight participants in this research the main potential source of primary care was the industrial school although some had also early or intermittent opportunity for care with their family of origin or in foster care. Fifteen respondents left school with their literacy needs met or partially met. The remaining thirteen had attained little or no literacy.

In the majority of cases (87percent) of those who had either met or partially met literacy needs when leaving school, there was a discernible link with levels of consistency in primary care relationships. Only two of these fifteen had no recollection of either a home life or ongoing family contact during their time in residential care. Having some positive primary care was cited repeatedly as positively influencing literacy outcomes.

Similarly, of the thirteen who finished school with unmet literacy needs, eleven (85percent) had no family life or consistent family relationship while in care. Of the remaining two, one had an intellectual disability and the other went into care at the age of eight with virtually no prior school attendance. The conclusive trend in the data therefore was towards a strong link between some continuity of primary care and positive literacy outcomes.

The capacity of the respondents' families to offer care in the home was negatively influenced by extremes of poverty, the disrespect that comes from perceived moral inferiority and the powerlessness of those without privilege to challenge a rigidly authoritarian system. Where some degree of stability was possible in the home, and education valued and promoted, a positive experience of literacy could be traced back to an early age.

My life has been a pattern of in and out of care but I have very vivid memories of my life before I went, say when I was three or four…learning words at home with my mother… storytelling. And then when I did go to school we weren't allowed to eat until our homework was done. There is a bit of a perfectionist in me as well and maybe it's because I remember my mother always checking over our homework. You need that kind of approval. It is a kind of a nurturing thing you know? *Carol, woman aged 50 years who left school with met literacy needs*

The quality of primary care was significant. Liam is 42 now and also moved in and out of care as a child. He lived at home consistently until he was three and although he had a number of siblings he always felt alone. His father was violent and his parents eventually split up after a stormy relationship to which he attributes his unmet literacy needs.

It would be very hard to learn if you feel that nobody cares about you. You are bound to build that wall and make sure that nobody gets in - because that was my little nest where nobody could touch me. To me it is like I was deaf. I couldn't hear anybody. I blocked people out and didn't want to have anyone coming near me because I had never had someone caring about me. I can't remember hearing me Ma or Da saying loving things to me or showing me love. *Liam, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Once inside the institution, and often far from any familiar surroundings, there was no provision for nurturing relationships that might compensate for family absence. Girls as young as twelve, who were resident in the institution and struggling to balance care and domestic duties with their own school work, looked after babies and small children. This was drudgery rather than care labour and they had neither the time nor the skill to encourage language or literacy development. Many had no literacy themselves.

Respondents' narratives describe the antithesis of affection. Authoritarianism and regimentation was the pervasive order of the day in a culture where children were identified with the perceived failings of their family. The goal of industrial schools was control and the production of docile, obedient manual and domestic labourers for deployment in religious enterprises or in wealthy families who required servants.

Those who were sustained in any affective family framework could be encouraged and motivated by that relationship or even the memory of it. Kevin had been at home until he was seven and could clearly name the role of primary care relationships in learning.

The way I look at it is that some people did well because they were connected with their families outside. They had their families to support them. They were able to concentrate better. Their thinking was different. People that did well at the school had their families looking after them. *Kevin, man aged 56 years who left school with partially met literacy needs*

The motivation and impetus to learn literacy emerged, for most of those who were successful learners in the study (80percent), from supportive and loving relationships and the desire to satisfy family expectations, even in circumstances of extreme hardship. Conversely, the absence of a primary care figure was seen to be a decisive negative factor. Those whose families were unable to keep them were passed on to those for whom care and learning care was work rather than love labour. In the industrial school system, abandonment and excessive discipline eclipsed care in children's lives. Even in later, more lenient regimes, discontinuity of staff meant that no single care figure existed with whom children could identify.

If a child comes from a family where there is lots of love and encouragement the child will reach their potential. But for someone like me who was brought up in a children's home, it is kind of even dodgier - because they have a family still (pause) their own biological family but then they have so many other people all over the years that have input in their lives, but who have walked away. Bob, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs

As adults, and often as parents and grandparents, survivors come to realise the centrality of care labour and to resent the irreplaceable lack of it in their early lives. For Jane, even the success of her own children and grandchildren is tinged with regret for her own lack of primary learning care and lost opportunity.

Well I think it is very different for my granddaughter. When she picked up a book and was able to read it, I was so happy. You know? And it also made me feel (breaks down crying) what I would have been… with a normal (pause) let us put it this way. That is the kind of family I would have liked to come from. *Jane, woman aged 57 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Any form of affectivity was discouraged in industrial schools and in the sphere of love labour it seemed as if an anti-relational ethos was pursued. In their critique of the industrial school system both the Kennedy Committee and the Compensatory Advisory Committee to the DES (2002) noted the dearth of personal relationships available to children. They observed the negative impact this had on all aspects of development, including learning opportunities.

> Research has shown that a most important factor in childhood and later development is the quality and quantity of personal relationships available to the child… The child who has not experienced good personal relationships will, in time, be lacking in emotional, social and intellectual stability and development.
>
> (Government of Ireland, 1970: 12)

Without such recognition of the pivotal role of affection, the anti-relational ethos pervaded the industrial school in every aspect. A Centre worker summarised her impressions of the narratives she has heard.

> The whole thing was separation though. You were separated from your family. The beds were separated. There was no touching and that was the whole ethos there. *Lighthouse Centre Worker*

Whether children knew their parents or not, it is clear that the absence of a primary carer from their lives did have a major impact on every aspect of their well-being and created a desolate backdrop to their early learning. As well as parents, other family connections were also significant. Often separation was extended to siblings who, because of age or gender or some other unexplained logistical factor, were placed in separate institutions and allowed no further contact with their brothers or sisters.

Derek, an Irish Traveler, described the sudden disappearance of his brother as a turning point in his literacy learning. Up until that point he was actually enjoying school and although 'the learning was a bit rough' he was happy and socially integrated and 'enjoying the interactive stuff.' Later in his narrative he explains his adult mistrust of groups and his inability to stay with any group learning process for any length of time. He is a loner who traces this trait to the betrayal and anger associated with his loss of his brother

> Michael he is dead now. He used to be in the orphanage with me up until the age of ten. I think that was one of the main reasons (pause) why I do think that I couldn't read and write properly. When he was ten years old, I was seven, and when you reached ten years old you were taken away and put in another institution. And he was taken away at ten and I was left there. That was one of the main reasons why (pause) the turning points of my life. And so that (pause) was a blow and I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't learn. *Derek, man aged 52 years, who left school with unmet literacy needs*

In the total institutional environment, even basic physiological care needs went unmet; children were hungry, cold, and exhausted from exacting contract work. All were isolated from comfort and fearful of punishment, abuse and humiliation. Bedwetting was not uncommon in this stressful environment and resulted in public degradation on a daily basis. A common survival technique was withdrawal and self-protection that has extended into adult learning relationships.

> I would keep nice and quiet and still and I wouldn't be picked on or bullied or any of the other things. And it is the same with the literacy and all of that you know? I'll write it and nobody is going to see it. Does that make sense? *Carol, woman aged 50 years who left school with met literacy needs*

The deep interface between learning literacy and being cared for emerged throughout the research process. Language and literacy development take place during a natural period of intense human dependency and so the interlinking of the processes is not surprising.

2. Secondary learning care relationships: the experience of schooling
Lynch and Lodge (2002:11) have argued for schools and other places of learning also to be recognised as 'affective enterprises' where both teaching and learning are deeply and variously concerned with relationships of care and interdependence. The case is borne out, by default, in the findings of this study where fear and damaged self-esteem dominated accounts of literacy learning and the pervasive atmosphere in the classroom was one of tension. Kevin was seven when he went into care and became fearful of learning.

> I didn't like the school there. I hated it. There was a terrible tense atmosphere. And like you would be looking at them to see if they were in a bad mood. There was always somebody getting a right beating. And you were tense all

through the class and afraid. If you got something to do you would be scared. I didn't like it - it was too tense. *Kevin, man aged 56 years who left school with partially met literacy needs*

Corporal punishment was widespread in the education system at this period but those with experience of both 'inside' and 'outside' schools observed difference in the degree of severity.

> I went to regular schools so I can say they weren't party places either but they were light years away from this place. Nobody will ever know or be able to recreate the terror in those rooms - reigns of terror every day. It was horrendous. *Bridget, woman aged 51 years who left school with met literacy needs*

In the teacher-learner relationship even the willing learner was anxious and fearful. Large classes were managed in a robotic, adversarial and often violent manner. Individual learning styles were not facilitated. Those who were left-handed were demonised and those unable to learn reading and spelling through primarily auditory methods were additionally disadvantaged.

Depending on the institution, children either attended 'inside school' where they had no contact with the outside world or in smaller institutions they were sent to the local national school where they joined children from the locality. In the 'outside school' children were constantly made aware of their inferior status and many spoke of being carelessly excluded at the back of the classroom. Inside the institution, within an already impoverished learning context, still further hierarchies existed. Irish Travellers, orphans, those perceived as morally defective because their parents were unmarried, those of mixed race and those with learning difficulties all attracted additional disparagement.

On reflection, respondents wanted to be seen as individuals with learning needs that they could expect to have met. They wanted to be treated with patience and care and to have a teacher who would 'draw you out' and find a way of compassionately enabling learning.

Where children had different affective experiences even within the same family they observed a corresponding difference in literacy outcomes within the institutional system. Brenda's literacy needs were met during her schooling whereas those of her younger sister remain unmet today. She attributes this directly to their divergent levels of primary care.

I lived at home with them until I was five and that is hugely influential because my sister was two [going into care] and you can see the three years that I got that she didn't get. The extra three years of nurturing from your own parent made a difference. She hadn't got the same foundation as I had as I would have had five solid years and she would have had only two. Even a little bit of encouragement that I got stood to me. *Brenda, woman aged 55 years who left school with met literacy needs.*

Martin was in care from birth but in regular and constant contact with his mother. She was the cook in a wealthy Dublin family and he benefited from the discarded reading material and copybooks of the privileged sons in her place of work. He used these to supplement the poorly resourced learning he got in the industrial school. For this reason he was always ahead of his peers in literacy and to some extent able to observe classroom relations from this small comfort zone. The absence of kindness was apparent to him.

> … it was harsh the way they taught you how to read and write. They didn't know any other way. You have to understand they didn't have any concept themselves of anything done at a level of decency or kindness. I mean kindness was alien to them, utterly alien. *Martin, man aged 64 years who left school with met literacy needs*

Until the age of ten when he moved to a more authoritarian regime, Matt lived in a convent where orphans were housed and educated. Uniquely amongst all the participants, he described a positive, creative learning environment with art, music, storybooks, comics and seaside holidays. He did not remember boys and girls who were unable to read and write. When he moved to the industrial school he noted a visible difference.

> It was very intimidating. These men in black whereas the nuns were soft like with their blue habits. And when you went in there was all these big people and there was no colour anywhere. Like even in the convent there was colour everywhere. *Matt, man aged 64 years who left school with met literacy needs*

Matt maintained that those who were in that colourless, careless environment all their lives had little hope of learning. Bob, disappointed that his dyslexia went unattended, believed that the literacy learning relationship has to be infused with care.

The teacher's heart and soul has to be in it to teach someone with special needs. It will come across. The child will see the love that the teacher has for what they do and the care will come across. 'I care and I want to teach you and I want to see you going forward.' Then that is like…That is where the care starts. *Bob, man aged 41 years who left school with unmet literacy needs*

Without primary or secondary advocates to champion the cause of their learning, the majority of those in industrial schools were at the mercy of those who had little belief in either the ability of children to learn literacy or the necessity for them to do so. Despite the nature of their professional role, teachers seemed to subscribe to the wider cultural perception that these children could best aspire to a life of subservience and did not really need to be literate. Tania articulates the implicit ethos enacted in industrial schools.

You will never amount to anything. All you will be good for when you go out of here will be domestic work, laundries and that kind of thing. But sure how could you be any other way? Nobody wanted you. How could you have any brains because nobody wants you? So how can you be clever? *Tania, woman aged 52 years who left school with met literacy needs*

An absence of primary care is used maliciously to explain and legitimate the withholding of secondary learning care. Even the background presence of a primary carer was shown in the data to make a difference to the secondary learning care received in the industrial school. The lack of positive school learning experience in turn made learning in adulthood more daunting suggesting that the types of learning care outlined have a dynamic and interconnected relationship.

3. Solidary learning care relationships: learning with peers
More than half of the participants in the research had begun to learn literacy in adulthood. Adult primary and secondary learning care relationships provided a bridge back into learning and there is much evidence in narratives of those who did not make that transition and died prematurely. Successful adult relationships, the desire to make a positive contribution to children's lives, and the empowerment of the personal counseling process, were the most common motivational factors for participation in adult literacy.

Awareness of care matters in the process of facilitating literacy was a consideration for both learners and tutors. One man remarked that 'sometimes as an adult you can feel that you are being left at the back of the class too.' It is hard for adults to unlearn their fear of formal education. People display their long memories in almost imperceptible but ever-present responses. They wince at sudden movements, closed doors, loud noises or someone approaching from behind. They hit themselves for making mistakes in reading and spelling. As well as learning literacy they are also learning about making new relationships with others and with their past and the learning process needs to make room for this. Tutors are constantly patrolling the borders between past and present, deflecting and disarming negative echoes and substituting positive learning experiences.

I suppose that [building relationships] is part of the learning thing too because they have to talk and we wouldn't get beyond that sometimes. I always notice how people say particularly in the early stages, how different it is from learning they have done before and they can't get over that they are being treated as equals, and as adults, I suppose. *Literacy Tutor*

A common legacy of industrial schools is that survivors feel uncomfortable with the complex dynamic of group learning and prefer a one-to-one learning arrangement where they can build up the confidence needed to move on. In this they demonstrate the need to retrace primary learning patterns. Although a cornerstone of provision, one-to-one literacy tutoring is dependent on volunteers and reflects the realities of other types of unpaid care labour in that women mostly do this work and make immensely valuable contributions for little or no recognition.

Institutional life left little time or space for friendship and group learning was not on the pedagogical menu. It was only in later life that survivors of abuse in industrial schools began to savour the benefits of community solidarity and the second chance it provided for learning literacy. As well as those whose return to learning was enabled by new relationships of primary care in adulthood, the bond that formed around a common experience of abuse and neglect has also been transformational in attracting people back to literacy.

I think that there is actually a lot of solace for people who maybe have felt quite alone that they come into a place and realise that people do have some form of shared history, some sort of shared continuing difficulties and that actually binds them together as a group. One of the features of the groups is

that they do very much look out for each other, especially new members of the group. They try to welcome them in and a lot of support is actually peer-to-peer support. *Lighthouse Centre Worker*

Gill left the industrial school with partially met literacy needs. She returned to learn as an adult and now teaches IT to adult groups. The consideration and care of her fellow adult learners was instrumental in maintaining her drive to progress.

> The praise, the encouragement that you get from an adult group is sustaining. You know you would hand in a piece of work and a big fuss would be made over you. Definitely it was positivity over negativity. It definitely made a difference. I stayed in adult education the whole way up after that. *Gill, woman aged 46 years, left school with partially met literacy needs*

4. The state's role in ensuring learning care

The majority of the research participants (68percent) suggested that the state neglected its direct responsibility to monitor the quality of care and education offered to them as children. Respondents described feelings of abandonment that transcended their immediate family and extended to the wider population. They saw an irony in the fact that they were taken away from families perceived to be unfit to offer care and supervision only to be neglected in the alternative state provision.

> Despite the fact that orphanages were designed to educate us and protect us from the ills of society, we received only minimal education and most of us were illiterate. Lack of education deeply affected every aspect of our lives, leaving us unprepared for and fearful of the world outside the institution
> (Fahy, 1999:54)

Respondents cited wider structural inequalities as central to their being taken out of their primary care centre. Unemployment, poverty, ill health, emigration, family breakdown, moral opprobrium and cultural powerlessness resulted in children being taken into state care and subsequently experiencing abuses that impacted negatively on their ability to learn literacy. State care-lessness was therefore both causal in their original disadvantage and in their subsequent neglect in the industrial school.

While home is undoubtedly the primary place of care, nevertheless the capacity of the family is determined, to a great extent, by the state's achievements with regard to creating equality in society. The state both enables and restricts the measures and systems that shape how egalitarian a society is and whether its goods are shared in a fair manner (Baker, 1987, Baker et al, 2004). The legislative and policy decisions made by the state, in practice, constitute choices about learning care equality.

Bridget argued for an ideal, inclusive, participative view of the state where interdependency is recognised and acted upon by all. Placing borders around who we should have concern for meant she and others were pushed to the margins of care. She proposed that our interdependence brings with it responsibilities that make us accountable for what happens to each other.

> Do you know it might sound simplistic but it is every adult's responsibility to ensure that every child is educated. If we all just look after our own - that is why we were the way we were. Those adults who couldn't look after us were equally abandoned by all the adults who could have helped out but instead abused them every way they could. *Bridget, woman aged 51 who left school with met literacy needs*

Conclusion

The paper began by presenting the rationale, research design and the historical context for this empirical study of literacy and affective aspects of equality. The findings from a three-year ethnographic, practitioner research process in the Lighthouse Centre for adult survivors of abuse in Irish industrial schools were then discussed. This data suggest that caring relationships have a pivotal role in successful literacy learning. For most of the last century, those consigned to state care experienced affective learning inequalities at each of four levels – in primary learning relationships in the institution, in secondary learning relationships at school and in tertiary learning relationships through their separation from peers and siblings in the anti-relational ethos of the institution. Fourthly, the state also, as surrogate guardian of institutionalised children, failed to ensure the provision of satisfactory care and education within the industrial schools. At the same time, through its role in accepting a wholly inegalitarian education system and wider social structure, the state also ensured that some citizens received less learning care at every level than did others.

The data suggest that inequalities of care at all four levels interacted to impede literacy learning. In the austere environment of the industrial school, even small affective differences became discernible and survivors identified these as creating more conducive conditions in which literacy could take some hold. Even in adulthood, it was learning care that emerged as transformational in the lives of those affectively and educationally disadvantaged in early life. As a critical case sample, the literacy and care biographies of survivors of abuse in industrial schools reveal the reality of learning literacy while in the care of the state, but without love. They also suggest that learning care, as a concept, merits greater attention in contemporary literacy studies and in the field of learning.

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