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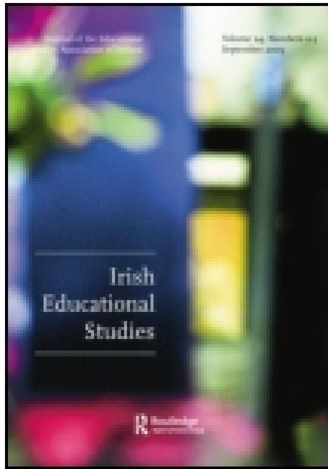

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What is 'good' teaching? Teacher beliefs and practices about their teaching

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What is 'good' teaching? Teacher beliefs and practices about their teaching

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There has been increasing attention on teacher 'quality' and effectiveness internationally. There is, however, little research documenting experienced teachers' classroom practices and their beliefs on why they teach the way they do. Drawing on a mixed methodological study of practices and beliefs across 12 primary and secondary schools, this paper documents the importance of passion, reflection, planning, love for children and the social and moral dimension to Irish teachers' constructs of good teaching. Contradictions are evident, however, between teacher beliefs and observation of their practice, the latter mediated by the sociocultural context of the school (gender, social class and migrant children), teacher expectations for different types of students and leadership practices within the school. Debates over 'quality' teaching need to take account of these broader contextual and sociocultural factors which influence how teachers construct and do teaching.

Keywords: teacher beliefs; effectiveness; quality; sociocultural; leadership

Introduction

Education systems internationally are undergoing profound change. Learning outcomes and how and what contributes to effective teaching is gaining increasing attention, spearheaded by comparative international studies of learning achievement (OECD 2009a) as competition states (Ball 2009) seek to maximise their advantage in the education marketplace. Such measures parallel the increasing emphasis on performativity and audit cultures in education systems characterised by new managerial reform (Apple 2006; Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012), where return on investment in education is sought through greater efficiencies in both outcome and process in education systems. The OECD (2005) report 'Teachers Matter' provides a broader backdrop to developments in this area, highlighting the essential link between teaching and learning outcomes for students, while the TALIS study (2009b) provides an outline of comparative indicators of teaching and learning environments across a range of countries.

A key issue of concern in discussions around effective teaching relates to what is defined as 'effective' as well as how it can be appropriately measured (James and Pollard 2011; Norman 2010). It is a tension between an instrumental approach to teaching and learning and a more broad-based approach which seeks to enhance teacher professionalism and maintain an equivalent focus on the social democratic,

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moral and personal goals of education (Alexander 2010). Most recently in the Irish context, debates over the quality of the Irish education system have come to the fore with an increasing emphasis on school evaluation and teacher performance at both primary and secondary levels in a context of wider new-managerial reform (Gleeson and O'Donnabhain 2009; Houtsonen et al. 2010; Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012). The restructuring of Teacher Education, coupled with the development of, for example, a national literacy plan, signals the impact of global developments on national policies here in Ireland, developments mirrored elsewhere (Conway et al. 2009; O'Meara 2011).

What is 'good' teaching – pedagogy and teacher 'effect'

The field of teacher effectiveness research has itself gone through a trajectory of development as understandings of the complex nature of student learning, as well as teacher practices, have evolved (Brophy and Good 1986). More recently a multi-layered approach has emerged that captures the intersection of multiple influences and contexts on how teachers both define and 'do' teaching in the classroom (Malm 2008; Muijs et al. 2005). Attention is focused not only on teacher characteristics and behaviours but also on factors related to student characteristics, school leadership practices as well as wider national policy developments. In their wide-ranging study of teaching practices in the UK, James and Pollard (2011) outline ten general principles that underpin effective pedagogy. These include broader values/goals in the society, the nature of curriculum and assessment policies, the degree and nature of emphasis on personal relationships and wider policies in relation to teacher professional development. Simplistic judgement on 'what works' is also queried by Alexander (2010) who assert that quality education can only be realised by 'deep structure pedagogical change', itself a product of deep learning, deep experience, deep support and deep leadership in schools (Hargreaves 2006). Framing teacher perspectives in terms of Cochran–Smith and Lytle's (1999) distinction between knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice and knowledge of practice, the movement to 'deep pedagogical' change suggests a knowledge of practice that is embedded in reflection and evidence-driven evaluation of practice in schools.

Internationally there has also been an increasing focus on researching the life-worlds of teachers. Such analyses focus not only on teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning (Arnon and Reichel 2007; Kyriakides, Campbell, and Christofidou 2002), but also on personal and professional factors which act to support or detract from the creation of more effective learning environments for students in schools. Teachers, including those at pre-service level, hold a set of complex beliefs about a wide range of professional practices and the people, structures, systems and theoretical paradigms that underpin them. These beliefs impact upon the manner in which change and reform comes about (De Corte, Vershaffel, and Depaepe 2008) including how, why and what a teacher teaches. They also shape teachers' understanding of student outcomes and experiences (Devine et al. 2010; Hermans, van Braak, and Van Keer 2008; Opdenakker and Damme 2006; Sammons et al. 2007). However, the relationship between beliefs and practice is neither linear nor unequivocal. Beliefs can compete with each other and, sometimes, act as contradictory discourses which (in)form and, at times, impede effective practice. For Fives and Buehl (2011, 479) teachers' beliefs act as a filter of both information and

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experience, framing situations and problems, guiding intention and subsequent action.

Beliefs are also intertwined with and core to identities – how teachers understand and define themselves shapes how they understand and define others (Devine 2011). This interconnection between the professional and personal identities of teachers is most explicitly identified in the wide-ranging VITAE (variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness) project in the UK. While professional identity evolves and develops over time and is multidimensional in nature, this research highlights the reserves of emotional energy teachers are required to bring to their work, the level of which can be depleted arising from personal, professional or policy-related demands (Day 2007). Indeed, the results of the VITAE study indicated that pupils of teachers who were sustaining or building upon their commitment achieved at or above expected levels. Sammons et al. (2007) suggest that teachers in later years of their professional careers and those working in more disadvantaged contexts are especially challenged in this respect.

Such analyses coincide with the systemic/contextual dimension to teacher practice identified in educational effectiveness research (Kyriakides and Creemers 2011), and the need to locate such practice in the context of school and community/ society wide layers which intersect to influence student outcomes in the classroom. Fives and Buehl (2011) inter-connect beliefs, context and practice in their analyses, arguing that contextual factors related to school culture/climate, school-wide relationships, resources, etc. mediate teachers' beliefs giving rise at times to a mismatch between expressed beliefs and actual classroom practice. There is wide-ranging research within sociological, as well as school effectiveness literature which additionally highlights the significance of student gender, social class, and ethnicity on teaching and learning in schools (e.g. Devine 2011; Hoadley and Ensor 2009; Hodgetts 2010; Lareau 2003; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Smyth 1999; Smyth and Calvert 2011). Such research points to the lower expectations and deficit perspectives of teachers for students from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as a tendency to teach to the 'basics' with less innovative and cognitively challenging approaches. Increasingly research in this area draws attention to differences across and indeed within schools in working with different types of students, with differing levels of effectiveness, hence outcomes among different groups of children (Kyriakides and Creemers 2011). An understanding of (dis)congruence between teacher beliefs and teacher practices is critical in researching teacher effectiveness as it underscores the multifaceted and often messy relationship between what teachers *do* and what they *believe*, in contrasting cultural and social contexts.

Teacher effectiveness research in Ireland

There has been little focused research on pedagogy and teacher effectiveness in Irish schools. Sugrue's (1997) work with primary teachers confirmed the perception of teaching as 'craft', reinforced through the construction of teacher identity as an 'inherited' familial trait across generations (the 'vocation to teach'), where 'good' teachers are born as much as made. Kitching's (2009) work identifies the complexities and emotional challenges for new teachers in adapting to this underlying 'moral' code and highlights the realities of boredom and frustration that are also part of these primary teachers' life worlds. Earlier school effectiveness research at primary

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level (Devine and Swan 2002) that included the observation of teacher practices across a number of primary schools indicated both across and within school differences in pedagogy and learning outcomes in maths and reading. Most recently the Educational Research Centre has conducted national research on DEIS[1] primary schools with respect to maths and literacy outcomes and the school-level factors that contribute to such outcomes (Weir et al. 2011).

At second level, research highlights not only differences in process and outcomes across schools (Smyth 1999) but also the prevalence of exam-oriented, didactic and a-theoretical approaches to teaching and learning (Gleeson 2012; Hogan et al. 2007; Lyons et al. 2003). These patterns dovetail with the TALIS study (OECD 2009b), which also noted lower levels of collaboration on pedagogy and a lower valuation of professional development, teaching for diversity and inclusion in second-level teacher constructs of appropriate appraisal criteria. Nonetheless Irish second-level teachers reported high levels of self-efficacy, higher emphasis on subject knowledge and more positive student relationships and disciplinary climates than teachers in other countries. The TALIS study provides the first comprehensive overview, in comparative context, of the views and perspectives of teachers in second-level schools on aspects of their practice. There is a need for more in-depth research which delves into such perspectives, and which also includes observation of pedagogical practice in the classroom.

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Outline of the study

This study adds to the emerging field in Ireland, part of an international study (International System for Teacher Observation and Feedback – ISTOF) that sought to pilot an observational schedule for measuring teacher practice across the 20 participating countries (Teddlie et al. 2006). However, the Irish study extended the research design to include not only observation of teacher practices, but also interviews with teachers about the nature of their practice and a summary overview of teacher constructs through the development of a 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire. Our concern was to document pedagogy in its widest sense – identifying the beliefs and philosophies that underscore such pedagogy. A mixed methodological concurrent and sequential design of the study was employed as highlighted in Figure 1.

For the purpose of this paper, discussion will focus on the development and analysis of the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire and the interviews which were conducted with teachers directly proceeding observation of a lesson in their classrooms. Observational data are briefly referred to, where appropriate to contextualise some of the analyses.

The design of the 'good' teacher questionnaire

The study sample is drawn from six primary- and six second-level schools, purposively sampled and representing a diversity of school types in terms of gender (single sex and co-educational) and social class (DEIS, non-DEIS). The breakdown of the sample is indicated in Table 1.

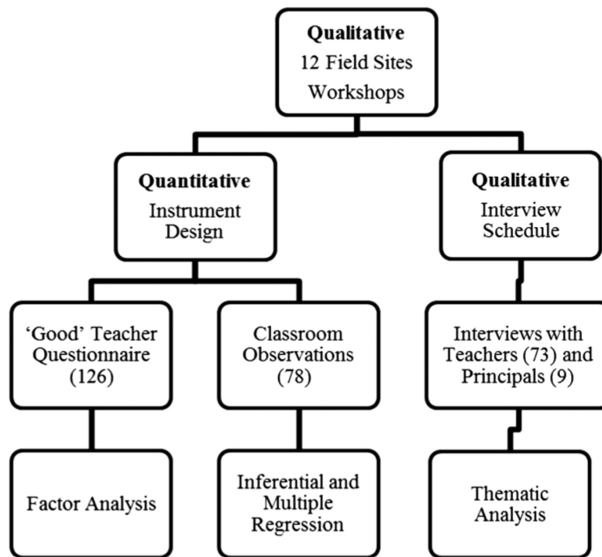

Figure 1. Design of the study.

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Following Kyriakides, Campbell, and Christofidou (2002), workshops were held with 60 teaching staff in six of the participating schools (three primary and three secondary) consisting of open discussion on the characteristics they associated with being a 'good' teacher. In focus groups, teachers were asked to record their views in a rank order from 1 to 10. Constant comparative method (Maykut and Morehouse 1994) was used in order to explore responses across the group discussions and to draw comparisons and commonalities across emergent themes which were ultimately used in the design of the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire. This questionnaire encompassed 65 items which we themed under five areas: teaching style, personal traits, differentiation, professionalism and student participation/relationship. These were in essence 'indicators' of 'good' teaching as defined by the teachers in the sub-sample schools. In the design of the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire, these indicators were interspersed in Likert scale format with a rating key from 1 to 7, with 1 considered as being less important and 7 as highly important. A sample excerpt is indicated in Figure 2.

Questionnaires were redistributed to teachers across the 12 participating schools. A total of 126 teachers responded to the questionnaire with background characteristics (See Table 2).

Teacher interviews

Part of the larger ISTOF study involved observation of teachers for one lesson to test the reliability and validity of the ISTOF 'protocol'. Drawing on research in the field of educational effectiveness (Teddlie et al. 2006), this involved recording observations of teacher practice along seven areas of activity including: assessment and evaluation; differentiation and inclusion; clarity of instruction; instructional skills;

Table 1. Outline of the study sample.

School/student background			Teacher background								
School name	*Social class*	*Gender mix*	*Teachers observed*			*Teachers interviewed*			*Questionnaires*		
Primary schools			*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
Oakvale Primary	DEIS	Girls	8		8	8		8	4		4
Laurelwood Primary	Non-DEIS	Co-ed	2	4	6	2	4	6	2	4	6
Hazelgrove Primary	DEIS	Co-ed	4	2	6	6		6	5		5
Hollybrook Primary	DEIS	Boys	4	2	6	4	1	5	3	2	5
Beechview Primary	Non-DEIS	Girls	8		8	8		8	21		21
Ashmount Primary	Non-DEIS	Boys	1	2	3	3	2	5	5	3	8
Secondary schools			*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
Primrose Dale Secondary	DEIS	Co-ed	5	1	6	5	1	6			-
Bluebell Grove Secondary	DEIS	Boys	1	5	6	1	5	6	16	18	35
Daisydale Secondary	Non-DEIS fee paying	Girls	8		8	8		8	4	3	14
Rosemount Secondary	Non-DEIS fee paying	Boys	2	5	7	4	1	5	5	10	15
Oakvale Secondary	DEIS	Girls	7		7	5		5	5		5
Violet Hill Secondary	Non-DEIS fee paying	Co-ed.	1	6	7	1	4	5	4	3	8
Total			51	27	78	55	18	73	80	43	126a

[a]Non-specified as being male or female.

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A 'good' teacher…..	**Less Important**						**Highly Important**
Gives clear instructions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is flexible and adapts to change in society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is inspiring to students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Forgives themselves and others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Adapts teaching to suit students' abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is well prepared and plans ahead	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is a good team player on the staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strives to improve their own teaching	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Values and respects students' opinions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Encourages students to reach their individual potential	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Follows a routine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is energetic and enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 2. The 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire.

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Table 2. Overview of respondents to the 'good' teacher questionnaire.

Overview of teacher sample – questionnaire			
		%	*N*
School characteristics			
Level	Primary level	38.9	49
	Secondary level	61.1	77
Social classification	DEIS	42.9	54
	Non-DEIS	57.1	72
Gender	All-girls' schools	38.1	48
	All-Boys' schools	31.7	40
	Co-educational schools	30.2	38
Teacher characteristics			
Age	20–25 years	9.9	12
	26–35years	40.5	49
	36–50 years	32.2	39
	51+ years	17.4	21
Gender	Male	35	43
	Female	65	80
Length of experience	Up to 5 years	29.8	37
	6–15 years	23.4	29
	16–30 years	37.1	46
	31 + years	9.7	12

promotion of active learning and development of meta-cognitive skills; classroom climate and classroom management; and is fully described in the work of Devine et al. (2010). Immediately following each observed lesson, a semi-structured interview took place (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007), with each participating teacher. A total of 73 teachers (18 male and 55 female; 38 primary and 35 secondary) were interviewed. Teachers were invited to discuss their priorities and their satisfaction with the lesson observed. In addition, emphasis was placed on ascertaining their personal beliefs in relation to planning and pedagogical practices more generally, including active learning, differentiation and assessment practices. Attitudes and opinions in relation to professional development were also explored. Interviews were taped, transcribed verbatim and imported directly into a purposive designed 'code and retrieve' qualitative software package MAXQDA. Data were then coded into themes, using a paragraph-by-paragraph approach and organised into a structured code system.

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Findings

A summary overview of a selected sample of the responses of teachers to the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire is provided in Table 3, under five general headings. These categorised their general constructs of 'good' teaching. These included constructs related to teaching style, personal traits, practices of differentiation, as well as their interpretations of professionalism and qualities related to good student relationships.

The table indicates the relative importance teachers ascribe to each of the items, although there was a tendency to rate items more rather than less positively across the entire questionnaire. Nonetheless subtle and at times significant differences were identified in priorities. With respect to teaching style, over 85% stated that giving clear instructions is highly important while 59% emphasised good planning and preparedness. The use of active learning, innovative methods and ICT in teaching was more likely to be rated as 'important'. Personal traits considered as 'highly important' were qualities of integrity and fairness (57.9%), while being compassionate and sympathetic was ranked as 'important' by 56% of respondents. Sensitivity to differentiation was ranked 'important', especially with respect to understanding socio-economic and cultural background (68%), while 50% stated it was 'highly important' to recognise the individuality of each student. Indicators of professionalism were more likely to be ranked as 'important' rather than 'highly important', especially in terms of being a 'team player' (72%) and maintaining good parent/teacher relationships (72%), as well as engaging in professional development (65%). Critical self-reflection was identified as highly important by 50% and important by 47%. More ambiguous views were expressed with respect to participation in extra-curricular activities as 37% ranked this as less important. With respect to student/teacher relationships 62% rated respect and valuing student opinions as highly important, while identifying the shy child and challenging students to go beyond their comfort zones were most likely to be ranked as 'important'.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to test the construct validity of the data and to gain a deeper insight into the way in which teachers in our sample construct 'good' teaching[2]. To determine the factor structure of the questionnaire, latent root or Kaiser's criterion was used (Drennan 2008; Hair et al. 1998). Factors

Table 3. Summary overview of patterns related to the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire.

Item	Less important		Neutral		Important		Highly important	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Teaching Style...a good teacher								
Gives clear instructions	–	–	3.1	2	12.5	25	84.4	98
Incorporates ICT into teaching	17.6	22	22.4	28	45.6	57	14.4	18
Takes risks and experiments in teaching (is innovative)	3.2	4	8.1	10	57.3	71	31.5	39
Gives tests regularly	17.9	22	21.1	26	49.6	61	11.4	14
Consistently uses active learning	3.2	7	9.7	9	51.6	74	35.5	33
Is well prepared and plans ahead	–	–	9.4	6	31.2	51	59.4	68
Covers the curriculum	5.6	7	11.1	14	49.2	62	34.1	43
Personal traits...a good teacher								
Is a multitasker – able to think on his/her feet	6.2	4	6.3	10	46.9	67	40.6	44
Is compassionate and sympathetic	0.8	1	6.3	8	56.3	71	36.6	46
Has qualities of integrity and fairness	2.4	3	2.4	3	37.3	47	57.9	73
Has high moral values and tries to pass these onto students	8.0	10	19.2	24	52.0	65	20.8	26
Differentiation... a good teacher								
Recognizes the individuality of each student	1.6	2	8.1	10	53.2	66	37.1	46
Understands socio-economic and cultural background	8.8	11	13.6	17	64.0	80	13.6	17
Professionalism... a good teacher								
Is a good team player on the staff	7.1	9	8.7	11	61.9	78	22.3	28
Participates in extra-curricular activities	30.4	38	20.8	26	39.2	49	9.6	12
Establishes and maintains good parent/teacher relationships	6.5	8	8.9	11	64.4	80	20.2	25
Is willing to engage in professional development	5.6	6	9.6	12	60.8	76	24.0	30
Is well informed of syllabus and resource materials	2.4	3	7.1	9	57.2	72	33.3	42
Is self-critical and evaluates own performance	1.6	2	4.0	5	57.6	72	36.8	46
Student participation/relationship...a good teacher								
Values and respects students' opinions	0.8	1	2.4	3	48.0	60	48.7	61
Can identify the quiet/shy student	6.5	8	7.3	9	58.8	73	27.4	34
Has a passion for working with children/young people	7.3	9	9.8	12	51.2	63	31.7	39
Challenges each student to go beyond their comfort zone	4.0	5	7.3	9	63.7	79	25.0	31

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having latent root of Eigenvalues greater than 1 were considered for inclusion. Five factors were identified, with Eigenvalues greater than 1. These included:

1. Passion for teaching and learning
2. Social and moral dimension
3. Reflective practitioner
4. Effective planning and management of learning
5. Love for children

These represent in effect clusters of responses drawn from the 'Good' Teacher Questionnaire which highlight the main indicators, in teachers' views within the study schools, of the characteristics of an 'effective' teacher. These are highlighted in Table 4, indicating the items within each overall cluster. Oblique rotation was used to allow correlation between the factors. Promax rotation was used for the purpose of this analysis. To ensure significance of the factor loadings, loadings of $p < .45$ are omitted. All five factors are strong, with factor loadings of .48 or greater.

Summary statistical analyses indicated that teachers did not weight all factors the same, and, as Table 5 indicates, the highest mean score[3] was given to the indicator '*having a passion for teaching and learning*', suggesting that this was the most highly valued trait by this sample of teachers in their constructs of teacher efficacy.

Within these weightings contextual differences were identified across the sample[4]. An independent sample t test was performed to identify differences in various cohorts in the sample. Female teachers ($r = .209$; $p < .05$) and older teachers ($r = .221$; $p < .05$) placed most importance on having a passion for teaching and learning as a key characteristic of the effective teacher. The social and moral dimension of teaching, identified as the next significant factor, was also considered to be an important indicator of good teaching, with teachers in primary schools ($r = .228$, $p < .05$) and females ($r = .282$, $p < .01$) most likely to indicate its importance. Teachers placed importance on being a reflective practitioner as an indicator of the 'good' teacher, with female teachers more likely to emphasise this characteristic than males ($r = .417$, $p < .01$). Effective planning and management of learning and having a love for children/young people was also considered as an important factor and was more highly evaluated by female than male teachers ($r = .379$, $p < .01$) (and by those teaching in all-girls' schools $r = .240$, $p < .01$).

The remainder of the paper explores each of these clusters in-depth integrating the analysis of the questionnaire with interviews. It is also supplemented with data from the observations of teachers' lessons, where appropriate, although the full outline of observational data is beyond the remit of this paper.

Factor 1: the 'good' teacher has a passion for teaching and learning

'Good' teachers were considered to have a passion for teaching and learning, yet there were differences across the sample in how much this trait was valued. As Table 6 indicates 85.6% of respondents believed that a 'good' teacher views teaching as a worthwhile career. Being fair in the treatment of students was highly important to 91.9% of respondents, especially among more experienced teachers i.e. those who taught for between 16 and 30 years ($p < .05$); females ($p < .05$) and older teachers i.e. those who were aged 36–50 years ($p < .05$). While more experienced teachers placed

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Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis of the 'what is a good teacher' questionnaire with principal components analysis extraction and Promax rotation.[ab]

		Factors				
Factors	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Passion for teaching and learning	Sees teaching as a worthwhile career	.803				
	Is fair in treatment of students	.755				
	Teaches students the value of learning	.644				
	Encourages weak students to work	.632				
Social and moral dimension	Leads by example		.867			
	Is a good role model		.801			
	Has qualities of integrity and fairness		.745			
	Has high moral values and tries to pass these onto students		.604			
Reflective practitioner	Uses a variety of teaching strategies			.879		
	Strives to improve their own teaching			.793		
	Is willing to engage in professional development			.714		
	Seeks advice from colleagues			.686		
	Is self-critical and evaluates own performance			.649		
	Reflects on what has been taught			.628		
	Is able to reflect on their own shortcomings			.611		
	Takes risks and experiments in teaching (is innovative)			.589		
Effective planning and management of learning	Covers the curriculum				.875	
	Is a multitasker – able to think on his/her feet				.692	
	Gives tests regularly				.653	
	Regularly checks homework				.650	
	Can identify the quiet/shy student				.564	
	Is confident and takes on new challenges				.477	

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Table 4 (*Continued*)

Factors	Variables	Factors 1	2	3	4	5
Love for children/young people	Loves and displays genuine warmth to children/young people					.756
	Incorporates ICT into teaching					.738
	Tries to connect with students at their level					.599
	Has a passion for working with children/young people					.529

[a]Not all of the items listed in the questionnaire are 'covered' in the clusters, as they did not reach the appropriate loading for inclusion. Nonetheless, the clusters as presented represent the best overall 'fit' of the data in order for meaningful statistical analysis to take place.
[b]Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the five factors. The results indicated that the scales were internally consistent and all results were above the recommended value of .70 for reliability demonstrating the factors which emerged during the EFA can be considered as reliable indicators to measure teachers' perceptions around the important characteristics of a good teacher. Cronbach's alpha values were passion for teaching and learning .775, social and moral dimension .836, reflective practitioner .891, effective planning and management of learning .822, love for children/young people .783.

Table 5. Summary overview of mean values associated with being a 'good' teacher.

	n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
Passion for teaching and learning	121	4	7	6.31	0.620
Social and moral dimension	124	2	7	5.84	0.973
Reflective practitioner	122	2	7	5.82	0.834
Effective planning and management of learning	120	2	7	5.60	0.917
Love for children/young people	121	2	7	5.33	1.049

importance on teaching students the value of learning ($p < .05$), female teachers believed that the 'good' teacher encourages weak students to work ($p < .01$).

The TALIS study (OECD 2009b) recorded higher than average levels of self-efficacy and positive student relationships among second-level teachers in Ireland, yet they recorded lower levels of job satisfaction. Our study, across the primary- and second-level sample suggests high valuing of the teaching profession among respondents, as well as generally high appreciation of and respect for students. This was reaffirmed in the interviews where teachers commented:

> I am 33 years (teaching) . . . I get great satisfaction from the feedback that something has gone really well . . . an odd lesson that has gone well and you get all this chat back from the kids. That gives me great pleasure . . . the kids themselves. (Emily, *Beechview*, non-DEIS, Primary)

> I would definitely find some days that I am on a roll and that they (the students) are on a roll and it's going well and I find it hugely satisfying . . . I would have forgotten every pain and ache and moan and groan . . . by the time I would go home I would feel a lot better for being here. (Violet, *Oakdale*, DEIS Girls Secondary)

This emphasis on relationships, care and empathy for students was confirmed in our observation of teacher lessons indicated in Table 7, although differences were identified depending on the social context of the school. In this respect more positive classroom climates were observed in our non-DEIS schools sample, in co-educational schools and in all-girls' schools. While not significant but nonetheless of note given the rapidly changing demographic context of classrooms and schools in

Table 6. Factor 1: a good teacher has a passion for teaching and learning.

Items on questionnaire	% who rated as highly important	Significant patterns across the sample
Sees teaching as a worthwhile career	85.6	Not significant
Is fair in treatment of students	91.9	Female teachers ($p < .05$) More experienced teachers ($p < .05$) Older teachers ($p < .05$)
Teaches students the value of learning	82.9	More experienced teachers ($p < .05$)
Encourages weak students to work	77.4	Female teachers ($p < .01$)

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Table 7. Summary outline of observed behaviours across the observational component 'classroom climate'.

	Not evident (%)	Neutral	Evident (%)	Strongly evident (%)	Not applicable (%)
Indicators of classroom climate					
The teacher demonstrates genuine warmth and empathy towars all students in the classroom	4.0		79.5	16.7	
The teacher shows respect for the students in both in his/her behaviour and use of language	2.6		82.1	15.4	
The teacher creates purposeful activities that engage every student in productive work	14.3		79.2	6.5	
The teacher's instruction is interactive (lots of questions and answers)	5.1		82.1	11.5	1.3
The teacher gives turns to and/or involves those students who do not voluntarily participate in classroom activities	29.5		67.9	2.6	
The teacher seeks to engage all students in classroom activities	17.9		74.4	7.7	
The teacher praises children for effort towards realising their potential	11.5		82.1	6.4	
The teacher makes clear that all students know that he/she expects their best efforts in the classroom	7.7		84.6	7.7	

recent years (Devine 2011), classrooms characterised by *fewer* numbers of immigrant students were also more likely to evidence positive classroom climates.

Interview data provided some explanation for these patterns. Teachers in DEIS schools expressed frustration in working with students they found 'demotivated' and expressed difficulty in connecting to their needs. This led to feelings of 'guilt' and emotional strain, coupled with a determination to persevere:

> It's demoralising really when you go home and you think that someone (a pupil) didn't speak all day . . . There is only so much you can do. You just move on from it. You have to do your best and not let it affect you. (Mary, *Hollybrook*, DEIS Boys Primary)

> A big problem is absenteeism . . . trying to cope with them catching up. (Collette, *Oakvale*, DEIS Girls Secondary)

While teachers in these schools spoke with affection for their students, also evident was a lowering of expectation for academic success:

> In a disadvantaged area you have to be accepting of the fact that not every child is going to reach what your standards may be. (Karen, *Oakvale*, DEIS Girls Secondary)

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In contrast, in non-DEIS schools, challenges to teacher self-efficacy derived from increasing expectations for high performance from parents, most pronounced at second level, through an overarching emphasis on examination preparation, especially the leaving certificate:

> Even in second year you get parents asking 'should I be sending my daughter to grinds? Do you think they are an A, B, or C?' (Grace, *Daisydale*, Fee-Paying Girls Secondary)

> Definitely parents are pushing, pushing, pushing and they are the main pressures. (Philip, *Violet Hill*, Fee-Paying Co-ed Secondary)

Yet for teachers in these socially advantaged schools there was also a sense of being able to draw on resources that enhanced their efficacy in teaching that as we see later had positive benefits in their higher investment in reflective practice:

> Being at an advantaged school means that you don't have to struggle to make clear that the exams are important. (Richard, *Violet Hill*, Fee-Paying Co-ed Secondary)

> You have great parental support in a school like this and if you mark reading or activities to be done at home, it'll be done and done right. There is great job satisfaction working in a school like this. (Olive, *Beechview*, Middle-Class Girls Primary)

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Factor 2: the good teacher is socially and morally aware

The second construct of a 'good' teacher which emerges from questionnaire data related to a commitment to the broader 'mission' of teaching in terms of the social and moral formation of children and young people. This was an area that was more highly rated by females and primary-level teachers, reiterating previous research that has identified the 'vocational' and holistic aspect of the primary teacher role (Kitching 2009; Sugrue 1997) (Table 8).

Across interviews, teachers expressed the view that 'good' teachers were those who deliberately modelled a form of positive behaviour which students would be encouraged – consciously or unconsciously – to emulate:

> I think you are given such a privileged position to come into someone's life and just say 'Here's how the world works'... to do the right thing and that it is not hard to be good and nice to people. (Liam, *Oakdale*, Disadvantaged Girls Primary)

Table 8. Factor 2: a good teacher has a social and moral dimension to their work.

Item on questionnaire	Highly important (%)	Significant patterns
Leads by example	65	Female teachers ($p < .01$) Primary school ($p < .05$)
Is a good role model	68	Female teachers ($p < .01$) Primary school ($p < .05$)
Has qualities of integrity and fairness	84.1	Female teachers ($p < .01$)
Has high moral values and tries to pass these onto students	54.4	Female teachers ($p < .01$) Secondary school ($p < .05$)

Table 9. Factor 3: a good teacher is a reflective practitioner.

Item on questionnaire	Highly important (%)	Significant patterns
Uses a variety of teaching strategies	74.6	Not significant
Strives to improve their own teaching	84	Not significant
Is willing to engage in professional development	62.4	Non-DEIS schools ($p < .05$)
Seeks advice from colleagues	50	Female teachers ($p < .01$) Non-DEIS schools ($p < .01$)
Is self-critical and evaluates own performance	36.8	Not significant
Reflects on what has been taught	54.4	Non-DEIS schools ($p < .05$)
Is able to reflect on their own shortcomings	64	Not significant
Takes risks and experiments in teaching (is innovative)	64.6	Not significant

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Factor 3: a good teacher is a reflective practitioner

Fives and Buehl (2011) view structured reflexivity as a critical component in the questioning, enacting and evolution of teachers' beliefs, yet they also noted the mismatch which can occur between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practice. In our study, this was the cluster which had the highest number of individual items, suggesting its importance in teacher overall constructs. Yet it was also the cluster in which there were contradictions between what teachers stated as highly important on the questionnaires and what emerged in the observations of classroom lessons, as well as in teacher narratives about their day-to-day teaching.

Taking the questionnaire data firstly, Table 9 indicates that a majority of respondents rated the use of a variety of teaching strategies (74.6%) and efforts to improve their teaching (84%) as highly important. More ambiguous views were evident in relation to taking risks in teaching (64.6%), engaging in professional development (62.4%) and speaking with colleagues (50%). Self-evaluation/reflection was only highly rated by 36.8% of respondents. Such patterns appear to confirm knowledge *for* practice approach identified in other research (Gleeson 2012; Hogan et al. 2007; OECD 2009b). However, our data also indicate clear contextual factors at play (Creemers and Kyriakides 2010; De Corte, Vershaffel, and Depaepe 2008; Fives and Buehl 2011) that emerged not only in these questionnaire responses, but also observational and interview data. As Table 9 highlights, responses to the questionnaire suggest that it is in non-DEIS schools that teachers are more likely to highly rate reflective practice behaviours (professional development; seeking advice from colleagues; and reflecting on what has been taught). Combined with our data on passion for teaching and learning, these findings re-iterate international research (e.g. Sammons et al. 2007) that raises concerns about the resilience and levels of reflection among teachers in DEIS schools in contrast to their colleagues in schools serving more advantaged sociocultural contexts.

Active learning and the development of higher-order thinking skills are a key component of reflective practice. Drawing on our observational data of classroom lessons, we can affirm some of the challenges identified in teachers' perceptions. This is evident in, for example, observations related to levels of practices related to

Table 10. Summary outline of observed behaviours on the ISTOF observational scale related to the promotion of active learning and the development of meta-cognitive skills.

	Not evident (%)	Neutral	Evident (%)	Strongly evident (%)	Not applicable (%)
Indicators of promoting active learning and developing meta-cognitive skills					
The teacher invites students to use strategies which can help them solve different types of problems	25.6		64.1	3.8	6.4
The teacher invites students to explain the different steps of the problem-solving strategy which they are using	43.6		48.7	1.3	6.4
The teacher explicitly provides instruction in problem-solving strategies	37.2		53.8	2.6	6.4
The teacher encourages students to ask one another questions and to explain their understanding of topics to one other	55.1		42.3	2.6	
The teacher gives students the opportunity to correct their own work	37.3		58.7	2.7	1.3
The teacher motivates the students to think about the advantages and disadvantages of certain approaches	30.8		65.4	2.6	1.3
The teacher asks the students to reflect on the solutions/answers they gave to problems or questions	30.8		66.7	1.3	1.3
The teacher invites the students to give their personal opinion on certain issues	19.2		75.6	2.6	2.6
The teacher systematically uses material and examples from the students' daily life to illustrate the course content	29.5		62.8	6.4	1.3
Students are invited to give their own examples	32.1		61.5	3.8	2.6

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active learning and the development of meta-cognitive skills among the study sample (Table 10).

Considerable variation across the study lessons was evident, yet, across the entire sample, active learning practices were one of the areas which was least evident across the total sample[5]. Social context of the school influenced differences in activity across this scale ($p < .05$), with more activities which promote higher-order skills in non-DEIS schools. Gender was also important with lessons observed in co-

educational schools indicating the presence of active learning to a greater extent than in single-sex classes, especially in boys-only schools ($p < .01$). Of note also are observations in relation to the presence of immigrant students with significantly lower evidence of engaging interactively the greater the number of such students in the classroom. While not statistically significant, there was also evidence of greater active learning among primary school teachers and among younger teachers across the entire cohort (Devine et al. 2010).

Interview data confirmed very different perceptions among the cohort in relation to reflective practice that bear upon not only some of these findings but also of the complex intersection of student gender and social class in mediating pedagogical practice. With respect to the use of active methodologies for example, there were contrasting views expressed within DEIS schools and over-riding concerns around the maintenance of discipline and concentration levels of students. This also dovetailed with gender composition; in that the most negative comments about the use of active and innovative learning methodologies emerged from teachers in all-boys' DEIS schools. This derived from concerns that such approaches would give rise to 'disruptive' behaviour:

> I am the kind of teacher who likes them in their seats and focused ... the whole active learning thing is great but in this school you'd just never get them back focused on something else afterwards unless you did it last thing in the evening. (Joan, *Hollybrook Primary*, DEIS Boys)

The greater prevalence of active learning approaches in co-educational schools in contrast, including DEIS co-educational schools, was often justified on the grounds of holding the 'attention' of all students, and perhaps a greater awareness of the need to match student diversity (in this respect in terms of gender) with a broader range of learning/teaching styles.

Also evident was the uncertainty among second-level teachers of the concept of active learning and its application to the practical reality of classroom life:

> Active learning? It is really ... to be honest I should have checked this ... a student actively taking part in the class? Maybe that's active learning? (Alan, *Primrose Dale*, DEIS Co-ed Secondary)

It was second-level teachers who also articulated greatest uncertainly with teaching for diversity including children with additional needs:

> We are not trained to deal with autistic children at all and I feel totally at a loss with him and when I asked other teachers what to do about him, they said just leave him be. (Kitty, *Rosemount*, Fee-Paying Boys Secondary)

School cultures, especially whole school policies were important in shaping reflective practice. Of the participating schools, four primary and three secondary schools across all social contexts participated in formal or semi-formal meetings at either class or subject level. Curriculum reform at primary level appeared to give rise to increased collaboration and reflective practice. School leadership was also important and at second level was referred to in terms of the need for subject department level innovation in order for change to occur at individual class level. At second level, the

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focus on collaboration appeared more on synergies in *timing* around curriculum coverage that was especially pronounced during state examination years. At primary level, with the revised curriculum the focus was on pedagogy and how the curriculum *was to be taught:*

> We meet once a week and we would discuss any best practice this week ... We would share ideas ... so it gives you a bit of a buzz, to try something new rather than working in isolation ... it's interesting sharing ideas. (Mark, *Laurelwood*, Middle-Class Mixed Primary)

> Especially in the exam years, the students want to know the overall schedule ... that we are going to get everything finished by June ... they can see we are following an overall plan. (Rhona, *Rosemount*, Fee-Paying Boys Secondary)

The pressure which resulted from preparation for state examinations at secondary school level was consistently mentioned as a concern in terms of a focus on more didactic methodologies that 'taught to the test', undermining the tendency to 'risk' more innovative methods.

Factor 4: a good teacher effectively plans for and manages learning

Within this cluster, factors related to curriculum coverage and being systematic in teaching through regular testing and 'reaching out' to students emerged. Again contextual factors appeared to influence teacher constructs, as teachers [especially those working in all-girls' schools ($p < .01$)] emphasised the importance of being a multitasker (71.2%), of being confident and taking on new challenges (71%) as important characteristics of the 'good' teacher. Regularly checking homework was especially important to those teaching in all-girls' schools ($p < .05$). Teachers working in secondary schools were more likely to emphasise covering the curriculum ($p < .01$) while those teaching in DEIS ($p < .01$) and all-boys' schools ($p < .05$) emphasised the importance of giving regular tests as key indicators of being a 'good' teacher (Table 11).

Table 11. Factor 4: a good teacher effectively plans and manages their learning.

Item on questionnaire	Highly important (%)	Significant patterns
Covers the curriculum	62.7	Sec. school teachers ($p < .01$) Female teachers ($p < .05$)
Is a multitasker – able to think on his/her feet	71.2	Female teachers ($p < .01$) All-girls' schools ($p < .01$)
Gives tests regularly	29.3	Female teachers ($p < .01$) DEIS schools ($p < .01$) All-boys' schools ($p < .05$)
Regularly checks homework	61.6	Female teachers ($p < .01$) All-girls' schools ($p < .05$)
Can identify the quiet/shy student	60.5	Female teachers ($p < .01$)
Is confident and takes on new challenges	71	Not significant

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However, giving tests was not ranked as important across the cohort of teachers overall (only 29.3% rated this as highly important).

In interviews, teachers spoke consistently of the importance of planning which included preparation of weekly, fortnightly and monthly schemes. Differences were evident on the amount of time spent on planning that related to school level (primary or secondary) as well as length of experience. Of the five primary teachers who stated that they did some planning on a daily basis, they spent an average of 30 minutes. For the remaining 16 who stated they planned on a weekly basis, the average time given was two hours. Often this was in addition to time spent sourcing resources for their teaching. A variety of planning styles was evident among second-level teachers and three of the schools – Daisydale, Oakvale and Violet Hill – had designated planning rooms for teachers to do their work. Most planning took place at weekends and considerable time was also spent on correction of homework:

> Every Sunday night I sit down for about 4 hours and correct tests and then plan for the week, especially for the fifth and sixth years there is a huge amount of planning to do. (Patrick, *Rosemount*, Fee-Paying Boys Secondary)

Planning time was in addition to time spent on extra-curricular activities and teachers spoke of the difficulty in 'quantifying' the amount of time spent in organising these events:

> I'd spend at least 4–5 hours per week planning. But I teach drama, IT to 5th year LCA, I teach SPHE – I never quantify it . . . I am ringing people in other schools, organising trips. (Martha, *Oakvale*, DEIS Girls Secondary)

The time spent on planning suggests that it is an integral part of their identities as teachers, yet for more experienced teachers there was a sense that planning was also built up through 'feelings' and 'hunches' about what works and is working best:

> A lot of it is in my head rather than on paper . . . you know what'll work and what won't. I still plan, but I use my experience too. I'm not a slave to it (writing plans). You learn that over time. (Kieran, *Rosemount*, Fee-Paying Boys Secondary)

Observations of teacher practice in relation to the area of classroom management strategies dovetail most clearly with teacher narratives on their planning. Here the focus was on the incidence of practices related to clarity over rules/procedures and sustained involvement of students over the period of a lesson. Our data confirmed evidence of highly structured and well-planned classroom practice in terms of disciplinary climate and effective classroom management across the sample (Devine et al. 2010), dovetailing with the TALIS findings. However, more structured approaches to classroom management were observed in co-educational classrooms and in classes in secondary schools, with the least structured classroom management evident in all-boys' schools. Such practices may in part be explained by specific gendered constructions by teachers of their students (Hodgetts 2010; Lynch and Lodge 2002) and a tendency to be less structured in disciplining boys, invariably described as 'boisterous, lively, energetic and noisy', in contrast to girls who were consistently spoken of as 'obedient, diligent' and a positive influence on boys in co-educational settings.

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Factor 5: a 'good' teacher has a love for children/young people

Teachers consistently expressed the view that a genuine desire to work with young people/children are central to constructs of what it means to be a 'good' teacher (Table 12). This includes displaying warmth (63.2%), connecting with students at their level (59.7%) and having a passion for working with young people (61.8%). Female teachers and those at primary level were more likely to rate these items highly.

These patterns dovetail with our previous discussion of classroom climate (Table 7) and were confirmed in interviews in the very constructive and caring way teachers at all levels spoke about their students. For teachers, however, in DEIS schools, of note was the lowering of expectations for academic achievement with an attendant emphasis on nurture and care, rather than expectations for academic success.

Table 12. Factor 5: a good teacher has a love for children and young people.

Item on questionnaire	Highly important (%)	Significant patterns
Loves and displays genuine warmth to children/young people	63.2	Female teachers ($p < .01$) Primary school ($p < .01$)
Has a vocation to teach	40.3	Female teachers ($p < .05$)
Tries to connect with students at their level	59.7	Not significant
Has a passion for working with children/young people	61.8	Female teachers ($p < .05$)

Discussion

These findings point to clear links between some of the observed practices and the values that are encompassed both in how teachers speak about their teaching as well as the specific constructs they define as being core to being a 'good' or effective teacher. Evident are holistic constructs of teaching that embrace the personal and social as well as the cognitive and academic, dovetailing with James and Pollard's (2011) iteration of core principles for effective pedagogy in the UK. Across our sample teaching is a valued career and one which above all requires passion and commitment to the role. Yet the findings also suggest that this passion and commitment plays out differently in terms of aspiration and practice, as well as across different contexts (teacher life phase and gender, school-level and socio-cultural profile of the student group). Emotions of guilt and uncertainty permeated interview narratives, as well as experiences of being challenged by the increasingly diverse and intensified nature of classroom life. In this respect the teachers in our sample are similar to teachers internationally (Day 2007; Kyriakides, Campbell, and Christofidou 2002; Malm 2008; OECD 2009b; Sammons et al. 2007) where age and length of experience shape differing coping strategies in classroom contexts that are rapidly changing in response to economic and social change.

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International evidence of the complex interplay between the personal and the professional in teachers' life-worlds (e.g. Day 2007; James and Pollard 2011) is borne out in our research. Similarly our findings in relation to teachers in Ireland reiterate Fives and Buehl's (2011, 472) assertion of the centrality of teacher beliefs (related to self, context, knowledge, pedagogy and students) to practise in classrooms. The 'messiness' of such links is also borne out in our data as contextual factors especially student social class and gender, cut across both what was defined as 'good' teaching and what was perceived as 'practical' in everyday classroom life. Ambiguity around reflective practice, teaching for diversity and the promotion of active/higher-order learning was especially evident in the contradictions between teachers' aspirations and the translation of these ideals into practice. In this respect the significance of sociocultural context of the school on teacher practice (Hermans, van Braak, and Van Keer 2008) is especially noteworthy in our data, in terms of observed patterns which indicate the prevalence of more structured and focused teaching, as well as assessment-driven approaches, to teaching and learning in non-DEIS schools. This is supported in interview data in assertions by teachers of the greater pressure to 'perform' from middle-class parents, especially at secondary level. In DEIS schools, teachers spoke of how poor attendance and a challenging disciplinary environment challenged their teaching. Their struggle to maintain resilience and connectedness (Malm 2008; Sammons et al. 2007) in their teaching dovetails with the lower levels of self-efficacy noted in TALIS (OECD 2009b) in relation to second-level teachers in publicly managed schools. That it was also this cohort of teachers in our study who were least likely to rank as highly important; professional development, collaboration or reflection on what has been taught, is of concern given the potentially positive impact of such activities on the improvement of practice in schools (Fives and Buehl 2011; Hermans, van Braak, and Van Keer 2008). Our study also provides some evidence of challenges to teaching the greater number of students from an immigrant background in the classroom, signalling the need for sustained professional development in this area (Devine 2011; OECD 2009b; Smyth et al. 2009).

Differences in gender were consistently evident; both in the observations of lessons as well as in the weightings teachers themselves gave to the different factors of 'good' teaching. While teacher gender appears to influence the strength of affiliation to the 'teacher' role and may explain higher rates of job satisfaction among female primary teachers noted also by Darmody and Smyth (2011); it is student gender which appears especially important in shaping practices in the classroom. This was most evident in the significant differences observed between all-boys' schools and co-educational/all-girls' schools, the latter two tending towards greater evidence (within the parameters of the ISTOF scale) of more effective pedagogical practices. More prolonged and wide-ranging investigations would be required to confirm the validity of such trends, especially in terms of how social class and ethnic background intersect with gender. School leadership is also crucial here and the vision/expectations and practices that are promoted at whole school level with respect to inclusion, diversity and expectations for learning (Devine 2013).

Differences were evident between primary and secondary teachers, some of which may be explained by the emphasis on preparation for examinations, especially in middle-class second-level schools. Also evident however were differences in constructs of pedagogy, most noteworthy in terms of both the concept of and stated practice around active learning that gave rise to differences in approach around

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reflection and shared discussion over what takes place in the classroom. This latter was more evident among primary teachers, especially when it was supported by school leadership through a whole school culture of collaboration and collegiality. At secondary level, our data confirmed the TALIS findings with reflection limited to procedural issues around scheduling rather than the nature of pedagogy in subject areas.

A key issue of concern in discussions around effective teacher efficacy relates to what is defined as 'effective' as well how it can be appropriately measured. Tensions exist between the neo-liberal thread that increasingly pervades educational policy (Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012) and the more broadly based pedagogical approach to teacher practice. Our data confirmed the 'craft'-like approach to teaching that permeates most teacher's practice, drawing on teachers' feelings about how they were 'reaching' students, rather than through a more reflected systematic approach to their practice in school. The latter was more evident among younger, less-experienced teachers who linked planning to control and discipline, an area that was of least concern to more experienced teachers. In general, teachers in our study emphasised flexibility and adaptability to the unpredictability and often 'organised chaos' of everyday life in schools. School culture and especially school leadership had a significant role to play here, in terms of the frequency of opportunities for shared discussion of planning for teaching and learning as well as the development of whole school policies around pedagogy including discipline and assessment. The study suggests that the analysis of debates over 'quality' teaching needs to take account of the broader contextual and sociocultural factors which influence how teachers construct and 'do' teaching. This is especially important in the light of patterns signalled in relation to student composition (especially social class, gender and ethnicity) and how this influences the expectations and beliefs of teachers for the learning of their students.

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Notes

1. DEIS refers to the Department of Education and Skills social inclusion strategy *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) targeted at helping children and young people who are at risk of or who are experiencing educational disadvantage.
2. A review of the correlation matrix tested for multicollinearity and singularity, with the majority of values ranging between .3 and .8, and identified as statistically significant, thus ensuring that EFA could be undertaken with the data, in spite of the small overall sample. Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant (chi-square 1643.55, $df = 351$, $p < .001$) also indicating that EFA was appropriate for this set of variables. The KMO measure of sampling accuracy was .851, indicating that the sample size was appropriate for EFA.
3. Mean scores refer to the average rating given to items within that overall cluster. Note there was no reverse coding on items.
4. With respect to gender differences, across the entire sample male teachers tended to rank all items of lesser importance than their female peers, perhaps suggesting a lesser or more ambiguous identification with the teaching role. Further research is warranted here

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although Darmody and Smyth (2011) indicated higher levels of job satisfaction among female primary teachers.

5. Differentiation was the component in which there was the least evidence of practice, followed by active learning/promotion of meta-cognitive skills (Devine et al. 2010).

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