

## **Troubling Reflexivity: the identity flows of teachers becoming mothers**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the transition to first-time motherhood as experienced by a small sub-sample of women engaged in the professional care of young children. In the context of a wider study of motherhood in the UK, their experience of combining work with new motherhood was distinctive. Women who professionally care for young children present a counter narrative to the view that teaching and motherhood can be blended. Negotiating the boundaries between work and motherhood produced a troubling reflexivity in which difficult feelings emerged and collided. Working in urban education involves emotionally intense forms of attachment that are disrupted by pregnancy. Becoming a mother prompts a renegotiation of professional and personal boundaries, leading women to pursue mothering as a separate enterprise, marked by individual solutions to care and career. Separating themselves from their working environment, women simultaneously isolate themselves from their middle-class counterparts who pay for childcare and return to work.

**Keywords:** teacher identities; maternal identities; work; motherhood, early years teaching

### **Introduction**

This paper draws upon data gathered in the course of The Making of Modern Motherhoods study, a 3-year research project funded by the ESRC as part of the Identities and Social Action programme. The study is a qualitative investigation of the transition to first time motherhood, employing an intergenerational and longitudinal research design. The data set comprises 62 interviews with a diverse group of women at the end of their pregnancy, and 12 intergenerational case studies where we also interviewed grandmothers, great grandmothers where possible and significant others, before re-interviewing women at least a year after the birth of their child. Interviews were carried out in London and a new town, and the age of expectant mothers ranged from 15-48. A cultural analysis of representations of mothering was conducted in parallel with the study. A further round of data collection focusing on 6 case studies has been possible through the ESRC Timescapes programme, giving the study a longitudinal dimension.

Of the 62 original interviewees, 46 were or had been working prior to their pregnancy and the majority of these women were interviewed at the beginning of their maternity leave. Seven of our interviewees were involved in teaching or childcare, working in schools, nurseries or early years settings. It is this cohort of teachers and carers that we will concentrate on in this paper in order to explore what happens when professional educators become mothers. Specifically, we draw upon the experiences of three women

in this sub-group, one of whom was involved as a case study participant as therefore interviewed before and after the birth of her child. These three women were chosen as richly illustrative exemplars of the *flow* between professional identities and personal lives. In each case the birth of a first child produces intense forms of reflexivity that calls for a reconfiguration of work-life relationships. We will begin with a consideration of the conceptual framework that we are using to think about the relationship between working and maternal identities, before moving on to explore some of the themes that emerged in pre-birth interviews. In a further section we focus on the pre and post-birth experiences of one of our case studies. Collectively, our analysis of this sub-sample points to the potentially troubling ways in which teaching and mothering identities are intertwined, producing a complex relationship between familial and working identities.

### **Motherhood as a ‘situation’**

Drawing upon the phenomenological approach of de Beauvoir (1949), we have conceptualised the very different circumstances in which the women in our study approached first time motherhood in terms of ‘situations’ that are the configuration of bodily, biographical and cultural trajectories. Work can be seen as one of the factors that shape women’s situations, but first-time mothers orientations to work vary dramatically according to their age, levels of personal investment in ‘career’ and where in their career they are at this point, as well as the kind of work that they are involved in and the extent to which the boundary between working and mothering identities is seen as permeable. Most of the younger women in the larger study had not yet established themselves in the world of work, and for them motherhood could act as a catalyst for imagining future work trajectories (often in childcare or in one case midwifery). Older women in the larger study who had been working for a period of time before pregnancy had to negotiate a delicate management between the competing demands of employment, mothering and the financial costs of childcare. For some women, returning to work soon after birth was a financial necessity, others felt that they had some choice. The extent to which women were invested in their existing working identities depended on many things, including how long they had been working, their work status, and their wider family situation. Yet whatever their status, motherhood forces women to consider questions about care; all women were faced with finding a resolution to the question, Who is going to look after my baby? A common lament of women in the study was that they did not ‘want to work in order to pay someone else to look after their child’, although some conceptualised this relationship in an entirely different way as ‘working for their child’. The position of women whose work is the care and education of children is particularly interesting in this context.

Our approach to thinking about work and motherhood has much in common with the framework of the ‘New Sociology of Work’ which troubles the conceptual boundaries of what we mean by work, pointing to the permeable and often blurred spatial and temporal boundaries between the domains in which ‘work’ occurs: public/private, formal/informal, legal/illegal; work time/ leisure time. From this perspective ‘work’ is not necessarily paid and is embedded in other social relations such as family and friendship, and in wider economic processes that involve consumption and exchange (Pettinger et al. 2006).

Reconceptualizing work involves bringing to the forefront of our analytical prism an appreciation of the complexity of the dynamic and interconnected character of work relations. The same activity may be paid and treated as formal employment, or be undertaken informally or on an unpaid basis; such differences have implications for how it is understood and socially evaluated. Rather than isolating work from non-work activities, the project becomes one to explore the points at which they become entangled and embedded as well as differentiated' (Pettinger et al. 2006:10)

If we add to this framework recent feminist appropriations of Bourdieu (Lovell 2000; Adkins 2002) that suggest the importance of how meanings, skills and resources are moved or transposed between social fields, it is possible to gain a fresh perspective on what has traditionally been posed in terms of 'work life balance'. Rather than asking how women balance private obligations and public participation, care and employment, we want to map the resources that first time mothers draw on in this work: material, cultural, social, conscious and less conscious. We are interested in how new mothers weave different resources together or keep them apart in the ensuing interplay of identifications as workers, lovers, daughters, mothers and friends. Although our research does not draw explicitly on psycho-analytic concepts or explanatory frameworks, we recognize that our findings resonate with work that seeks to explore the psychic life of schools and the defenses and repressions involved in the development of authoritative professional identities (Britzman 1998, Pitt 2009).

### **Teaching and mothering**

Teaching is generally understood to be a flexible and child-friendly career for women, in terms of school holidays and the potential to take time out without jeopardizing the ability to return to the classroom. Socio-historical approaches to teaching trace the contours of a profession that became defined as women's work through the 'feminisation of a trade' (Steedman 1987). Steedman explores the dual nature of an emergent profession that calls upon women to nurture children who are not their own, while simultaneously releasing women from their fate as mothers. Steedman points to the many ways that conceptualisations of *good mothering* was forged by generations of working women in schoolrooms during the first half of the twentieth century. Good mothers accept the responsibility of childcare as their own, respond to the needs of the child and believe in the psychological effectiveness of love. The template for what teachers and mothers should provide rests with the 'idea of growth as a natural unfolding, a kind of emotional logic of development' (Steedman 1987: 123). Teachers and mothers were called upon to develop a quality of attentive watchfulness that rested upon an intense empathy with the child. For Steedman, reflecting upon her early career as a primary school teacher, the classroom became a suffocating 'prisonhouse' that was both in the world and a retreat from the world.

That teachers of young children and mothers of young children occupy shared terrain with a mutually recognised sensibility remains a commonplace of both domains and a

path that many women have taken in pursuit of work-life balance. Sociological writing of the 1960s responded to fears that the family was under threat by the increased participation of women in the workforce by pointing to teaching as an ideal and jointly beneficial arrangement of work, marriage and motherhood (Fletcher 1962). The legacy of this view that teaching and domestic life can be successfully blended was expressed by most of the teachers in our study, (several of whom were themselves the daughters of teachers). Their experience of managing the transition from a working to maternal identity was distinctive. Teachers remarked on the significance of working in an environment in which people liked children and where parents and colleagues were positive and excited for you. This contrasted acutely with the accounts of women working in male dominated environments in which their pregnant body remained a difficult presence, and impending parenthood and maternity leave is framed in terms of 'letting the side down' and placing a burden on colleagues or the business. Being pregnant at school or nursery may be exhausting, but the pregnant body is a source of communication and joy. Blending teaching commitments with new motherhood, however, was not without its trouble-spots. New managerial practices in education across the UK intensified teachers' workloads, putting them under increased pressure and subject to heightened levels of accountability.

The impact of neoliberal reforms in education has significantly changed the experience of teaching, marking it as *different* for women today than for previous generations. Emergent neoliberal practices place emphasis upon the delivery of a set curriculum in which teachers act as technical mediators of skills acquisition that can be monitored and tested at regular intervals. Educational practice within this context encourages the development of professional identities premised upon a notion of technical expertise and the conceptualisation of the pupil body as disciplined and schooled subjects. It could be argued that these changes in the educational landscape have disrupted the empathetic bond between teacher and pupil as care gives way to individualized learning programmes and strictly adhered to forms of educational development. The women in our sub-sample can be viewed as professionals working in the confluence of ideas between early years teaching as a form of maternal care and neoliberal practices orientated towards a distanced, less intimate version of professionalism. Many women found themselves under pressure in the workplace as their pregnancy progressed. The physical demands of teaching had resulted in several of the pregnant teachers beginning their maternity leave early, whether through being signed off sick, or the coincidence of the summer holiday. In one case a woman had to take union advice in order to challenge a demand that she should participate in a nursery trip to the seaside when seven months pregnant. Those in senior management positions also remarked on how pregnancy could undermine their status with colleagues, finding themselves excluded from decision-making processes. More junior staff talked of their fears that they would lose out on training opportunities if it was known they were pregnant or were planning for pregnancy.

Negotiating the boundaries between working professionally with and for children, and becoming a mother emerged as a complicated business. In becoming teachers of young children, women had developed professional identities as carers and pedagogues in contexts where developing an identity as 'teacher' involves the on-going interplay of

biographical experience and professional practice (Kehily 2002; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). Despite the pervasive presence of neoliberal practices in education, many teachers in primary education still place relations of care at the centre of their practice, giving their professional identities a particular emotional dimension that could be familial and, at times, maternal (O' Connor 2007; Hargreaves 2001). Women in our sub sample drew on their professional knowledge and skills in imagining motherhood for themselves, yet they also drew informal knowledges garnered in school by observing the behaviour and values of the parents they encountered in their work as teachers. When asked how being a teacher might impact on her ideas about motherhood, 33 year old Madeline, head of a nursery school, commented on how inspirational it was to meet mothers who had stayed at home with their children until they reached the age of three. She also comments on how the Bengali mothers she had encountered in school were 'really dedicated' and 'committed to their families', before also adding in professional mode that 'some of them needed support, so we guided them in that direction'. Madeline articulates her view that young children should be at home with their mothers as a 'professional belief' and feels alienated by the women in her middle class neighbourhood who make her feel like 'a freak for staying home' – and who in her words pursue the maternal project as, 'must go back to work, childcare since birth, the children must be stimulated'. Her comment that 'I've done 12 years with other people's children, I think it's time to spend with my own' suggests that the relationship between formal and familial care can be fraught. Far from enjoying permeability between professional and private realms, Madeline is keen to separate the two.

Similarly complicated feelings were evident in an interview with 31 year old Carla, a nursery school teacher. Carla sees teaching as a family friendly profession, enabling her to 'pick it up, as I go along', 'go back part-time or full-time, re-train in something else to do with sort of childcare'. She also notes that teaching for six years has prepared her for motherhood:

it's always easier when it's other people's kids isn't it, you know? [...] but um (.) and just things to do, like I know how to make cakes, and I can make playdough, (laughs) and things like that, flour and oil, you know. Um (.) so I mean – and I really want to get involved in toddler groups, and I feel quite confident about going out to meet other parents, and that sort of thing. So I think that's been a good preparation.

During the interview Carla showed us 'educational toys' that she had made for her baby including a sensual 'treasure bag', tactile materials and a 'star bag' that she described as excellent for encouraging language development in children with English as a second language. Yet at the same time she is resistant to encouragement from her head teacher to return after her maternity leave and to enrol her baby in the nursery. While talking us through the books that she had bought during her pregnancy Carla talks about one on attachment parenting: *Why Love Matters*

Carla: Yeah, but it's made me think a lot about sort of childcare and – for later, (laughs) you know – scary.

Interviewer: *Why Love Matters.*

Carla: Hmm, hmm that's a fantastic one. Yeah I've seen her, she did a talk at one of the courses I was on, and that was really good, I found that quite um emotional to read actually (laughs) as well.

Interviewer: So what do you think about childcare?

Carla: Um I want to um – I want to have a childminder, I think. And that's why I don't want to go back full-time straight away either. Um and I haven't really got much further than that, but I can't really – because everyone at work's saying, "Are you going to bring the baby here?" you know, because we've got the baby facilities at work. And although the children seem really confident, and the – the child – you know, the workers are very professional, and it's fine, I just (.) phew I don't know. I think it's just too young, you know. And my head did say, you know, "Would you like to bring your baby here?" And I just kind of said, "I'd rather be in a place away from them, because I'd be worrying," you know, trying to say it tactfully... I just feel really strongly that um I don't think it's a good environment for very young children. Because it's quite noisy and busy, and because they mingle in with the older children, which is (.). I mean it's fantastic when you see them climbing, you know, they're climbing up the climbing frames independently, and – but there's not much time for quiet times, and just that (.) - because of all the shifts and the holidays and staff sickness and stuff.

Later on during the interview, Carla returns to conflicts that she has experienced between her professional identity and her emergent identification as a mother during her pregnancy.

Carla: I've noticed with um – with the younger mums at work, because they've got their mums sort of on board a bit. But um they seem to be putting them onto solid food a lot earlier than is rec – than I have heard is recommended. You know, I have one mum of – he's like 3 or 4 months old and, "Oh yeah he's eating solids already, it's really good." And I was thinking, "I thought you had to wait for six months." And she was like very proud of this. And she's like 20/21 I think she is. And um (.) and, you know, you just – because as a profession, you know, you say, "Oh yes? Oh really, yes?" You know, and I just sort of nodded and, you know, thinking, "Should I be saying anything? But I don't really know exactly." [...] I sort of thought, "Was it really my place?" Because she was sort of just chatting, it was like a – like a little – you know, the parents had come to share a lunch with the children, you know, and she was just sort of chatting like that. And um – and I didn't know (.) whether – because I wasn't entirely sure myself, you know, should I be contradicting that? And it's sort of issues like that have come up quite a bit, you know. And um, you know, and you'll get the parents saying, "Oh I want my child to sit down and learn the alphabet when they come to nursery." And, you know, so you explain that's not how it works here, and we learn through play. And I was kind of alright with talking like that. But when it comes to the very young children, I still don't feel very (.) sort of confident, I suppose, about – you know.

Interviewer: And also I suppose there's the difference between you being a professional and you being another mother...

Carla: You know, and um in one of the toddler groups they had um – they put a load of rice, dried rice out on a tray for children to play with. And um there was a – I’m not sure whereabouts she was from, but she was um sort of like an Asian parent saying that, “We could never do this in my country, it would be disrespectful to be wasting rice on – you know.” And we sort of hadn’t really thought about it like that, that was a really interesting take on it. Because we’re always like, you know, sensory play, and flour and mess, and this and that. And she was saying, “No, this would feed nine people, you know, why would we want to waste it?” And, you know, and there’s like other um parents who get really, really upset if their children get wet playing with the water, and stuff like that. [...] There’s always a battle going on a bit. [...] And it’s like, you know, they’ll get wet and catch a cold. But it’s not just – I mean there’s quite a few parents sort of – it’s more parents, I’ve noticed, who don’t have as much outdoor space and stuff at home, and have maybe just got a little balcony, or they’re in a lot, you know. [...] And um, you know, or they’ve got paint down their top, they’re dirty, you know, that’s terrible. And, you know, so we do a lot of work with that, you know. And I think it’s more of a confidence thing as well. But there is – it’s a cultural thing, you know. If they didn’t have water and sand and mud to play with when they were young, why do they? You can’t expect them to understand immediately why their children should have it.

We are not sharing these examples to expose Carla, or to question the quality of organised childcare, but to suggest how complicated it is to be the custodian of a professional identity while also becoming the object of that professional knowledge. Holding the responsibility of ‘being right’ and recognising difference produces a troubling reflexivity, requiring egg-shell-stepping manoeuvres that struggle to find a comfortable discursive space. Carla is not only wondering whether the ‘correct’ professional position is to impose her ideas about appropriate child development, or to recognise and value cultural diversity, but she is also placing herself as a parent in relation to these other parents, and distinguishing herself. Like Madeline, Carla’s teaching experience has been in the inner city, and impending parenthood is leading her to consider leaving the city for a more suburban middle class environment. The traffic of emotions and resources in this transitional relationship can be seen as one-way – Carla wants to draw on her professional knowledge and training to enrich her parenting skills. She does not want to bring her baby into the environment in which she developed these skills.

In the context of a broadly based study of contemporary mothering, these accounts suggested a distinctive and complicated relationship between maternal and working identities. Yet if we think about these women as teachers, we can also explore the ways in which pregnancy exposes the operations of the psychic life of the school and the accommodations demanded of educators. In the next part of the paper we will present data from one of our case studies, showing the potentially troubling ways in which teaching and mothering identities are entangled, and to give a sense of the sources of the emotional charge that characterises these women’s reflections on care.

### **Case study: Heather Chapman**

We met 27 year old Heather and her husband Andy shopping in Mothercare not long after they had discovered that she was pregnant, something that had completely disrupted their carefully made life plans. Both were teachers, and had come to the UK from Australia to work for a period of five years to pay off the mortgage on a house back home, where they intended eventually to return to start a family. The unplanned pregnancy had thrown them into confusion. Heather was in a primary school teaching job that she had committed herself to for three years. Despite her fears that the head and senior management team school would punish her for this, the school had been extremely supportive of her, reassuring her that she was eligible for maternity leave and that they would support her return to work. She describes her colleagues as ‘a family of people’, which she valued enormously having no family of her own in the country. Although Heather recognised that financially she would have to return to work after her maternity leave, this was ‘a shame’ having always envisaged herself as a stay at home mum. She had no sense how she would manage this return to work and was struggling to imagine how to balance the school timetable with childcare, while fantasising about the potential of creating a school based crèche that could support the 7 babies under 2 that are currently ‘on staff’.

We interviewed Heather again just over a year after the birth of her son Ben. Heather was pregnant with her second baby, living in their house in a suburb of an Australian city – missing the networks and sociability that characterise inner city mothering. The extracts that we have identified here capture moments in her account where there is some symbolic traffic between teaching and mothering identities, and between work and domestic domains. These are both examples of mixing and of separation between the public and private, and between lay and professional identities. Heather presents her birth ironically as fitting the timetable of the school day, ‘he was out at 3.30 so it was a school day, 9 to 3.30, the bell rang and he was there’, presenting mother and baby comically as schooled subjects. Her account of returning to work after her maternity leave suggests how integrated and entwined her working and parenting were at this stage:

I’d rock in to school at,...I think I was getting in to school sometimes at about 5.50, 6am in the morning so that Ben would have his morning, he’d go back to sleep, he’d have his bottle and then he’d go back to sleep and he’d normally sleep from about 6.00 around 7.30 and that’s when I could get work done [...] I had all the codes I’d chat with all the cleaners, everyone you know, Ben is here and all the cleaners would come down and see Ben in the morning and then at 7.30 once he’d wake up if I hadn’t finished he’d have a little play on the carpet and tot around while I got the last bits and things, being in reception was so much easier you know. There wasn’t the marking, there wasn’t you know the extensive amount of programming and particularly because it was the beginning of the year, and its still primarily free play it was fantastic, I was very lucky... so once I’d finished, I’d go in to the staffroom and everyone would come down generally, all the staff would come and have a play with Ben. If I had things to do my head would take him, I was welcomed to have him in meetings, he



always attended all the staff meetings, it was like...he became the school's baby which was beautiful you know. Everybody knew Ben, and loved him and... then at 9 am when school started oh...we'd go to the classroom, Karen [childminder] would arrive and drop her daughter off at the door and she'd...you know all my kids would run in to the class and say goodbye to Ben and off Ben would go for the day, and at 3.30 he'd get dropped back again. So it was good. And often if I had things to do in the afternoon I could give him to someone to have a bottle down in the staff room and then I'd come down.

However, this integrated life did not last, and after two months Heather gave her notice and returned to Australia, where it was financially possible for her to stay home with Ben. She explains that she may feel at ease about day care when he is 2 or 3 and has sufficient language to 'talk back to me', noting that her teaching experience has prepared her well for the moment of separation, when as a teacher you 'have to hang on to them and have them sob hysterically as mum walks away'. Heather says, 'I know I'll do it... every child goes through that and he'll be fine'. But at the moment he is 'still too baby-baby and I want...him to be the age where he understands why I'm walking away'.

In this second interview Heather also explains that her previous passion for teaching is slipping away. She is 'no where near as motivated or driven' and while being a teacher had been a huge part of her life, 'it doesn't matter any where near as much' now. In fact she draws on her teaching identity as a way of explaining that 'I'm really happy to go and do painting in the backyard and I'm really happy to sit in the sandpit for an hour, because that's what my teaching was - to do activities'. Heather also reveals some more difficult ways in which her professional training and expertise intrude on her mothering practice, as well as some of the ways in which her maternal experience encourage her to rethink familiar classroom scenarios. Knowledge of both home and classroom incite her to translate experiences of learning and mothering across this boundary.

Andy [husband] often says he hears my teacher voice coming out with Ben, and I don't think that's a bad thing, he needs to know sometimes no, and I mean it but I'm sure all mothers do it but I know I use my teaching strategies on Ben. [...]and I sometimes think though that I try, I'd never say it out loud but I catch myself, not judging because that's a horrible word but er...no other people, its generally like my sister and my sister in law perhaps, their mothering styles I sort of think in my head, I'm like...oh I wouldn't have allowed that, or you know...but then I think I wouldn't have allowed that in my classroom, I almost view their...like I think I've got to remind myself, no these are my little nieces and they're beautiful, and they're at home in their environment and its okay, but in my head I'm thinking, cos they're all starting to turn 3 and 5 and they're older and that's the age I was teaching, and I'm thinking oh I wouldn't let them speak like that but then I know the funny thing is I remember mums coming to me at school saying oh...he never speaks like, the way he does to you, at me at home, [...] oh he's such a well behaved boy and he's fantastic, oh he's not like that at home. And I'm seeing the home. So I can't...I sort of think oh, I 100% know Ben will be exactly the same, like I have no, I'm not in denial at all that

I'm going to have the typical child that will probably do all the same things and then I'll go...ooh you're not meant to...

We ask Heather whether studying child development has an impact on how she thinks about what Ben should be doing and what's normal for him. She replies that this knowledge is a source of anxiety for her and that she almost wishes that she 'didn't know I think it would be so much better, maybe I wouldn't care so much', because 'its all well and good to have the knowledge and the background but the actually doing and putting in to practice of your own child' is a different matter. Seeing your own child through your teacher eyes can be challenging, exposing the contradictions between a disciplinary educational gaze and an unconditional maternal perspective. Occupying both positions, Heather demonstrates the ways in which the *flow* between mothering and teaching can be disruptive and, at times, painful. Heather shares a number of concerns about Ben's social development in the interview, describing her frustrated attempts to find friends for him of the same age and sex within a highly privatized suburban neighbourhood. The following example shows how anxiety-provoking professional knowledge can be, but also the partial and destructive impact of its mundane classifications:

it had never occurred to me that Ben could be a child that could be isolated. I've taught in so many classes, and you walk in to the room and you can immediately pick the child that is the isolated, ostracized one in the room. And either you find, or I've found that its, the parents will reflect the child, when you get to meet the mum who often is a single parent, their lack of confidence and self esteem and it breaks your heart dealing with them because they're upset about their child or you get the opposite where er...or you get the child who's ostracized and isolated because he's aggressive and he's angry and he's a bully and then you meet the parents and you go oh well that's why. I said I'd never considered, it wasn't until that night seeing Ben isolated that oh my goodness he could be the one. ...Andy said don't be silly it takes an all rounded parents to produce an all rounded child he'll be fine. And I said but if I was to go back to teaching now I would view it so differently, because somewhere there's a mother who every night might be feeling the way I am tonight, every night when she lays down in bed, I've only got one night of this feeling sad about Ben, being...isolated, just devastated me, I've never...and I always work hard with those kids and try and make them special and get them involved in a group you know. I make them, I give them a nick name, a cool name in the class, and try and get them involved. But I just thought, if I think back over those kids that were the isolated one and it just devastates me that there's a mother and a father seeing their child come home upset or knowing ...and that would change my teaching for ever, which I didn't understand before. Without a child I didn't get it. I felt for those kids and I worked hard for those kids, but I didn't have an emotional...oh...

Heather's decision to step back from teaching during her children's early years needs to be understood in relation to the intensive reflexivity produced by the permeable boundary

between working and maternal identities and practices. Heather narrates her pre-mothering self as able to give unconditionally to her pupils. With motherhood this generosity can no longer be afforded.

Mum was always been, Heather you're just a born teacher that sort of thing, and its just realized to me that its not as important as I thought it was, er...this could sound so bad, but I'm sure a lot of teachers who are mothers, I hope they've gone through the same thing, of, where as I would come home, I would work for hours, my programs in my opinion, I've worked so hard they were fabulous. [...] you know I would spend weekends, go round...planning and programming and putting effort in, above and beyond what I know a lot of other staff at other schools do. And it wasn't anything to do with er.. I enjoyed it, I really enjoyed having fantastic lessons that the kids would fun out on, I enjoyed their successes. When it blew them way that they got something, yet now when I think about going back, and even when I did.....when I think about yeah going back in the 6 months that I did, I still cared about the education of those children, it still mattered extremely to me but I did, I did what was required of me I didn't go beyond the call...which you know I worry I think, oh god I wonder if parents are like...I wonder if parents are like, oh that's fantastic you know. My feelings were I would do everything that was required for those kids and I would make sure they got the best education, not obviously possible, because I probably could have done more, but I'd make sure that everything that was required that was done, now...its also about finding that balance, you know what I mean. He also deserves some time, he also deserves to have quality as well, family time.

### **Discussion**

Returning to the theoretical framework of the 'new sociology of work' which points to permeability between different kinds of work, and feminist appropriations of Bourdieu which explore that transposition of skills between biographical fields, we can affirm that for this group of teacher/mothers, there is a great deal of traffic between the domains of work and home. Focusing on our sub-sample of first time mothers who are also involved in the professional care of young children, there is a clearly discernable mixing and transposing of knowledge, skills and techniques across biographical fields. Yet this traffic is not fluid or mutually reciprocal. Many of the women in this cohort also expressed or acted upon a desire to separate, and to make boundaries between the professional and the personal. Expertise in the care and education of young children was productive of reflexivity commonly manifest in enhanced levels of awareness of ways of being and doing across different fields of practice. However, as Heather's case study suggests, this can be a troubling reflexivity that has the potential to transform both the professional and the maternal identity.

Our wider findings from the study suggest that the arrival of a new generation is a moment that is productive of social class distinctions – marking both the destination point for the classed journey of the daughter who is now a mother and the beginning of a new

class journey for the child. As teachers working in inner city schools and nurseries, Carla, Madeline and Heather have a heightened awareness of the ways in which education and care are implicated in projects of social mobility. Their proximity to the parenting projects of low income families is contained within professional discourses of 'support' which are destabilised by sharing the subject position of the mother. One response that is evident in the data presented in the paper is escape and separation, and the privatisation of professional skill into an intensive middle class mothering. Yet this also separates these women from other middle class mothers who may maintain an investment in work and career, and who may be protected, to some extent, by their lack of insider knowledge of childcare settings. We have been struck by the one-way direction of traffic across the boundaries of teaching and mothering, the tendency to take the professional into personal projects of mothering rather than taking mothering into the professional realm of the school and the nursery. Carla does not want to enrol her baby at her workplace nursery, Madeline wants to give up teaching to give time to her own children and although Heather begins by mixing the two, this situation does not last.

Considering the experiences of these women in psycho-social terms, it is possible to suggest that bringing the personal into teaching exists as a method for observing how we experience ourselves in the world (Pitt 2003). Processes of teaching and learning can be understood as psychic events, given shape by both conscious and unconscious formations. In developing a professional identity as caring, attentive and empathetic, teachers of young children may internalise a view of themselves as selfless individuals, emotionally committed to the children in their care. Providing guidance and expertise in early years settings remains the *right-thing-to-do* as professionals who hold a holistic understanding of the child's needs and seek to act in the child's best interests. Many teachers of young children share Heather's approach to the job as going beyond the call of duty, fully committed to providing a 'fantastic' environment in which children could play and learn. As an early career teacher, Heather's dedication to the children in her class can be seen as a form of attachment or emotional investment that prefigures the maternal self she describes as emerging following the birth of Ben, her own son.

For all the women who contributed to the case study element of the research, giving birth is an *emotional* experience that disrupts the affective settlements women may have made prior to pregnancy. Despite having a strong attachment to children in her care, the emotions generated by becoming a mother dislodge Heather's teacher identity and do not readily fit with her work in school. As Alice Pitt (2009) suggests, the performance of educational 'authority' may require the repression of identifications with the vulnerability of children (we were all at school once) as well as the recognition of the anxiety of parents who entrust their children to the expertise of professionals. Heather, Carla and Madeline all express some unease about integrating their maternal selves into their working environment and work hard to justify the re-entrenchment of the personal and familial and the need to separate work from their maternally reconfigured selves. Putting themselves and their children first appears necessary as attachment is transferred from the school children to the new baby. The pain of bringing the two worlds back together is articulated by Heather in the projected exercise of seeing her child as a schooled subject.

In this instance, her knowledge as a teacher is brought into conflict with her experience as a mother, prompting a re-evaluation of her practice in both domains.

A further disruption produced by the collision of knowledge and feelings points to the difficulties professionals have in dealing with difference at the level of the emotional. While teachers such as Madeline admire the dedication of Bengali mothers and develop elaborate teaching and learning strategies for ethnically diverse families, identifying with urban education and working class children becomes difficult when familial connections and aspirations enter the space. Processes of identification with the families in their working environment involve an uncomfortable acknowledgement that, while their professional practice in these settings may be good and appropriate for *others*, it is not what they want for their own child. Finding the space too busy, too noisy and too intermingled become euphemistic explanations for the alternative care they seek to provide for their own children. Teachers and childcare workers form a small part of our wider sample, and represent a very particular configuration of the situation of work and mothering. While teaching is recognised or possibly constructed as a particularly flexible and family friendly profession, our data suggests that it produces some specific and challenging juxtapositions for imagining motherhood, where the projects of work and mothering, so apparently similar, may be experienced as being in tension and even in competition. The potential for blending a teaching career with motherhood may not be as smooth or uncomplicated as conventional wisdom supposes.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have sought to explore the transition to first time motherhood as experienced by a small sub-sample of women who were also engaged in the professional care of young children. Seen in the context of our wider study, the experiences of these women in combining work with new motherhood was distinctive. Widely held assumptions about the nature of teachers' work suggest that a teaching career and family life can form the basis of an agreeable work-life balance for women. Indeed the projects of good mothering and early years education were seen as mutually constitutive, relying upon a feminine sensibility that empathised with the child by providing a safe and ever watchful environment for growth and development through play. The idea that teaching and motherhood can be successfully blended existed as a commonplace assumption, shared by many women in our study. The experiences of women engaged in the professional care of young children, however, presents a counter narrative to this conventionally held view, supporting psycho-social accounts of how educational authority is produced through a repression of the recognition of vulnerability (Pitt 2009). Negotiating the boundaries between work and motherhood produced a troubling reflexivity in which difficult feelings emerged and collided. As early years educators and new mothers, Madeline, Carla and Heather acted upon a desire to separate the professional and the personal. While they drew upon their professional knowledge to enhance their parenting skills, they were reluctant to take the personal into the workplace. The experience of working in inner city schools and nurseries has given these women intimate insights into the links between care, education and social mobility. Working with difference at the level of professional practice involves emotionally intense forms of

attachment, commitment and support. However, this emotional connection was disrupted by pregnancy. Becoming a mother prompted a renegotiation of professional and personal boundaries in which new modes of identification and desire emerged, including the desire for a particular class trajectory for their own child. For these women, the emotional experience of motherhood leads them to pursue mothering as a separate enterprise, marked by privatised and individual solutions to education, care and career. In doing so they separate themselves from their working environment and simultaneously find themselves removed from the experience of their middle-class counterparts who pay for childcare and return to work

## References

Adkins, L. (2002) *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*, Buckingham: Open University Press

Beauchamp, C. and Thomas, L. (2009) Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, (12), pp. 175-189

Britzman, D. (1998) *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: towards a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning*, NY: State University of New York Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1949 [1997]) *The Second Sex*, Gallimard/Vintage.

Fletcher, R. (1962) *The Family and Marriage*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Hargreaves, A. (2001) The emotional practice of teaching, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14, (8), pp.833-854

Kehily, M.J. (2002) *Sexuality, Gender and Schooling, shifting agendas in social learning*, London: Routledge.

Lovell, T. (2000) Thinking feminism with and against Bourdieu, *Feminist Theory*, 1, (1), pp. 11-32.

O'Connor, K.E. (2008) 'You choose to care': teachers, emotions and professional identity, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, (1), pp. 117-126

Pettinger, L., Perry, J., Taylor, R. and Glucksmann, M. (eds) (2006) *A New Sociology of Work?* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

Pitt, A.J. (2003) *The Play of the Personal, psychoanalytic narratives of feminist education*, New York: Peter Lang

Pitt, A.J. (2009) 'Generation and the paradox of autonomy in the teaching profession' paper presented at Gender and Education 7<sup>th</sup> Intl conference, University of London, Institute of Education, March 2009.

Steedman, C. (1987) Prisonhouses, in M. Lawn and G. Grace (eds.) *Teachers: the cultural politics of work*, Lewes: Falmer Press