

Mind-bodies, Interdependent Opposites and Knots

A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Child-Teacher Relationship in Upper Primary School

Submitted by Annie Ó Breacháin to the University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Education

June 2016

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Annie Ó Breacháin" in a cursive script. The first name "Annie" is written in a larger, more prominent hand, followed by "Ó Breacháin" in a smaller, more compact hand. The signature ends with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.



This thesis is dedicated to Mum, Conall and Poppy.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to **all of the team at the Graduate school of Education**, University of Exeter. Your guidance during the taught phase of this programme provided me with a solid foundation for undertaking this research.

I want to thank and remember **Professor Anna Craft** who was my initial supervisor before her untimely passing. Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a hanam. Thanks also to **Dr. Anthony Wilson** who worked with Anna as a second supervisor. I owe a debt of gratitude to **Dr. Nadine Schaefer** who agreed to become my principal supervisor following Anna's passing and who remained with me until leaving the university recently. Nadine, thanks for your critical eye, your guidance and insightful comments. Sincere thanks to **Dr. Kerry Chappell** who worked alongside Nadine and seamlessly transitioned to become my principal supervisor for my final year. Kerry, I appreciate your ongoing support, both pastoral and academic, and your careful reading of several drafts of each of the chapters in this thesis. Your attention to detail is exceptional and I am lucky to have had you as a mentor. And finally thanks to **Dr. Susan Jones** whom I approached to become my second supervisor for the final year. Your humanity and warmth are magnetic characteristics and your practical approach, both during the taught phase and the thesis phase of this programme, is much appreciated. Thank you for joining Kerry and I, for offering an alternative perspective and for being the embodiment of kindness.

Most sincere thanks to the research participants whose generosity will never be forgotten. I would like to thank those scholars to whom I sent emails asking for clarification on some aspect of their work. I was surprised at how many were kind enough to respond and to provide suggestions and encouragement. Those scholars include **Gert Biesta, Laura Lundy, Max van Manen, Linda Finlay, William Hare and Laura Sophia Fendt**.

I gratefully acknowledge financial support towards my Ed. D. from **Marino Institute of Education and St Patrick's College, Dublin City University**. Thanks to **Prof. Anne O'Gara, Dr. Michael Flannery, Prof. Fionnuala Waldron, Paula Murphy, Dr. Regina Murphy, Prof. Mark Morgan and Dr. Una McCabe** for your encouragement. Sincere thanks to my examiners, **Dr. Leah Tomkins and Dr. Fran Martin**, for suggestions to enhance the thesis and future writing.

I have many colleagues who were undertaking doctoral studies at around the same time and whose support carried me through difficult periods. Thanks to **Gerry O' Connell** and to all of the gang who participated in the 'nerd weekends' in various locations around Ireland: **Seán Delaney, Claire Marie Dunne, Joan Kiely, Leah O' Toole, Suzy Macken and Aiveen Mullaly**. Thanks to **Ristead Ó hAonghusa** for being my pal throughout.

Sincere thanks to my cousins, **Eileen and Vincent Lambe**, for helping me with both practical and creative aspects of this study. Thanks to my friends, **Patti Roche, Helen Hallissey and Lisa Clinton**, for insightful feedback on earlier drafts of this thesis.

To my family - my **Dad, my brother, Brian** and especially my mum, **Ita Connolly**, who made many sacrifices as a single mother so that I could 'learn up,' as Granny used to say!

Do mo ghrá geal, an fear céile is fearr ar domhan, **Conall**. Buíochas ó chroí leat as ucht na tacaíochta uilig. Mo cheol thú! Buíochas leat, a **Poppy**. Bhí tú liom ar an aistear seo. Chuir tú sciatháin ar ár gcroíthe ó thainig tú ar an saol.



## ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry into teachers' and children's 'lived experiences' of the child-teacher relationship in an Irish upper primary school context. It highlights the current need to re-focus our attention on the child-teacher relationship which Biesta (2004) argues is the 'location' of education. An overview of the literature on relational pedagogy is provided which connects the child-teacher relationship to broader theoretical debates including Heidegger's (1962) concept of *Mitsein* and Buber's *I- Thou* relation (1937). Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the overarching methodology following van Manen's (1990) 'lived experience' approach.

The study was conducted in a large, suburban, primary school with designated disadvantaged status. Before data generation commenced, a Children's Research Advisory Group was established in the school following Lundy, McEvoy, and Byrne (2011). The function of this group was to advise about conducting research with children. Research participants included three teachers and five children from each of those teachers' classes. Data generation featured the use of protocol writing and conversational interviews following van Manen (1990, 2014) and the use of embodied, drama methods which were unique to this study but inspired by the work of Norris (2000) and guided by O'Sullivan (2011). Data was also generated using visual methods drawing on the work of Mitchell (2011), Tinkler (2015) and Chappell and Craft (2011). In line with the phenomenological approach adopted, data was interpreted in what Gadamer (1989) describes as a circular manner. This involves attending to 'parts' whilst keeping in mind the 'whole' picture.

This study identified three overarching thematic findings which find resonance with the fields of relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning as well as new insights at the point where these two areas overlap. These include how teachers and children relate to one another as 'whole, embodied feeling beings'; the idea that there is a tension between 'closeness' and 'distance' in the child teacher relationship and that there is a need for both 'structure' and 'freedom' to feature in that relationship. Further, this study found that the child-teacher relationship is experienced as 'knotted' with social and contextual relationships. These findings are discussed in light of the concepts of 'connectedness' and 'emergence', features of complexity theory. This study provides new insights into how teachers and children experience their relationships with one another, thereby extending the body of knowledge on the child-teacher relationship.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Introduction to the Study.....	1
1.2 Primary Education in Ireland: Socio-economic and Policy Context.....	2
1.3 Research Aims and Question .....	7
1.4 Personal Motivation: Researcher’s Position .....	8
1.5 Choosing a Methodological Framework .....	10
1.6 Overview of Study .....	11
1.7 Structure and Organisation of the Thesis .....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	13
2.1 Introduction to the Literature Chapter .....	13
2.2 The Problem of Alienation and the Re-emergence of Relational Pedagogy .....	13
2.3 What is Relational Pedagogy?.....	15
2.3.1 Connectedness of human beings .....	18
2.3.2 Self, others and strangers.....	20
2.3.3 Spaces and gaps.....	23
2.3.4 Relational knowledge .....	24
2.4 The Nature of the Child-Teacher Relationship.....	28
2.4.1 Knowing one another as whole beings: Embodied relationships? .....	28
2.4.2 Fundamental qualities of fruitful relationships: Respect, trust and care .....	32
2.4.3 Power and dialogue .....	36
2.5 Considering Context in the Child-Teacher Relationship .....	38
2.5.1 Policy context .....	39
2.5.2. Socio-economic context. ....	41
2.5.3 School context: Ethos and culture.....	41
2.5.4 Classroom context .....	44
2.5.5 Children and teachers’ personal contexts: Readiness for relationship?.....	45

2.6 A Need for a New Kind of Knowledge of the Child-Teacher Relationship .....	47
2.7 Conclusion .....	48
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	49
3.1 Introduction.....	49
3.2 Research Design .....	49
3.3 Research Question and Aims .....	50
3.4 Ontological and Epistemological Position.....	51
3.5 Locating a Suitable Methodology.....	52
3.5.1 ‘Lived’ experiences and existential themes.....	52
3.5.2 Description and interpretation.....	54
3.5.3 An open phenomenological attitude.....	56
3.5.4 Subjectivity and intersubjectivity .....	56
3.6 Research Context .....	57
3.6.1 Research participants and choosing ‘examples’ .....	58
3.6.2 Inclusion criteria .....	60
3.7 Power and Participation: Considering Participants’ Roles.....	61
3.7.1 Playful approaches – devising a drama workshop .....	62
3.8 Critical Selection of Data Generation Instruments .....	64
3.8.1 Close observation .....	65
3.8.2 Protocol writing or protocol documenting.....	66
3.8.3 Conversational interviewing.....	69
3.8.4 Drama-based group method .....	75
3.8.5 Reflexivity .....	77
3.8.6 Visual research methods .....	82
3.9 Data Analysis .....	83
3.9.1 Interpretation: Gadamer and Bruner .....	84
3.9.2 Transcription and initial reading of participants’ texts and associated photographs .....	85
3.9.3 Dwelling .....	85
3.9.4 Searching for meaning units: Fasteners, foci, threads.....	85
3.9.5 Thematising – balancing part and whole .....	86
3.9.6 Writing phenomenological texts .....	87

3.10 Ethical Considerations .....	87
3.10.1 Gaining access and informed consent .....	88
3.10.2 The right to withdraw .....	90
3.10.3 Anonymity and confidentiality .....	90
3.10.4 Children’s research advisory group .....	91
3.10.5 Validity, rigour and plausible insight: Ethics of data generation and analysis .....	92
3.11 Conclusion .....	94
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion .....	95
4.1 Introduction.....	95
4.2 Relating as Whole, Embodied, Feeling Beings .....	97
4.2.1 Whole beings .....	98
4.2.2 Embodied, feeling beings .....	104
4.3 Relating through Interdependent Polarities: Closeness and Distance; Structure and Freedom .....	113
4.3.1 Closeness and distance.....	114
4.3.2 Structure and freedom .....	117
4.4 Relating whilst Knotted with Other Social/Contextual Relationships .....	127
4.4.1 The DEIS context and the child-teacher relationship.....	128
4.4.2 School ethos and the child-teacher relationship.....	130
4.4.3 Curriculum, pedagogy and the child-teacher relationship.....	133
4.4.4 Other members of the school community and the child-teacher relationship .....	135
4.5 Theoretical Resonances and Contributions .....	139
4.5.1 Relating as whole, embodied, feeling beings .....	141
4.5.2 Structure and freedom .....	142
4.5.3 Relational, embodied curriculum and pedagogy .....	144
4.5.4 The child-teacher relationship through the lens of complexity .....	145
4.6 Conclusion .....	149
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	150
5.1 Introduction to the Conclusion Chapter .....	150
5.2 Reflection on my Selection of Topic.....	150
5.3 Summary of Findings.....	151
5.4 Policy Implications.....	153

5.5 Implications for Practice.....	155
5.6 Reflection on Methodological Decisions.....	157
5.7 Contribution to Knowledge .....	159
5.8 Further Research .....	162
5.9 Concluding Comment .....	164
References .....	166
Appendices.....	186
Appendix A: Table of Data Sources: Short Codes Explained .....	186
Appendix B: Participants and Sampling in Phenomenology: Looking to the Field .....	187
Appendix C: Guide for Teachers on ‘Protocol Documenting’ .....	189
Appendix D: Subjecting Myself to Protocol Documenting- A Poem to One of my Primary School Teachers.....	190
Appendix E: Interview Guide for Teachers.....	191
Appendix F: Interview Guide for Children.....	193
Appendix G: Photo Showing my Journals for Reflective and Reflexive Note-taking .....	196
Appendix H: An Example of how Data were Coded within Nvivo 10 to ‘Child’ Codes, ‘Parent’ Codes and Ultimately to Themes .....	197
Appendix I: Results of Nvivo Query on All Data Sources Coded to the ‘Child’ Node ‘Closeness and Distance’ which Comes under the ‘Parent’ Node ‘Lived Relation’ .....	201
Appendix J: Tree Maps Generated Using Nvivo 10 Showing Codes (Nodes) Compared by Number of Items Coded .....	210
Appendix K: Process of Analysing Photographs of Embodied Data.....	211
Appendix L: Ethical Approval Certificate .....	212
Appendix M: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Teachers.....	218
Appendix N: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents .....	222
Appendix O: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children .....	226
Appendix P: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents of Children in the Children’s Research Advisory Group .....	230
Appendix Q: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children in the Children’s Research Advisory Group.....	233
Appendix R: Schedule of Fieldwork December 2014-April 2015 .....	236

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Depicting my understanding of theoretical concepts underlying relational pedagogy.....	17
Figure 3.1 Research design .....	50
Figure 3.2 Graphic representing data analysis .....	84
Figure 4.1 Graphic summary of thematic findings .....	96
Figure 4.2 DBFG, Cian.....	109
Figure 4.3 DBFG, Kate .....	110
Figure 4.4 Miss Vaughan’s concept map, CVIM, MV .....	114
Figure 4.5 Miss Elliot’s concept map, CVIM, ME .....	116
Figure 4.6 Behaviour board and timetable (CIVM, MS) .....	119
Figure 4.7 Miss Sullivan’s concept map, CVIM, MS .....	124
Figure 4.8 Mapping themes and sub-themes to theoretical areas .....	141
Figure 4.9 Looking at the child-teacher relationship through the lens of complexity .....	146



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that the educational equation cannot be approached in terms of two distinct and separately analysable subjects, a teacher and a child, but as a situation within which these two elements comprise an essential and inseparable unit. There is no such thing as a teacher or a pupil as realities in themselves. The two, even as words, are defined in terms of their relationship and can only be analysed within the context of the educational encounter.

Hederman (2012, p. 39)

### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study is the child-teacher relationship in the upper primary school context and as such belongs to a growing body of research in the field of 'relational pedagogy'. Bingham and Sidorkin (2004, p. 1) suggest that 'like many "new" approaches, the pedagogy of relation is not new at all' and rather has a long philosophical tradition starting with Aristotle moving through to Buber, Bakhtin, Dewey, Gadamer and Heidegger, and more recently to Noddings, all of whom emphasised the relational quality of education. The re-emergence of relational pedagogy and the upsurge of studies in the field come at a time when there is an increasingly commercialised view of education as a product in the marketplace (Lynch, Grummell, & Devine, 2012). The idea of relationships as the 'location' of education (Biesta, 2004, p.11 ) presents a significant challenge to the dominant, technocratic and commercialised conceptualisation. These ideas are extended in chapter two.

The majority of studies on the relationship between children and their teachers in the primary school context are conducted in the early years phase of primary school from a cognitive psychological perspective (see Driscoll & Pianta, 2010; Fumoto, 2011; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007) and have more recently drawn on ecologically-oriented systems theory (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Many concentrate on the causal relationship between the child-teacher relationship and other factors concerning the child such as academic achievement, social and emotional development and peer relations (see for example, Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). There are noticeably fewer studies addressing the child-teacher relationship beyond the early years phase and fewer still that focus specifically on the upper primary phase of schooling despite those within the

field of cognitive psychology acknowledging that the 'need for positive relationships does not diminish as students mature' (Myers & Pianta, 2008, p. 601) and seeing that period as a critical transition for children 'between the securities of infancy and the stresses of puberty' (Zee, Koomen, & van der Veen, 2013, p. 517).

Few studies examine the child-teacher relationship from the perspective of *both* teachers and children. Approaching the child-teacher relationship from a phenomenological standpoint, this study concentrates on teachers' and children's descriptions of their idiosyncratic, lived rather than conceptualised experiences (van Manen, 1994). In keeping with an open, phenomenological attitude (see section 3.5.3), the study focuses on the nature of the relationship itself, on the meanings attributed to it by those involved and on the complexities of that relationship. In essence, it is a study of the 'relationality of the relationship' (Biesta, 2004, p.13) from the perspective of those involved.

Examining the child-teacher relationship from the perspective of lived experiences carries the promise of offering a detailed, deep expression of the phenomenon. Some ideas that emerge may resonate with or extend ideas found in the cognitive psychological literature but the study aims to offer additional, nuanced understandings of the child-teacher relationship which may be of interest to those in the field of educational research.

## **1.2 Primary Education in Ireland: Socio-economic and Policy Context**

Whilst the child and teacher are in relation with one another, they are also in relation with a very particular context. Therefore, before addressing the specifics of this study, I provide some context by describing the nature of primary school education in Ireland at present. Firstly, I present a general description of Irish primary schools before outlining a number of changes which have characterised the last two decades of primary education in Ireland.

There are about 3,000 primary schools in Ireland at present, the vast majority of which are state-funded. Primary school teachers are generalists rather than specialists meaning that they have responsibility for all aspects of curriculum and all children in a class for a school year. Whilst more than half of the schools in Ireland are 'small schools' with fewer than 180 pupils and eight teachers, this study is situated in a large, urban school and the children generally have a different teacher each year.



Despite commitments from successive governments to lower class sizes in line with EU averages, children in Irish primary classrooms are most likely to be in classes of twenty-five or more with over one in five children in classes of thirty or more (Murray, 2014). This situation has been further complicated in recent years with the reduction in the numbers of support teachers and assistants for children with special educational needs. Teachers and children therefore, are navigating classroom contexts comprising large numbers of children many of whom have additional educational needs. The nature of child-teacher relationship may therefore be partly shaped by these large class sizes.

Irish Primary Schools have undergone a significant degree of change in the last two decades: changes in demographics, school management and ethos; legislation relating to professional standards and curriculum and government priorities. It is worth outlining the nature of such changes since the child-teacher relationship may be affected.

The economic boom in Ireland in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century led to an unprecedented degree of inward migration resulting in an increasingly diverse population in Irish primary classrooms. The subsequent economic collapse led to an increase in the proportion of children deemed 'at risk of poverty' (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2012, p.1 ). In 2010, one in ten Irish children aged 0-17 were found to be living in consistent poverty meaning that they were living in households with incomes below 60% of the national median income. It further means that they were experiencing some form of deprivation (e.g. going 24 hours without a substantial meal) (CSO, 2012). This may be relevant given that this study takes place in a school with designated social disadvantage status. Such schools avail of additional supports and resources under the DEIS plan introduced by the Department of Educational and Skills in 2005 (the acronym stands for 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools but 'deis' is also an Irish word pronounced 'desh' meaning 'opportunity'). In the case of primary schools, socio-economic variables used within the plan to identify social disadvantage included unemployment, as well as percentages of families in local authority accommodation, lone parenthood, members of the travelling community, large families (5 or more children) and the percentage of those eligible for free books (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2005). In schools that meet the criteria, the pupil: teacher ratio is also deliberately smaller (24:1) than in non-Deis schools. It may be the case that the

relationship between teachers and children in their classes has particular significance in the DEIS context.

A further change during the same period has been increased debate about school management and the role of religion in primary schools. Whilst the majority of schools in Ireland continue to be de-facto denominational and mostly Catholic, an increasing number of alternative models of non-denominational and interdenominational school management have emerged and are unable to meet parental demand for such alternatives (DES, 2013). In recent years therefore, teachers and children have been negotiating increasingly diverse and complex landscapes in terms of socio-economics, language, culture and religion.

Another change in the Irish educational landscape was the signing into law of The Teaching Council Act in 2001. The Teaching Council was established in 2006 marking the beginning of the first formal step towards professional standards for teachers in Ireland. In 2012, the Teaching Council published a Code of Professional Conduct for teachers which sets out the standards of professional knowledge, skill, competence and conduct required for the profession. In the context of this study, it is significant that the child-teacher relationship is given special recognition both explicitly in standards that require teachers to develop positive relationships with children and implicitly in the four core values underpinning the standards: respect, care, integrity and trust.

Each of these changes inform the context of this study but perhaps of most relevance is the significant amount of change in terms of what is valued and prioritised at a curricular level. Gleeson (2010) highlights the absence of philosophical and ideological underpinnings to curricular development in the Irish context arguing that curriculum is viewed simply as 'syllabus content' consisting of 'rules, procedures and unquestionable truths' where knowledge is 'value free and comes neatly packaged in subjects' (Gleeson, 2010, p. 2). Whilst the relationship between curriculum and the child-teacher relationship may not be apparent at first; that which is included and excluded in prescribed curricula conveys strong messages about desired classroom activity which in turn may impact on the child- teacher relationship. Despite the lack of explicit disclosure of philosophical and ideological foundations in curricular development, as Gleeson (2010) argues, the values underpinning curriculum emerge through its enactment.

In 1999, the primary curriculum was published in Ireland and remains the mandatory curriculum followed across all primary schools. The points of revision from its predecessor, published in 1971, include an emphasis on 'breadth and balance', recognition of the role of language and the arts and commitment to each child's potential and holistic development. At the time of its introduction, the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) was lauded for its breadth of vision and it continues to garner the highest praise for its child-centeredness, broad and balanced curriculum and recognition of the emotional element in teaching and learning (see Alexander, 2010; Coolahan, 2011; Downes, 2003). The curriculum (DES, 1999) makes specific mention of the importance of the child-teacher relationship. The 'social and emotional dimension of learning' is identified amongst one of the principles of learning in the introductory document wherein it states that:

It is widely recognised that the child's social and emotional development significantly influences his or her success in learning. This is addressed most effectively through a school ethos that is characterised by a caring, interactive relationship between teachers and pupils. It is also a central concern of learning in every curriculum area.

(DES, 1999, p. 16)

Further attention is given to this relationship in a section entitled 'the child and the learning community'. Teacher quality, as one of the determining factors in the child's learning and development in school, is at least in part defined by the relationship between the teacher and the child:

It is the quality of teaching more than anything else that determines the success of the child's learning and development in school...He or she has a complex role as a caring facilitator and guide who interprets the child's learning needs and responds to them. This role is informed by a concern for the uniqueness of the child, a respect for the integrity of the child as a learner and by a sense of enthusiasm and a commitment to teaching... The quality of the relationship that the teacher establishes with the child is of paramount importance in the learning process... A relationship of trust between teacher and child creates an environment in which the child is happy in school and motivated to learn.

(DES, 1999, p. 20)

Whilst quality teaching is sometimes perceived in narrow, linear terms whereby the 'input' of quality teachers results in high academic achievement (or output) on the part of the child; this interpretation positions the child-teacher relationship as a central feature of quality

teaching. This aligns with the overall tone and set of values embedded in the 1999 primary school curriculum.

The next most significant government publication to impact on the Irish primary school landscape came in the form of a strategy published in 2011 which aimed to improve standards of literacy and numeracy among children and young people in Ireland. The strategy (DES, 2011) marked a noticeable shift in values from those espoused in the 1999 curriculum. According to the Strategy document, a key driver behind its publication was the poorer than usual performance of Irish fifteen-year-olds in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), with Ireland dropping from fifth to seventeenth place (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). The strategy asserted that 'literacy and numeracy are urgent national priorities for our education system' (DES, 2011, p. 14). Key messages in the strategy were printed in bold red font creating a tabloid sense of urgency. Some of the main changes to the existing primary school experience included increased time spent on developing literacy and numeracy skills with removal of teacher discretionary time and the introduction of an additional point of standardised assessment to that which had been required since 2006, bringing the total to three. One of the objectives of the strategy was to 'benchmark the literacy and numeracy achievement of Irish students with that of students in other developed countries' (DES, 2011, p. 8). This aligned with the overall competitive and market-driven tone of the document whereby raising standards in literacy and numeracy was seen as key to 're-building our economic prosperity' (DES, 2011, p. 15). This rather explicit focus on economic prosperity forms part of a broader picture on the ideology that informs Irish education provision at present (Lalor, 2013) and marks a significant shift in values from those espoused in the 1999 curriculum.

Currently teachers and children are working with both the primary school curriculum and the literacy and numeracy strategy despite their ideological differences. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of the literacy and numeracy strategy on the nature of primary schooling in Ireland, the pressure to increase standards, to compete at an international level and to build a more prosperous Ireland could impact on the child-teacher relationship. O'Brien (2008) highlights the rise of individualism in Irish society and the associated view of people being independent rather than interdependent. She further highlights the marketization and commodification of schooling and asks if the relationship between

teachers and students could become commodified. Ball (2003), in his work identifying the rise of a culture of performativity in education, suggests that in such a culture caring about one another is replaced by caring about performance. My concern is that with increased emphasis on individual performativity and the relationship between performativity and economic prosperity; the relational element of teaching and learning could be conceived of as an optional extra to the core work of the primary school and ultimately side-lined.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Question**

The principal aim of this study is to explore upper primary school teachers' and children's lived experiences of being in relationships with one another. At a time when relationships are in danger of being side-lined in educational discourse generally and in the Irish context in particular, I aim to bring greater recognition to the child-teacher relationship in upper primary settings. Through researching the child-teacher relationship from the perspective of those within it, I wish to highlight teachers and children's knowledge of that relationship.

Aspelin (2011) suggests that relational pedagogy is a theoretical discourse. Aitken, Fraser, and Price (2007) rightly identify the abundance of studies at a 'macro level' and the comparatively few at a 'micro level', differentiating between those that are purely theoretical and those that are grounded in experience. A further aim of this study therefore, is to offer a contribution to knowledge at the micro level.

The following research question guides this study:

How do teachers and children experience the child-teacher relationship?

This is a meaning question, which is non-propositional in nature and thus can never be 'closed down' nor provide answers or solutions (van Manen, 1990, p. 23). This question, therefore, offers an opportunity for teachers and children to share their experiences of their relationships with one another. I hope that this study can shed light on such experiences and enable a deeper understanding of the child-teacher relationship.

#### **1.4 Personal Motivation: Researcher's Position**

In the initial phase of this research journey, I was unsure about a research topic and considered areas as varied as 'the nature of small schools', 'the portrayal of teaching and learning in film' and 'inquiry approaches to learning'. At around that time, I attended a research symposium where the presenter suggested that one way to read a research paper is to ask 'what is this author angry about?' I began to think about what was making me angry to see if that would help to refine my focus. I discovered that I was angry at the prevailing technocratic, neoliberal view of teaching and learning dominating the Irish policy landscape (see Lynch et al., 2012). I decided to foreground the relational element of education in my research. Whilst wondering about the integrity of my research focus, I was encouraged by the following question, 'Why would you want to carry out a piece of research if you didn't in some way want to persuade somebody of the value of what you are doing?' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2008, p. 4). I intend to shed light on the distinct relationship that exists between a child and their teacher and to bring that relationship and its significance for teaching and learning into focus in the context of Irish primary school education.

In my current capacity as a primary school teacher educator, I am often involved in formal and informal conversations about 'good teaching' and 'good teachers'. Of course, the difficulty lies in the understanding of what 'good' means and what is prioritised or side-lined in an effort to focus on that which is considered desirable. Over the last three years, I have been involved in the development of a new practice-based module of initial teacher education. This work involves refining 'high leverage practices' in teaching. (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009, p.277). High leverage practices are defined as 'core task domains of teaching ....in which the proficient enactment by a teacher is likely to lead to comparatively large advances in student learning' (Ball, Sleep, Boerst, & Bass, 2009, p. 460). In other words, these are teaching practices considered fundamentally important to children's learning.

From professional experience as a primary school teacher and from observing close to two hundred student teachers teaching, I believe that a necessary component underlying any high leverage practice is an ability to build relationships with children. Too often I have seen

lessons, that read well on paper, fall short because of a disconnect between the content being taught and the children with whom the teacher is working or because of a more fundamental inability on the part of the teacher to engage with the children on any level other than to 'manage' their behaviour. Conversely, I have been in classrooms feeling like an imposter because of the mutual respect, dynamism and connection between the student teacher and the children. In such situations, the 'success criteria' against which I am marking the student teacher seem inadequate.

A deeper motivation for this research is my personal experience of relationships with teachers. I attended a roundtable recently where a researcher spoke about a narrative inquiry that she was conducting which aimed to disrupt student teachers' deficit theories (Allison-Roan & Hayes, 2014). She described how she told her group of student teachers about a child with a disjointed set of school experiences and a troubled home life and asked for the student teachers' responses. They, unsurprisingly to the researcher, predicted a poor future for the child and were very critical of the child's parents and upbringing. The researcher later revealed that the story was her own. Whilst listening to that researcher, I thought of past teachers from my own school days. I too had a somewhat disjointed experience of school having attended four different secondary schools. Two kinds of teachers stood out in my mind. On the one hand there were the interested, caring, encouraging ones who saw vulnerability in me and were human enough to respond. On the other hand, the cruel, sarcastic, negative bully who I had the misfortune to encounter in one secondary school. Immediately following that roundtable presentation, I began to write and though perhaps I always knew it subconsciously, I discovered that one of the motivations for becoming a teacher was because of the positive relationships I had built with some teachers. I further discovered that each of the ideas that I had considered as possible topics for this doctoral research, from a study on the particular nature of small schools; to the portrayal of teaching and learning in film; to inquiry approaches to learning, though seemingly unrelated, all had strong associations with the child-teacher relationship.

The professional and personal experiences that I have described in this section contribute to my 'biological presence' (Smith, 2004. p. 45) in this study whereby the declaration of my motivations can serve as an access point to the texts that emerge. A Husserlian phenomenological stance would suggest 'bracketing' these experiences and pre-

conceptions to arrive at the essential and general structures of the phenomenon. In contrast, Heidegger's interpretive orientation or hermeneutical phenomenology, which is the approach I adopt, is built on a belief that this 'bracketing' is neither possible nor desirable (Finlay, 2012). In hermeneutical phenomenology, researcher subjectivity is inevitably implicated (Finlay, 2012) and researchers adopt a critically self-reflective stance. Discussion of 'hermeneutical phenomenology' is offered in the next section and more fully in the methodology chapter.

### **1.5 Choosing a Methodological Framework**

The philosophical assumptions underlying this study come from the interpretive tradition. This implies an ontological belief that social reality is complex, non-linear and subjective. It further implies an epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed and re-constructed by social actors and that the only way to come to know that reality is through the participants' interpretations of it. This study conceptualises the child-teacher relationship as contextualised and impossible to abstract from its context.

Having explored the potential of a variety of interpretive methodological frameworks and guided by Creswell (2007), I felt that phenomenology with its emphasis on detailed description would likely provide the most fruitful approach. Whilst phenomenology can be purely descriptive such as is the case with transcendental phenomenology; this study will not only examine the nature of the child-teacher relationship but the subjective *meanings* that both children and teachers ascribe to that relationship. Given the importance of 'lived experiences' (van Manen, 1990), subjective meanings and my central interpretive role in what will emerge as data, hermeneutic phenomenology best describes the methodological approach.

Kakkori (2010) argues that there are fundamental differences and tensions between the terms 'phenomenology' and 'hermeneutics'. She contends that whereas the former relates to *the essence* of things and is therefore generalizable, the latter relates to *meanings* and is therefore specific. However, following Gadamer's explanation of hermeneutics (1989), a phenomenon can be experienced in a particular and unique way and yet lived within a shared context. It is this interpretation of hermeneutical phenomenology that guides the



methodological approach in this study whereby the child-teacher relationship is seen as being experienced in a very particular, subjective way by those involved whilst also recognising the existence of this phenomenon within its context. This does not mean that it intends to formulate generalisations (Magrini, 2012) but that the broader context of the phenomenon is recognised.

## **1.6 Overview of Study**

This study used hermeneutic phenomenology to explore teachers' and children's lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship in an urban, upper primary, socially-disadvantaged primary school. Three teachers and five children from each of those teachers' classes (fifteen children in all) participated in the study. Full consideration of the process of selecting participants is offered in section 3.6.1. A Children's Research Advisory Group (Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011) was used to advise about methods of engaging children in research. Six children participated in the advisory group (see section 3.10.4).

Data were generated in various phases. Multi-modal data generation instruments were deliberately chosen to allow for the creation of in-depth descriptions of the child-teacher relationship. Firstly, teachers documented their relationships with the children in their classes using their chosen form (see section 3.8.2). Children engaged in some preliminary drama-based workshops (see section 3.7.1). Next, I observed the teachers and the children in their classes (see section 3.8.1). Afterwards, three teachers and six children were interviewed for the first time (see section 3.8.3). Following the initial interviews, another round of observation was conducted in each of the classrooms. Thereafter, a second interview using visual methods was carried out with the teachers and the children engaged in a drama-based focus group (see sections 3.8.4 and 3.8.6). I made reflexive notes, some written and some audio, throughout the data generation process (see section 3.8.5).

The use of hermeneutic phenomenology in this study sought to discover the lived experiences and the subjective meanings of the child-teacher relationship in upper primary contexts in Ireland. This approach afforded a fresh look at a phenomenon that had previously been researched predominantly from a cognitive psychological perspective. Knowledge that is generated through phenomenological inquiry is not inductive nor does it

offer solutions to practical educational problems. Rather the phenomenological dynamic offers an original framework that helps to illuminate thinking (Guimond-Plourde, 2009), in this case, about the child-teacher relationship and relational pedagogy.

### **1.7 Structure and Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in five chapters. In this first chapter, I introduced the reader to the field of study in which this research is located, my personal motivation for engaging in this research and the specific context for this study. I also outlined the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this research and discussed how the research aims and questions would be answered. The second chapter opens with a discussion about the reasons for the re-emergence of relational pedagogy in educational discourse. I explore themes from both theoretical and empirical literatures relating to the child-teacher relationship and highlight how this particular study fits within the existing knowledge-base. In chapter three, I discuss the methodological approach and its theoretical underpinnings drawing on the work of Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Finlay (2011, 2012, 2013) and van Manen (1990, 2007, 2014). I present the research design, its methods, how data were analysed and ethical considerations. In chapter four, I present my findings and discuss their relevance in light of existing literature and how they contribute to an understanding of the child-teacher relationship from a theoretical point of view. In the final chapter, I take the opportunity to reflect on the study as whole. I offer a reflection on my choice of topic and my methodological decisions. I summarise the study's findings and offer some practice and policy implications from an Irish primary education perspective. Finally, I outline my contribution to knowledge before considering future, related research projects.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction to the Literature Chapter**

This study aims to explore teachers' and children's lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship in upper primary contexts in Ireland. Through foregrounding this relationship, this study belongs within the field of relational pedagogy.

To contextualise this study, I examine the reasons behind the re-emergence of relational pedagogy in educational discourse before examining how it is defined. I discuss themes that I have identified in both theoretical and empirical literature concerning my exploration of child-teacher relationships including the 'connectedness of human beings', 'self, others and strangers', 'spaces and gaps' and 'relational knowledge'. I consider the nature of the child-teacher relationship reviewing the conflicting notions of relating as stereotypes and as whole, embodied beings. Next, I present an argument for the necessity of fundamental qualities in the child-teacher relationship including respect, trust and care. Further, I consider the role of power in the child-teacher relationship and how power can be experienced both as a tool of oppression and liberation. I investigate the context-embedded nature of educational relations attending to school contexts, classroom contexts and teachers' and children's personal contexts. Within each of the sections that follow, I explore key concepts in the literature to set the context for this study and provide a rationale for the need for a new kind of knowledge about the child-teacher relationship.

### **2.2 The Problem of Alienation and the Re-emergence of Relational Pedagogy**

Due to advances in digital technologies, human beings are more connected than ever and within the next six years, most of humanity will be connected to one another by some form of digital device (Chan, 2014). However, a closer look at our connection reveals that many of us are involved in 'chimerical relations' (Hutchinson, 2004) or unreal relationships and becoming almost paradoxically more disconnected from fellow human beings. Bingham et al. (2004) highlight this disconnect in the educational context and point to the growing problem of alienation for all members of school communities. They attribute the feeling of alienation to an increase in bureaucracy arguing that 'students, teachers and parents increasingly find themselves in situations void of meaningful human contact, ridden with

frustration and anonymity' (Bingham et al., 2004, p. 6). Carman (2013) suggests that the dominant rational view has given us a model of ourselves as disengaged thinkers completely disconnected from others. In a similar vein, Lynch et al. (2012, p. 14) highlight the impact of 'new managerialism' on Irish education and the erosion of the traditional caring roles played by principals and teachers. They argue that education has become 'another consumption good (not a human right) paralleling other goods whereby the individual is held responsible for her or his own 'choices' within it'. Similarly, Ball (2008), writing in the U.K. context, has argued that the collapsing of educational and social policy into economic and industrial policy has resulted in students being viewed as consumers.

Bingham et al. (2004) suggest that differing solutions to the alienation problem are offered by traditionalists on the one hand and progressivists on the other. The traditionalists, they argue, demand high stakes tests and accountability whereas the progressivists propose reformed curricula with the intent of intrinsically motivating children to learn. Similarly, Hederman (2012) writing in an Irish context, argues that education has always been reduced to the analysis of three separate and distinct elements namely, the teacher, the student and the method. He calls this educational theory on which, he argues, most of our schooling is based the 'Moses, Macbeth and Montessori Syndrome' (Hederman, 2012, p. 32). He suggests that all models of education in Western culture comprise some combination of the teacher (Moses), the student (Macbeth) and the method (Montessori). In traditional education, Hederman (2012) maintains, emphasis is placed on teacher as the proactive agent, pupil as passive receptacle and method as the funnel which provides one-way traffic between the two. He suggests that no matter how seemingly revolutionary, new educational theories and movements, including progressivism, remain true to this format and are always simply a reorganisation of the same paradigm.

The solution offered by each of these authors is similar: a focus on human relations or on what Bingham et al. (2004) call the 'pedagogy of relation'. This is not a new idea but rather a re-emergence of a long tradition of relational thinking that can be traced back as far as Aristotle. Van Manen (1994) notes how the German philosopher and pedagogy theorist, Nohl (1982) suggested that studying the relation between the educator and his / her pupils was the starting place for a science of pedagogy. The Irish patriot, Pádraig Mac Piaráís, who was, among other things, an educator, and who was writing in the early 1900s, similarly

insisted on the centrality of an intimate and personal relationship between the teacher and the pupil. 'Aiteachas', from which the current Irish word 'oideachas' (meaning education), derives, translates as 'fosterage'. Traditionally, teachers were fosterers and pupils foster-children. Mac Piaráís (1916, p. v) suggested that the meaning of such language is not arbitrary but rather 'the words and phrases of a language are always to some extent revelations of the mind of the race that has moulded the language'. Equally van Manen (1994, p. 59) suggests that being 'attentive to the etymological origins of words' reveals something of the original lived experience. The language used to describe education highlight that rather than being a new phenomenon in the Irish context, relational pedagogy was instead the fundamental way in which education was understood since the establishment of the Free State. The most recent upsurge of interest in relational pedagogy internationally is credited to feminist writers such as Nel Noddings (Bingham et al., 2004).

According to Bingham et al. (2004), approaching education from a relational perspective will result in vibrant, democratic school communities. Hederman (2012), too, proposes that education be reconstructed around relationship. He suggests that all future educational endeavours ought to begin 'with analysis of its most fundamental datum – the pedagogical encounter, the educational relationship – which becomes the first term and the regulating norm of the investigation' (Hederman, 2012, p. 41). Like Hederman (2012), Stengel (2004) wonders about the possibilities afforded by a fresh look at education with a focus on relation, the interaction between and among teachers and students. This study is designed to investigate teachers' and children's lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship.

### **2.3 What is Relational Pedagogy?**

Whilst the term 'pedagogy of relation' is used in some literature, other literature uses the term 'relational pedagogy' and these are used interchangeably. In the most comprehensive publication in the field of relational pedagogy, '*No Education without Relation*,' Bingham et al. (2004) tease out the meaning of a pedagogy of relation through a number of relational propositions (see Bingham et al., 2004, p. 6-7 for the full list). The first of these is noteworthy in the context of this study: 'a relation is more real than the things it brings together. Human beings and non-human things acquire reality only in relation to other beings and things' (Bingham et al., 2004, p. 6).

By this conceptualisation, the study of the teacher, the child, the method, the curricular content or any other element in isolation is insubstantial. Biesta (2004, p. 13) concurs suggesting that a theory of educational relationship is not about the constituents of the relationship i.e. the teacher and the learner but about the 'relationality' of the relationship. In other words, it is concerned with the interaction between the teacher and the student.

Bingham et al. (2004, p. 6) further propose that 'teaching is building educational relations.' It is interesting that the term 'learning' has been excluded from this proposition. This aligns with Biesta's argument that whereas teaching implies relationship, learning does not necessarily have this implication. This is because of the potential for learning to happen alone and in any place as captured in terms such as 'lifelong learning' and 'informal learning' (for a full discussion of Biesta's 'learnification of education' see Biesta (2013)). Biesta locates this thinking within complexity theory seeing teaching as a complex system. As distinct from simple systems, such as machines, complex systems cannot be deconstructed into their constituent parts and do not operate in a predictable, linear, deterministic manner. Rather such systems are constantly on a path towards becoming more complex and are in interaction with their environment depending on such interaction for their existence (Biesta, 2010). Complexity theory challenges the mechanistic world-view so often applied in educational discourse (Biesta, 2010). The proposition offered by Bingham et al. (2004) firmly holds that 'building educational relations' and 'teaching' are synonymous. In other words, in order for teaching to be considered as such, it must have at its core a commitment to building relationships between the teacher, the child and the subject matter.

It seems that authors in the field of relational pedagogy draw on a multitude of theoretical perspectives and while some are explicitly stated, others are implicit in the language used. I approached the theoretical literature through the lens of relational pedagogy. This focus has influenced the themes I have identified to include 'connectedness of human beings', 'self, others and strangers', 'spaces and gaps' and 'relational knowledge', each of which will be dealt with in turn. Any attempt to categorise necessarily involves separating concepts which do not adequately reflect their relationship to one another. Figure 2.1 below attempts to portray the connections between these themes and indeed those that are not connected. Its meaning will become more apparent in each of the subsequent sections. The skipping ropes are intended to represent links between different concepts. For instance Buber's

(1937) 'I: Thou' relation is depicted, from the perspective of the teacher who, through dialogical relation with children, begins to see them as 'Thou' as opposed to 'It' (see section 2.3.1). Heidegger's (1962) concept of our being-in-the-world as fundamentally connected to others (Mitsein) as an a priori existential (see section 2.3.1) is depicted on the right hand side of the diagram. Part of Biesta's (2004) chapter title 'mind the gap' features prominently in yellow in the diagram. The reason for this is that while all these connections are certainly part of the child-teacher relationship, his idea of the necessity of spaces and gaps in order for relation to occur has influenced my understanding of relational pedagogy (see section 2.3.3). The lost tourist, who looks perplexed about whether to approach 'teacherland, 'childland' or 'methodland', represents an idea offered by Hederman (2012) (see section 2.3.1) about how educational theory has tried to focus on all of these factors in isolation instead of looking to what Biesta (2004, p.11) would argue is the 'location' of education, namely the child-teacher relationship.

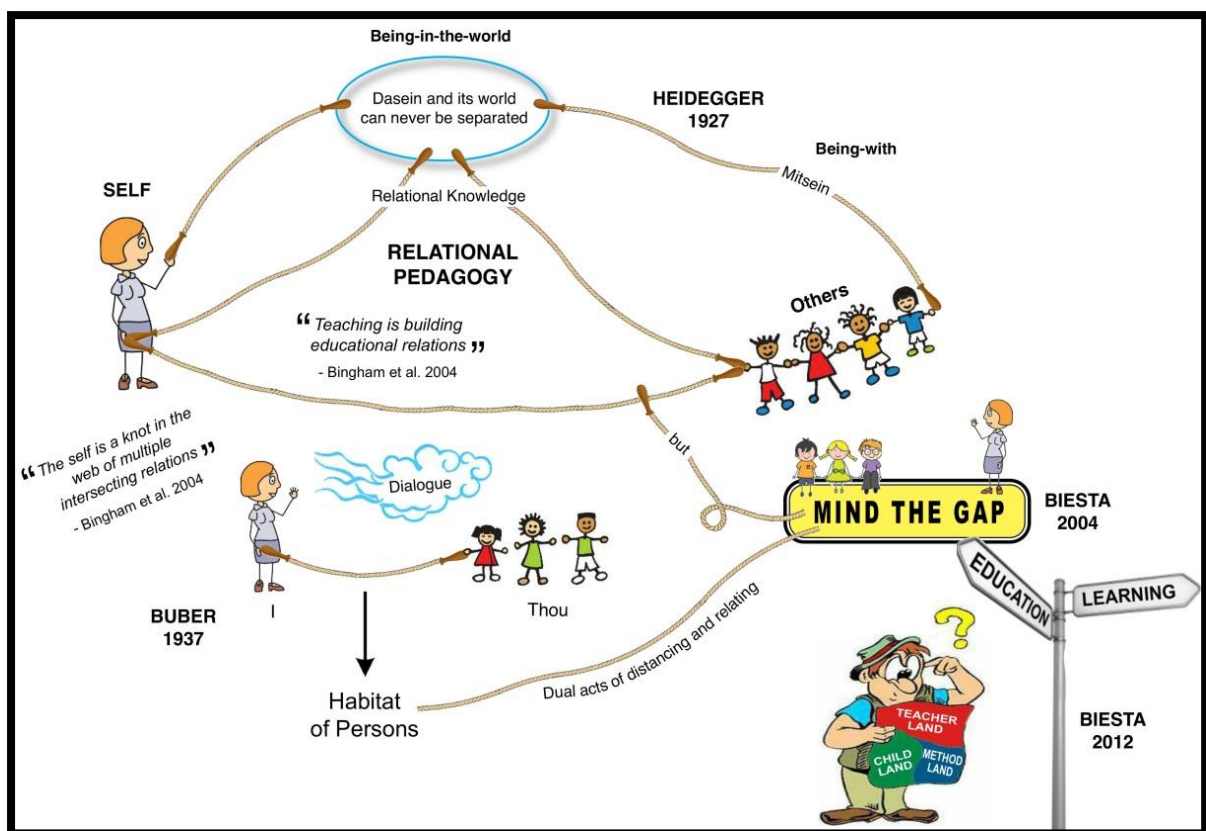


Figure 2.1 Depicting my understanding of theoretical concepts underlying relational pedagogy

### 2.3.1 Connectedness of human beings

Cognitive development is of course vitally important, but it is a relatively thin veneer over our primal being.

(Riley, 2011, p. 42)

A common thread running through the literature on relational pedagogy is a belief that human persons are, at a fundamental level, connected to the world and to one another. This philosophy can be traced to Heidegger who stated that 'it is not the case that man 'is' and then has by way of an extra a relationship-of-being towards the 'world'' (1962, p.84). Heidegger rejected the idea of the isolated subject and the decontextualized external world. Rather he contended that our sense of being springs from a more basic and primordial engagement with the world (Reuther, 2013). Heidegger chooses the German term '*Dasein*' to encapsulate the idea of the human person's being-in-the-world with the hyphenation intended to emphasise '*Dasein*' as a unitary phenomenon (Wrathall & Murphey, 2013). 'In-the-world' does not refer to a spatial phenomenon but rather an existential one with the 'in' being more akin to how someone might be 'in love' rather than in a place (George, 1998). *Dasein* is accompanied by the related concept '*Mitsein*' which captures the togetherness (literally 'being-with') of humans in world. Once again, from a Heideggerian perspective, it isn't the case that the human being *chooses* to connect to others but rather that the nature of being human is being connected. Buber (1937, p. 27) argued that the human being is born in relation to others, a notion he referred to as 'the inborn thou'. However, Buber takes issue with some of Heidegger's assertions. Of particular relevance to this study, is Buber's critique of how he believes Heidegger limits the human experience of truth to being disclosed 'only in the realm of the individual's relation to himself' (Buber, 1937, p. 165). Critically for Buber, relations with others are the essences of human beings and this is why his thesis is crucial to the pedagogy of relation. Buber argued that distance is the precondition for the emergence of relation. In other words, the human being is born in relation to others and it is from this relationship that the self emerges.

In his seminal essay *Ich und Du* (1923), translated into English in 1937, Buber proposed the *dialogic principle*. He suggested that 'the world to man is twofold' and that man relates to the world either as another living thing (Du/Thou) or as an object (Es/It) (Buber, 1937, p. 3).



According to Buber, relational processes may be divided in two. Participants are either immediately present in relation to each other as 'Thou' or engage in mediated relationships with others as 'It' (Aspelin, 2011). 'I- Thou' refers to the realm of the dialogic relation whereas I-it relates to the realm of subject-object experiences. Buber (1937) would argue that it is our choice to thin or thicken the distance by entering into an 'I-Thou' relation with an 'other' or withdrawing into an 'I-It' mode of existence (Scott, 2014). Buber's (1937, p. 11) insistence that the 'I-thou' relation cannot be sought out and rather is met 'through grace' is somewhat disheartening when we consider the educational relationship. Indeed, Buber (1937, p. 17) argues that 'as soon as the relation has been worked out or has been permeated with a mass, the 'Thou' becomes an object within objects'. Any effort to generate or plan for 'I-Thou' relations results in 'I-It' relations rather than being in direct relation.

The relevance of Buber's dialogic principle for education is that it shifts the emphasis from the teacher and the pupil onto the space between them (Hederman, 2012). Building on Buber's work, Aspelin (2011) suggests that our focus ought to be not only on what teachers and children do together but how they are together. He sees this as a crucial distinction and suggests that relational pedagogy should hold two distinct but inter-related dimensions. The working term Aspelin (2011) uses for these dimensions are 'co-operation' and 'co-existence'. Co-operation relates to the processes in which individuals co-ordinate their actions towards specific goals (Aspelin, 2011). The term co-existence for me evokes a sense of mere tolerance but Aspelin's intention is almost the opposite. Co-existence is defined as somewhat more unpredictable than co-operation whereby 'no means are used and no medium stands between persons' (Aspelin 2011, p. 10). Aspelin likens co-operation to Buber's 'I-It' relation and the co-existence to the 'I-Thou' relation. An example of co-operation in a teaching and learning context might be the organisation of a class meeting such as that advocated by Boyd, MacNeil, and Sullivan (2006). The meeting they describe is a regular event and involves the class teacher and the children drawing up a mutually agreed agenda. The meeting is not necessarily chaired by the teacher. Such meetings have as a goal the promotion of better classroom relations. Co-existence is less simple to exemplify given that it is described as an unexpected interruption 'in which the participants actually live in a shared dimension' (Aspelin 2011, p. 10). In such a circumstance, people are

immediately present to the essence of another human being (Aspelin, 2011). Moments of co-existence can interrupt moments of co-operation and indeed he suggests that co-existence can fertilise co-operation.

The relationship between children and their teachers is therefore not simply a desirable element of the educational process but rather as Biesta (2004, p.11) argues the *location* of education. Biesta suggests that the space between teachers and students is potentially educative. I will address the idea of spaces and gaps more fully in the section 2.3.3.

Hederman (2012, p. 56) asserts that where person-to-person contact is not possible (and in this regard he points the finger at large class sizes), then neither is education because, as he sees it, 'education is the miracle that happens between people who have the time and imagination to engage at a personal level in the very precise and creative activity that is educational relationship'.

'Connectedness' not only appears as a theme in theoretical literature but in professional literature too. At the top of the list of what 'outstanding' teachers do, Dunn (2011) writing in the UK, suggests that building relationships with students is probably the most important aspect of teaching. Palmer (1998, p. 11) concurs and adds the importance of building relations with the subject matter suggesting that 'good' teachers are those that 'have a capacity for connectedness being able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their students and their subjects'.

If connectedness is taken as part of the pre-existing human condition, this study is concerned with the nature of this connectedness in classroom contexts. It is centrally concerned with the extent to which both teachers and children experience this connectedness in their relationships with one another.

### **2.3.2 Self, others and strangers**

Education is often seen as a dual system involving teachers on the one hand and students on the other. The dynamics of the dual system do not allow for students and teachers to meet because they are each caught up in a polar struggle over power (Raufelder, Bukowski, & Mohr, 2013). A pedagogical system which is others-focused emphasises cooperation, relationships, equity and fair play, allowing room for 'amicable disagreement' (Bigger, 2011,

p. 8). Similarly, Thayer-Bacon (2004) argues for the central importance of diverse classroom communities for relational pedagogy to take hold. She suggests that diversity in terms of age, gender, socio-economic background, religion and ethnicity serve to challenge our situatedness. Our differences and similarities are highlighted through engagement with others. Palmer (2014) suggests that such engagement with otherness and diversity would give children

a lived experience of what it means to take each other seriously and to negotiate our differences and to work past the hard places... to treat the crises and the collisions as opportunities to go deeper into community rather than as excuses to run away from each other screaming.

(Palmer, 2014, para. 12)

Bigger (2011) conceptualises relational pedagogy as a balance between 'self' and 'others'. His concept of 'individual in community' aligns with Thayer-Bacon's (2004) concept of social beings-in-relation-with-others whereby the 'self' in each concept is conceived of as always in relation with others. Each of these is consonant with Heidegger's notion of 'Mitsein' and indeed Buber's insistence on the primordial nature of our relatedness to others.

Hutchinson (2004) focuses on the role of strangers in building democratic communities. In order to place the idea of the role of strangers in context, she highlights three general types of community. First, there are familial and friendship communities which whether positive or negative bring people together. Next there is the type of community made up of those with similar interests such as sports or political communities. Finally, there are those communities that are minimal and are the kind, Hutchinson (2004) argues, desired by classical liberalism where individual identity, individual rights, freedom and autonomy are the central features. The later form of 'community' with individualistic overtones is increasingly recognisable in the global discourse on education in which values such as rationality and autonomy are emphasised (Aspelin, 2011). Hutchinson (2004) maintains that such individualistic principles infuse most institutions in the dominant culture (US context). Similarly, Hederman (2012), writing in an Irish context, suggests that this individualistic standpoint aligns with an understanding of education as mere instruction whereby the relationship between the teacher and the child is a dispensable commodity which could be replaced with technology, for example. Similarly, O'Brien (2004) is concerned about the rise

of individualism in Irish society and the view that people can be independent of one another rather than interdependent. She is especially concerned about how such a view further disadvantages those more vulnerable members of society.

Hutchinson (2004) suggests that schools ought to be conceived of as the second type of community where the interest of communities is represented. She proposes that in these situations, both children and teachers present as strangers to one another. Much like Bigger's (2011) concept of a pedagogy of relations which is constructed through balancing understanding and concept of self with respect for others and responsibility to the group, Hutchinson (2004) wonders how people can be brought into community with one another whilst retaining their identity. She considers how schools can move beyond a minimal notion of tolerance in a democracy towards a meaningful and productive conceptualisation of democracy. Hutchinson (2004) argues for intimacy among strangers, recognising the paradoxical nature of such a term. She suggests that the more opportunities we take to gain glimpses into one another's lives', the less likely we are to be afraid, judgemental or dismissive of one another.

In my work with beginning teachers, I often wonder about how much or how little of myself to share. Some years ago, I began a workshop with a group of postgraduate students by apologising in advance for what might become a less energetic workshop. I explained that my husband had been the victim of an unprovoked attack the day before and suffered serious injuries. The delivery of this information was nothing like it had been when I practised it and I couldn't finish the story and rather left the room crying. Though embarrassed at the time, that episode meant that for the remainder of the year, the group dynamic had changed and our engagement moved to a different dimension. I had previously been a primary school teacher where building relationships with one group of children over a school year was not only possible but necessary. I believed, as Thayer-Bacon (2004) affirms, that it wasn't possible to build meaningful relationships when working with large groups of students which changed every hour. However, after that episode, I was more conscious of the possibility of moving beyond a situation where we remained strangers to one another. Whereas previously we had been in a social dimension as a group of people with shared experiences, perhaps this episode moved us into what Buber (1998) would call the 'interhuman' phase open to the possibilities of the 'I-Thou' relation. Whilst this example

is at a localised level, I appreciate the importance of developing Hutchinson's (2004) thinking on a global scale and its potential for social justice. If through glimpsing into the lives of others (such as those working in slave conditions to produce trademark technology products, to use Hutchinson's example), we are mobilised to act compassionately towards these strangers, then this pedagogy has power indeed. Hutchinson's (2004) argument is that often we are unaware of others or we choose not to enter into relation with such strangers so that we don't have to act. In this study, I wonder to what extent teachers and children glimpse into one another's lives and how this impacts on their relationship with one another. I wonder if individualism is beginning to infuse this relationship reducing education, as Hederman (2012) argues, to mere instruction where there would be little room for the interpersonal dimension to which Buber (1937) refers.

### **2.3.3 Spaces and gaps**

Buber's (1937) emphasis on the space between the individual and others is of central importance in relational pedagogy discourse. Buber (1937) argues that it is through entering into this space that the individual becomes a person. The individual enters into personhood when inhabiting the space between themselves and others. Hederman (2012, p. 58) suggests that the most important goal of education ought to be to allow each child to enter that space.

Biesta takes the notion of 'gaps' as a central idea in his conceptualisation of the pedagogy of relation. He argues that we need to take seriously the idea that education consists of the interaction between the teacher and the learner and that if we do, it would follow that education is not 'located in the activities of the teacher, nor in the activities of the learner but in the interaction between the two' (2004, p. 12). Biesta (2004) further argues that the gap between the two is not something that needs to be closed or overcome but that it is the existence of the gap that makes education possible. He extends this idea arguing that it is the gap itself that educates. He applies a performative theory of communication, the idea that meaning exists only in and through communication, to education. Biesta (2004) suggests that the gap whilst ultimately unrepresentable cannot be ignored or forgotten. He suggests that teachers may have two options. The first is to negate the gap and act as if their task is to impact directly upon the minds of their students or they can acknowledge the

gap as a space of enunciation brought into existence through teachers and students coming into presence with one another.

Biesta's more recent writing on this topic (Biesta, 2012) builds on the notion of gaps in educational relations and argues for hesitation of two sorts. The first is a 'practical hesitation' whereby a teacher refrains from getting too close to a student which could limit the possibility and potential of the gap. I found an example of what Biesta (2012) might refer to as practical hesitation reported in Phillippo (2012). She found tension between students from non-dominant cultural groups (US context) who felt that their privacy or agency was being threatened by the teacher trying to get to know them. Therefore, it seems that social and cultural sensitivity is required. The second sort of hesitation, according to Biesta (2012), is 'theoretical hesitation', whereby a teacher is aware of the aspects of education that are outside or beyond a simple view of education as relation. Biesta (2012, p. 2) highlights the 'unrelational' features of education which 'emphasise separation and distance rather than connection and closeness'. This is consonant with Buber's emphasis on the importance of silence in order to enable genuine dialogue. Genuine dialogue is spoken or silent communication that 'has in mind the other or others . . . and turns to them with the intention of establishing a mutual relation between himself and them' (Buber, 1947, p. 19).

The theory of relational pedagogy advocates for the necessity of spaces and gaps between an individual and others. There are some resonances with this theoretical position at the level of practice. For instance, Palmer (1998) argues that in order to foster close-working relationships, the classroom environment needs to welcome not only speech, but silence. This study seeks to explore the practical, lived experiences of teachers and children as they relate to one another. Participants' descriptions of their interactions with one another may reveal the lived experiences of such spaces and gaps.

#### **2.3.4 Relational knowledge**

If a pedagogy of relation is understood as involving deep connections between teachers, students and *subject matter*, then the implications of relational pedagogy on the nature of knowledge and knowing must be considered.

Bingham (2011, p. 514) examines the tendency in the current 'information age' to 'curricularize' all knowledge. He sees this as stemming from a belief that the availability and intensification of information in the information age ought to be matched with an intense form of education. He suggests that by such conceptualisation the teacher is not necessary and indeed the little packages of knowledge can be accessed online. This is connected to Biesta's (2013) idea of the 'learnification' of education. Similarly, Palmer (1990) argues that such views of knowledge as objective bodies which can be delivered from teachers to students is rooted in the belief that subjective biases distort knowledge. Bingham examines the simplistic and common-sense understanding of the way in which knowledge is transferred from one person to another which 'is that magic means for taking ideas from the blood-and-guts of my brain and inserting them into the blood-and-guts of your brain' (2011, p. 515). Biesta (2012) challenges this conceptualisation of communication and traces its origins to pragmatists such as Dewey and Mead. Bingham (2011) and Hodkinson, Biesta, and James (2008) suggest that while the sender-receiver or 'acquisition' model of learning has been challenged from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives, it still prevails. It is interesting to consider why that might be the case. Palmer (1990) suggests that fear is the driving force behind objectivism and that this fear creates disconnects between teachers, their subjects and their students. Fear of the other results in safe, mechanical, manipulative and lifeless pedagogy that aims to protect those involved (Palmer, 1990). This fear factor may explain why, in some instances, students and teachers appear to engage with one another as if they are in opposition instead of in community (Hargreaves, 1998). Palmer's (1990) suggestion that this fear results in lifeless pedagogy may also explain the abundance of research internationally on 'effective' teaching and a similarly prolific body of research dedicated to increasing pupil motivation.

Palmer (1998) argues that truth has become conceived of as that from which we must disconnect ourselves both physically and emotionally. Palmer (1998, p. 11) asserts that it is no longer acceptable to 'teach as if there were a reality out there that can be mirrored by logical-empirical propositions' because to do so is to ignore the way reality is shaped by an interplay between the knower and the known. He further proposes that knowing of any sort is relational, 'animated by a desire to come into deeper community with what we know' (Palmer, 1998, p. 54). Similarly, Hederman (2012, p. 41) asserts that 'there can be no

knowledge which does not begin by sparking off real contact between the human organism and its world'. The challenge therefore, is to enable teaching and learning situations that afford opportunities for children and teachers to establish and develop meaningful relationships with one another.

Palmer (1998) argues that if we were to draw lines of instruction in many classrooms, we would see them running singularly from the teacher to the individual student. By contrast, his perception of this relationship is a complex web of connections between teacher, student and subject. This web analogy aligns with a pedagogy of relation which is conceptualised as comprising multiple relationships between the subject matter, the teacher and the students. Through close observation (see section 3.8.1), this study may be able to report on how curriculum and knowledge is experienced as part of the child-teacher relationship.

In considering how knowledge is experienced as part of the child-teacher relationship, Stengel (2004) reflects on her school-going daughter's declared hatred of science and contrasts this with memories of a curious, inquisitive child who engaged in self-directed experiments both at home and with her carer in her pre-school years. Whilst she suggests many possible reasons for the child's later hatred of science, including peer-identified biases and over-emphasis on assessment, Stengel concludes that the central difficulty is that her daughter doesn't 'know' science. She relates this to the notion of relation as a 'triadic reality'. In educational relation, she argues that the "'teacher's" simultaneous interaction with the "subject matter" and the "student" opens space for the student's interaction with and connection to that subject matter' (2004, p. 146). Three elements need to interact in the educational relation namely the teacher, the student and the subject matter. Similarly, Hederman (2012, p. 60) suggests that unless curriculum and objective science are 'inserted into the framework of the educational relation, they never assume the reality of communion'. By this understanding, congruent with the theory of education as relation, the subject matter is seen as a function of the student-teacher relationship (Biesta, 2014). Stengel (2004) insists that although her daughter's science teachers were positive and encouraging, the reason for her daughter becoming disaffected was that they had not forged a relation with her that had scientific knowledge and understanding as its 'third', suggesting a triadic relation between teacher, child and knowledge. Stengel (2004, 2010)



further explains this notion of the subject matter as the third in a relationship. In discussing her daughter's abhorrence of assigned reading but fascination with books that she shares with friends, she insists that the latter was prompted by shared interest. The key to relational knowing, according to Stengel is that knowledge becomes a 'third', an object of 'mutual interest and concern, in some relationship' (2004, p. 149).

I can relate to this from personal experience. At post-primary school, I took little interest in the assigned play, 'Philadelphia, Here I Come' by Brian Friel, which was part of the English curriculum and which was assessed in The Leaving Certificate which is the Irish equivalent to A level in the UK (Qualifax, 2014). The teacher would ask us to read entire pages aloud or underline quotations that connected to various identified themes such as 'inability to express emotion' with the result that the play became meaningless and lifeless for me. I had another teacher for the poetry and creative writing elements of the English course whom I would meet along the corridors. Knowing my disinterest in the modern drama classes, he would say things like 'Poor Gar, I think he's a lost cause, Annie' referring to the protagonist in the play and I would reply with quotes from Gar's girlfriend, 'It must be now, Gar'. These exchanges became regular, mostly at informal times such as lunch break. We began to talk about 'poor Gar' and to connect Friel's vivid descriptions of Gar's friends' mannerisms to a group of men in the village where I grew up. He would ask me to 'talk some sense into Gar' if it seemed as though he were about to make a foolish decision at a certain point in the play. In those conversations, Gar, Madge, Master Boyle and S. B. O' Donnell became as real as the teacher and I. They became the third in our relationship. About such an experience, Stengel (2004, p. 150) would conclude that knowledge became a function of our relationship with one another.

Authors in the field of relational pedagogy have theorised about how knowledge can be experienced as that which is acquired or that which is an extension of personal relations. In this study, teachers' and children's descriptions of their relationships with one another may shed light on the practical, lived experience of how such knowledge is experienced, thereby contributing to a more situated understanding of this phenomenon.

In this section, I have exposed themes commonly found in literature on relational pedagogy in order to establish its core principles. In summary, it seems that relational pedagogy calls

for respectful openness to ‘others’ and deep connections between teachers, their students and their subject matter. It equally calls for respect for the self and a requirement for space and distance. Further, relational pedagogy demands relational knowing and thus privileges critical self-reflection. These themes have framed how I conceptualise the child-teacher relationship. In designing a study to examine children and teacher’s lived experiences of this relationship, I will be attuned to how teachers and children refer to feeling connected to one another and how they negotiate the self-other relation. I will further be interested in discovering if spaces and gaps feature as part of their relationships and how knowledge is experienced. However, I will also need to design a study that is open enough in order to allow for fresh insights to arise from the participants’ lived experiences.

The phenomenon of interest in this study is the child-teacher relationship. In the next section, I move away from the literature on relational pedagogy generally towards an examination of the nature of the child-teacher relationship itself.

## **2.4 The Nature of the Child-Teacher Relationship**

The significance of the child-teacher relationship is increasingly recognised as central to education. Bingham et al. (2004, p. 9) remind us however that human relationality is not an ethical value suggesting that ‘domination is as relational as love’. Recognising the relationality of education means acknowledging that people are in relation rather than suggesting particular qualities of that relation. It seems that the characteristics and qualities that enable the educational relationship to become ‘enlightened’ (Aspelin, 2011) are of central importance. Reviewing educational literature through a relational lens revealed three broad themes in this regard, namely: ‘knowing one another as whole beings’; ‘fundamental qualities of fruitful relationships’; and ‘power and dialogue’. I will address each of these themes in turn in the following sections.

### **2.4.1 Knowing one another as whole beings: Embodied relationships?**

American scholar, bell hooks refers to the years of socialisation that taught her to believe that ‘a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded one another as “whole” human beings...’ She refers to her personal experiences of the academy and suggests that its structures seemed ‘to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the

mind/body split' (hooks, 1994, p. 16). In this way, people are not recognised as embodied beings but as detached minds and the work of teaching becomes about developing and educating 'minds' instead of people. Such views align with neoliberalism wherein the ideal type of citizen 'is the cosmopolitan worker built around a calculating, entrepreneurial, detached self' (Lynch et al., 2012, p. 83). By contrast, recognition of the whole person resonates with the theoretical literature outlined in section 2.3.1. A concern with the whole person aligns with Buber's argument that the genuine educator is always concerned with the 'person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives now and in his possibilities, what he can become' (Buber, 1947, p. 123)

By referring to holism, an embodied conceptualisation of the child- teacher relationship is understood. By embodied, I mean recognition of how children and teachers are not only engaging with one another at a cognitive level but in a more holistic way recognising one another as people. In setting out her relational epistemology, Thayer-Bacon (2004, p. 166) writing in the field of relational pedagogy, argues that 'knowledge is something that is socially constructed by embedded and *embodied* people [my emphasis]'. She is amongst few who emphasise embodiment in relational pedagogy. For instance, in the manifesto of relational pedagogy (Bingham et al., 2004), embodiment is not mentioned. Rather it is implied through the choice of terminology such as 'human beings' rather than 'learners'.

The privileging of the mind and the under-recognition of the body are not solely educational phenomena. Bergum (2003, p. 123) drawing on the philosopher Sally Gadow, sounds a warning about nursing practices becoming disembodied in line with technological advances. She cites how the electronic foetal monitor (observing) has replaced the 'ear on the belly' technique (hearing, feeling) in pregnant women. I wonder about parallels in the educational context. Perhaps test score analysis and comparison is somewhat equivalent whereby the focus becomes on the scores themselves quite apart from the lived lives of the children who attained them.

Tobin (2004) presents a frightening picture of the gradual disappearance of the body from early childhood education from the 1920s to the present and points to several inter-related factors in his argument, including for example the decline of classical psychoanalytical influence. Whilst his argument is situated in a US context and in early childhood settings in

particular; many of his key points could be applied to other settings. In summarising various trends that have resulted in the disappearance of the body, he points to their common focus – ‘rationality, control and risk avoidance’ (Tobin, 2004, p.124). The over-emphasis on rationality aligns with Ball’s (2003) concern about a performative culture prevailing in the education system (see section 1.2). Voicing similar concerns, van Manen (1994) challenges what he calls pragmatic realism using Giesecke (1987) as an example. For Giesecke (1987), the essential task of pedagogy in the case of the school teacher is to instruct the children in subject matter knowledge. This resonates with similar ideas articulated more recently by the sociologist Frank Furedi, who argues that schools ought to be solely concerned with intellectual content or knowledge content, rather than meddling in the ‘domain of feelings’ (Delaney, 2015). Furedi’s argument conjured up an image for me of disembodied heads rolling in through school gates whereby children could leave their bodies and most especially their feelings at home. Such an argument aligns with hooks’ assertion that modern society would have us believe that ‘to feel deeply is inferior’ (1994, p. 175).

In his analysis of Buber’s contribution to relational education, Sidorkin (2000) suggested that Buber’s theory lacked nuance and offered the beginnings of a taxonomy of student-teacher relations. His work on the taxonomy has not, as yet, been fully developed but as the only attempt to characterise pedagogical relations, it is useful for this discussion. He places ‘stereotypical’ relations at the bottom level of the taxonomy whereby students and teachers treat one another ‘solely on the basis of stereotypical knowledge of each other’s official position’ (Sidorkin, 2000, p. 3). In other words, neither the students nor the teachers invest their embodied, human being in the relationship. This aligns with part of Fielding’s (2012) proposition for deep democracy in schools in which he refers to the establishment of ‘radical relationships’. He defines radical relationships as those that ‘encourage us to ‘re-see’ each other as persons rather than as role occupants’ (Fielding, 2012 p. 61). In their ethnographic field study in a secondary school in Germany, Raufelder et al. (2013) found that instances where teachers and students transcended the role level of their relationship were few. Students in the study expressed a desire to move outside of the kind of relation where they were addressed only as a student (their role) towards interactions at the ‘being level’. The ‘being level’ seems to refer to a level of interaction that acknowledges the other person’s humanity. In this account from one student, she expresses a desire to connect with

a teacher's being rather than merely with the knowledge that teacher is imparting: '[I would like that teachers] not only come in, start teaching, have us write things down ... I mean, they should be more than an educator: they should be a human being' (Raufelder et al., 2013, p. 12).

Sidorkin (2000) refers to an 'exploratory' level in his relationship taxonomy whereby each party is trying to see if the other deviates from stereotype. This exploration involves teachers and students making initial steps to move outside their identities that pertain to school only. Once parties decide that co-operation with one another is possible, the relation moves to the co-operative level, according to Sidorkin. It seems that certain events have the possibility to engender change in stereotypical relationships and move towards what Sidorkin (2000) calls 'recognition', whereby students and teachers accept one another's identities. One such catalyst may be a willingness to admit that the relationship is not healthy or fruitful. Margonis (2004) takes courage from Wigginton's (1986) publication *Sometimes a Shining Moment*, wherein he shares his vulnerability with the students: 'look, this isn't working. You know it isn't and I know it isn't. Now what are we going to do together to make it through the rest of the year?' (Wigginton, 1986, p. 32).

Much like Wigginton, hooks would emphasise the collective responsibility ("we") in such a scenario. She refers to a class of 'resisting' students which she encountered that made her realise that the teacher alone cannot take responsibility for creating a productive learning community (hooks, 1994, p. 15). In this sense, the responsibility for connecting with one another's being is a relational phenomenon with both parties having a role to play.

It may be that more indirect approaches result in 'co-operation' or 'recognition' to use the next levels of Sidorkin's taxonomy (2000). Middle school teachers in a UK study (Cramp, 2008) reported that school excursions helped to break down the stereotypical images they had of their students. Pupils in the same study reported that school trips afforded an opportunity to get to know teachers beyond the role that they played in school. A focus group interview revealed that pupils were aware of the constraints at school that prevented such intimacy: 'Even if [the teacher] wanted to tell you he has a girlfriend there isn't a chance in the school day, is there?' (Cramp, 2008, p. 179). hooks (1994, p. 16) refers to such phenomena as the dualistic separation of public and private, whereby connections between

life practices or habits of being of students and teachers are often hidden from one another. A similar finding emerged in the ethnographic field study in Germany (Raufelder et al., 2013) whereby teachers and students reported that there was not enough time or space in the school day for engagement at the 'being' level. Students were referring to the lack of time or space to engage with their teachers as people instead of one-dimensional figures.

When compared to secondary school teachers, primary teachers spend 95% longer with fewer children with whom to engage over a given week (Riley, 2009). Further, Irish primary school teachers and children generally share the same classroom for the entire day. This time intensive close engagement may result in more opportunities for children and teachers to see one another as whole beings. However, there may well be other pressures quite apart from time and space that impact on the possibilities of developing educational relationships that recognise the wholeness of one another. The phenomenological approach adopted in this study affords opportunities for teachers and children to describe their experiences of their relationship with one another which may shed light on how, if at all, encounters at the being level are made possible.

#### **2.4.2 Fundamental qualities of fruitful relationships: Respect, trust and care**

In contrast to the arguments outlined in the previous section (2.4.1) regarding the teacher's role solely as purveyor of intellectual content, the literature on relational pedagogy emphasises the central importance of certain qualities in the child-teacher relationship including respect, trust and care. hooks (1994, p. 13) sees each of these elements as 'essential if we are to provide the necessary condition where learning can most deeply and intimately begin'. In the subsections that follow, I detail how these qualities are considered in both theoretical and empirical literature.

##### **2.4.2.1 *Respect.***

Respect ranks highly on Sidorkin's taxonomy of educational relations (2000) and he characterises respectful relationships as those wherein each party recognises the relation's value and is willing to pay some costs in order to maintain it. Margonis (2011) interprets respect in a similar way and suggests that showing students respect is a fundamental step towards moving from 'thing-oriented' to 'person-oriented' educational values. In this

regard, he asserts that rather than attempting to assimilate students into a pre-existing framework, teachers could ask 'what can the students and myself be, given who we are?' thereby respecting the ways in which students think, talk and act (Margolis, 2011, p. 434).

One of the difficulties with 'respect', highlighted by Goodman (2009), is its multiple connotations including human dignity, autonomy, equality, deference and protection. Conflict arises when what one person claims as respectful is viewed as disrespectful by another or in particular where an adult's scepticism about the validity of a child's view results in 'respect-as-submission' rather than 'respect-as-equality' prevailing (Goodman 2009, p. 4). Goodman (2009, p. 4) suggests that respect can be separated into three strands namely 'dignity', 'equality' and 'autonomy'. She differentiates between 'respect-due' and 'respect-earned' with the former relating to the universal value of human dignity that should be afforded to all and the latter extending beyond human dignity to embrace elements of autonomy and equality as well. The second interpretation recognises the child's agency and the possibility for the child to engage with the teacher on an equal footing. It is 'actualized in small increments' over a sustained period (Goodman 2009, p. 11). She contends that the interpretation of respect as dignity is a narrow conceptualisation in danger of alignment with 'teacher-knows-best'. An example of the multiple connotations of the term respect to which Goodman refers is evident in a large-scale longitudinal Irish study carried out by Smyth and Banks (2012). The study found that secondary school students consistently listed respectful student/teacher relationships in their characterisation of good teaching. In that study, which highlighted the impact of high stakes assessment on the student-teacher relationship, a respectful teacher was defined as someone who 'did not constantly admonish' the students (Smyth & Banks, 2012, p. 299) reflecting a narrow interpretation of respect. Rather than assuming a shared meaning of respect, as part of this study, children and teachers will be asked to describe their lived experiences of building educational relationships which may include their particular understanding of 'respect'.

Empirical research featuring student voice consistently report students' desires to build respectful relationships. Robertson (2006) concluded that students in her three-year study from primary through to post-secondary consistently expressed a desire for intelligent, creative and empathetic teachers who created trustworthy and respectful spaces for learning in their classrooms. Teachers, it seems, are aware of the importance of students'

desires to be shown respect. A recent study of Irish teachers' perceptions of what constitutes a 'good' teacher (Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013), found that amongst desirable traits, teachers rated 'engaging respectfully with students' highly. Through eliciting multimodal descriptions of encounters with one another, children and teachers in this study may offer insights into how, if at all, they feel respected by the other party. There may also be some indication as to which of Goodman's conceptualisations of respect is experienced.

#### **2.4.2.2 Trust.**

In a large-scale study in the U.S., (Doda & Knowles, 2008) middle-school students were asked what they wanted from their school experience. A large majority responded that they desired healthy and rewarding relationships with their teachers and peers. Trust was identified as a key factor in such relationships. Doda (2011) subsequently argued that trust empowers students and teachers alike to engage in authentic teaching and learning. She further argued that a commitment to the development of trusting relationships on a school-wide level as opposed to tokenistic one-off events was required. This correlates with a finding by van Maele and van Houtte (2011) relating to the significance of school culture whereby some schools were found to foster trusting relationships and others pose barriers to such relationships. Doda's (2011) particular interpretation of 'trust' seems to align with the second of Goodman's (2009) conceptualisations of respect whereby the child's agency is recognised and there are possibilities for power-sharing and co-operation.

In the Irish context, 'mutual' respectful and trusting relationships are specifically referenced in the code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (The Teaching Council of Ireland, 2012). Lilja (2013, p. 3) argues that trustful relationships between teachers and children 'are necessarily mutual; if they are not mutual then they cease to be trustful relationship'. A study into Irish pre-service teachers' understanding of respect (O'Grady, 2011) echoed this emphasis on mutuality whereby the pre-service teachers suggested that teachers needed to respect their students in order for respect to be reciprocated. Therefore, it seems that all parties in the educational relationship desire mutually respectful, trusting relationships. Accounts of the child-teacher relationship generated as part of this study may give insights into to how trust is practiced in everyday encounters.



### 2.4.2.3 Care.

Care is a strong theme across both the theoretical and empirical literature upon which I draw in this study. Care is fundamental to Heidegger's *Dasein* (being-in-the-world). For Heidegger, care is not an occasional property of *Dasein* but part of its essence (George, 1998). Heidegger's concept of *Fürsorge* is of most relevance to this study. *Fürsorge*, which Macquarrie and Robinson (Heidegger, 1962) translate as 'solicitude', refers to man's concern for other *Dasein*. Tomkins and Simpson (2015, p. 1016), writing in the context of leadership and organisation studies, suggest that the word 'solicitude' fails to capture the intentionality and 'real *involvement* in the world of others' and implies somewhat detached feelings of benevolence. Their preferred translation is 'care' and this is how *Fürsorge* is understood in this study.

Heidegger suggests that *Fürsorge* presents in two ways in our interactions with others - *Einspringen*, translated as 'leaping in' and *Vorausspringen*, 'leaping ahead'. 'Leaping in' refers to a caring intervention whereby a carer assumes responsibility for a situation. It can be seen as dominating form of care closing off the other's 'authentic horizon' and concealing 'their innate potential' (O'Brien, 2014, p. 545). In the context of the child-teacher relationship, 'leaping in' might present as a teacher solving a problem for a child in an effort to unburden the child but arguably creating a dependent dynamic. 'Leaping ahead' can be described as a more 'suggestive, enabling, facilitating mode of intervention' (Tomkins & Simpson, 2015, p. 1016). In the child-teacher relationship, 'leaping ahead' might manifest as a teacher offering a range of possibilities for the child to consider in dealing with a problem, thus empowering the child. Whilst these examples neatly distinguish one form of care from the other, Tomkins and Simpson (2015, p. 1027) suggest that from a Heideggerian perspective, the practice of caring might better be understood as that which demands a balance between 'stepping in and standing back'. They further emphasise the need to maintain the Heideggerian complexity of these concepts resisting temptations to default to the language of 'best practice'. I hope that the lived experience approach employed in this study which promotes particularity will afford an opportunity for such complexity to be retained.

Noddings (1998) highlights the importance of dialogue about caring in order to enable both teachers and students to reflect on their efforts to care. Noddings (1998) further suggests that students need practice in caring and opportunities to reflect on that practice. Such dialogue and reflection could be seen to honour the complexity of caring to which Tomkins and Simpson (2015) refer.

In a recent empirical study in the Irish context, Devine et al., 2013 found that schools with designated disadvantaged status, such as the school in this study, were more likely to emphasise the caring and nurturing element of teaching. Devine (2015) wonders whether or not such emphases could be at the cost of high expectations for achievement. In light of this concern about the potential payoff of an emphasis on care; it will be interesting to note any relationship between care and learning expectations in participants' descriptions of their relationships with one another in this study.

Despite Noddings' (2002, p. 11) assertion that 'all people want to be cared for', the literature mostly interprets 'care' as something that is done by the teacher unto the student. The relational perspective which informs this study would suggest bi-directional care in the educational relationship and I will employ an open attitude in this regard during the process of analysis.

### **2.4.3 Power and dialogue**

The 'inherent inequality' (O' Grady, 2015) in the child- teacher relationship means that the issue of power is a frequent theme in the associated literature. Van Manen (1994) notes how critical theorists consistently highlight how easily the teacher-student relationship can slip into power relations of domination and oppression. Devine (2002), writing in an Irish context, points to this tendency, highlighting the way in which power can be exercised both as 'domination' and 'transformation' (empowerment) in child-teacher relationships depending on social structures within settings. Power as domination is evident when teachers draw on the 'full range of their authoritative resources to socialize children in line with adult-defined goals and expectations' (Devine, 2002, p. 308). Reflecting on her personal experience of high school teachers, hooks (1994, p. 17) identifies with this experience of domination suggesting that her teachers 'more than anything...seemed enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom'.

Empowerment or power as transformation is conversely characterised by reflection, critical engagement and negotiation whereby children experience agency, a sense of belonging and active participation in matters of concern to them (Devine, 2002). Inspired by Freire, hooks' (1994) 'engaged pedagogy' promotes such student empowerment through problematizing obedience to authority and promoting the idea of education as freedom. Some refer to this complex state as mutuality. Mutuality is the highest level in Sidorkin's taxonomy (2000) and is characterised by the relation becoming an end in itself. Further, mutuality is a necessary condition for Buber's 'I:Thou' relation. In light of the unpredictability of the emergence of 'co-existence' (Aspelin, 2011) and the 'I-Thou' relation (Buber, 1937), as discussed in section 2.3.1, it seems that mutuality is not something that teachers and children can arrange. However, certain conditions may 'evoke co-existence' (Aspelin, 2011, p. 10) and one such condition is dialogue.

Buber envisaged the teacher-student relationship as entirely dialogical (Hilliard, 1973). For the teacher, this is a complex dynamic that involves a balancing act between recognising the reality of the particular pupil and employing imaginative flair to divine the possibilities potentially present in each of them (Hederman, 2012). Buber (1947) distinguished between three forms of dialogue, 'genuine', 'technical' and 'monologue'. It follows that a certain quality of dialogue is required in order to arrive at mutuality. Technical dialogue describes the kind that involves an intent to understand the other's circumstance. Monologue, which Buber argues is most common, is often disguised as dialogue because of the presence of two or more people. However, little connection is made and people only entertain their own views. In an educational context, monologue might parallel what Skidmore, Perez-Parent, & Arnfield (2003) call 'pedagogical dialogue' as distinct from 'dialogical pedagogy' with the former relating to the teacher as knower of the truth and child as ignorant of it and the latter involving a multi-voiced interrogation of the topic of study.

In genuine dialogue, which is rare, according to Buber, participants really have in mind the other(s). Whereas Buber's initial work set two binary opposites (I/thou and I/It), his later writing suggested that there was an in-between phase of interhuman (*zwischenmenschliche*) whereby relations are not fully 'I-Thou', as yet, but open towards genuine dialogue (Sidorkin, 2002). Buber argues that life between people is occasionally graced with moments where they meet one another dialogically (Mendes-Flohr, 2003). In this study, there may be

evidence of times when teachers and children are in 'I-Thou' or 'I-It' relations and other times when they occupy that in-between space. My analysis of participants' descriptions of their lived experiences will be coloured by the awareness of these three relational modes.

Buber's 'genuine' dialogue resonates somewhat with Carl Rogers' (1967) attitude of 'authenticity' which similarly refers to an ability to stand in direct relation. Whereas Buber's genuine dialogue concerns all parties in a relationship, Rogers (1967) focuses on the teacher and his/her ability to stand in direct relation to his/her students. Relations by their very nature involve at least a pair of people (Sidorkin, 2000) if not multiple configurations so considering the teacher's attitude is only part of the equation. The duality of relations is highlighted by Bingham (2004) who refers to the relationality of authority, as an example. He suggests that rather than the traditional concept of a teacher having authority over a student, students can take a more agentive role whereby authority is discounted and honoured at different times. Such a reconceptualization could perhaps be applied to Buber's concern about the imbalance of power in the teacher/student relationship which for him prevents the likelihood of 'I:Thou' relations and genuine dialogue.

In this study, it will also be interesting to see whether or not such moments of genuine dialogue are perceived to occur. Whilst the phenomenological focus will not specifically address 'genuine dialogue' as a theme, experiences that participants share may point to such moments. Teachers and children's descriptions of their relationships and accounts of their interactions may shed light on the way in which they experience or indeed practice power and authority.

## **2.5 Considering Context in the Child-Teacher Relationship**

Student-teacher relationships are messy, contextual, individual, and an ever-changing phenomenon which makes them tough to quantify, explain, master...

(Hirschhorn, 2009, p.207)

This study of the child-teacher relationship is being conducted in upper primary classrooms in a school with designated disadvantaged status. Mindful of van Manen's (1990) notion of the 'situated person', in this section, I will examine the literature pertaining to students' and teachers' experiences of the child-teacher relationship and consider the broader policy,

school, classroom and personal contexts in which such experiences take place. Whilst these are presented as distinct categories here, teachers and children in schools cannot be disentangled from the particularities of their contexts and are rather part of dynamic (O'Connor, 2010) and complex (Davis & Sumara, 2012) systems. Mindful of this entanglement, this study intends to focus not on isolated elements in turn but on the sharing of stories of lived-experiences which may reflect the contextual nature of the child-teacher relationship.

### **2.5.1 Policy context**

In Section 1.2, I outlined the most significant policy changes impacting on the child-teacher relationship in primary schools in Ireland in the past two decades. These include the publication of a broad, balanced national primary school curriculum (DES,1999); the national early childhood framework for children from birth to six years, '*Aistear*' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009); the national literacy and numeracy a strategy, Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and for Life (DES, 2011) and the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers ( The Teaching Council, 2012). The seemingly contrasting philosophies underpinning these co-existing documents and policies results in uncertainty about the value placed on the child-teacher relationship in the Irish Primary School context. In short, as my colleague and I have argued elsewhere (Ó Breacháin and O' Toole, 2013), the dedication to holism in the primary school curriculum is threatened by the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy in the national strategy published in 2011. That policy represents part of a more general shift in values from those that value the holistic development of the child towards those that serve the economy. Lynch et al. (2012) note in particular the side-lining of the role of *care* in Irish educational policy which is significant given the centrality of care in developing rich educational relations as discussed in section 2.4.2.3. However, the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (The Teaching Council, 2012) gives special recognition to developing positive student-teacher relations. The code is underscored by four core values; respect, care, integrity and trust. Teachers are required to 'develop positive relationships with pupils/students...and others in the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement' (The Teaching Council, 2012, p. 6). At the level of professional policy therefore, it seems that the child-teacher relationship holds a place of special significance in the Irish Primary School system. Teachers are, in effect,

obliged to create caring, respectful and trusting relations with their students. At a curricular level, however, in a similar way to U.K. policy direction, there has been a move to privilege 'particular social goals and human qualities' (Ball, 2008) with those that serve economic purposes being given greater recognition. Such prioritisation could impact on the child-teacher relationship.

Teachers from disadvantaged schools in an Irish study examining the transition from primary to secondary school in Ireland (O' Brien, 2004) reported that the distance between the culture of care of the primary school (where care was interpreted as close relations with children) and the academic and exam oriented culture of second-level was a major obstacle to successful transfer. However, this study is somewhat dated. The significant number of changes at primary level in the intervening period, most significantly the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011) with its additional point of assessment, may have impacted on what was then regarded as a caring school culture at primary level.

The policy picture in Ireland is constantly changing which leaves the value of the child-teacher relationship hanging in the balance. At present, the statutory body with responsibility for curriculum and assessment in Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has begun to review curricula and assessments at both Primary and Secondary school level. Although only at the consultation stage of the process, initial steps with respect to principles and approaches for the primary curriculum have echoed many of those pioneered in the early childhood framework, *Aistear* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). This is encouraging given the emphasis in *Aistear* on the importance of developing relationships. The revised curriculum looks set to become a less prescriptive 'open framework approach' (Weikart, 2000). As is the case with *Aistear*, there will be an emphasis on learning dispositions which will be developed under the following themes: 'Exploring and Thinking and Using Maths' 'Using Language, Communicating and Expressing', 'Identity and Belonging' and 'Well-being and Health'. The explicit naming of 'Maths' and 'Language' may sound a warning when, for example, the Arts are no longer specifically mentioned. It would seem that the themes relating to identity, belonging, well-being and health are moving closer to a relational understanding of teaching and learning which is often articulated in 'specific forms of relations to oneself, people around the students and the larger world' (Bingham et al., 2004, p. 7). Further, if the learning outcomes follow the

route taken by *Aistear*, whereby the role of the child and the adult working *together* is emphasised, this will move the national curriculum closer to a pedagogy of relation that acknowledges that ‘human relations exist in and through shared practices’ (Bingham et al., 2004, p. 7). In the meantime, at the level of practice, teachers and children may be experiencing tensions arising out of the various demands of these contrasting curricula, codes and policies.

### **2.5.2. Socio-economic context**

Recent socio-economic changes in Ireland, as outlined in section 1.2, have resulted in an increase in the number of children deemed ‘at risk of poverty’ with one in ten Irish children living in ‘consistent poverty’ in 2012 (CSO, 2012). When the definition of consistent poverty refers to a child who may not have eaten in 24 hours (CSO, 2012), the possibility for even minimum attentiveness in class is undermined, not to mention relational teaching and learning. Under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative (see section 1.2), schools in areas designated as disadvantaged are allocated supplementary resources and supports in accordance with their level of disadvantage. The school in which this study is situated has been classified as ‘DEIS band 1’, the most underprivileged category. The school’s disadvantaged status may have some bearing on how children and teachers interact. Negative student-teacher interactions were reported by Riley and Docking (2004) who studied a large sample of primary and post-primary students in schools located in areas of high social deprivation (UK context). Whilst many students commented on the kindness and friendliness of teachers, many older students in particular reported negative relations (Riley & Docking, 2004). They resented teachers who talked down to them, blamed them unjustly, shouted at them, or punished the whole class for the wrong-doings of individuals. The finding relating to older students reporting negative relations may be relevant in the context of this study which is situated in upper primary.

### **2.5.3 School context: Ethos and culture**

Ethos and culture can influence the kinds of relationships that can be built within schools and the school community’s worldview can dictate what areas are valued over others. Watson (2011) set her critical ethnographic study in an alternative Mid-Western high school (US) where deliberate efforts were made to create a contrasting culture to traditional high

schools given that most of the students had been expelled from such schools. The school model was characterised by its flexibility whereby teachers and students negotiated mutually suitable times for instruction, adopted preferred teaching and learning styles and assessment practices. From the 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) that Watson (2011) provides, it is clear that a culture of teacher-student and student-student collaboration prevailed and 'genuine dialogue' (Buber, 1937) was enabled. Watson (2011) found that the value placed on relationships between teachers and children was mediated through the school's ethos and culture. Watson's (2011) study points to both the necessary supports and the underlying philosophy required at a school level for student-teacher relationships to flourish.

A similarly alternative programme, which emphasised student-teacher relationships, was developed and implemented in a middle school in Victoria, Australia (Yates & Holt, 2009). Only one year-group of students was involved in the programme. These students were timetabled and located differently, each class had its own room rather than moving between lessons and the same teacher was appointed for core subjects. These changes to the traditional school structure were part of a 'deliberate attempt to create connection, and a community who knew each other better' (Yates & Holt, 2009, p. 30). From a research perspective, the fact that the alternative program was designed and implemented for one group only highlighted the necessary changes (including to timetable, rooms and 'core' teachers) to traditional school structure. Children and teachers in this study are already located in one classroom for the entire day and are, for the most part, together for all lessons. From that perspective, they may be at an advantage in terms of possibilities for building relationships. Yet while such structures may support the possibility of building closer relationships to some extent, it seems that at a school level, building and maintaining high quality relationships have to be valued. For instance, participants in the Australian study (Yates & Holt, 2009) found that changing to a more relational approach whilst immersed in a traditional school culture was difficult. They further found that despite a commitment to relational pedagogy, school values are often communicated indirectly, in this case through the use of physical space:



both students and staff frequently identify this as a 'good' school by referring to the quality of its sporting fields and buildings, so to be located in an old and run-down block was an unwelcome part of the attempt to interrupt the school culture and do things differently....the building was not a place students could easily be proud of.

(Yates & Holt, 2009 p. 32-33)

This study points to how members of the school community experience a lived sense of the extent to which relationships are valued. In the Irish context, a report examining pupil behaviour in a wide range of second level schools across Ireland concluded that 'there are certain aspects of school culture that are of special significance in the context of student behaviour. Chief among these are the relationships that develop between teacher and student' (DES, 2006). The same report acknowledged in particular the place of respect within teacher-pupil relationships in cases where the school ethos conveyed a genuine respect for its students and pupil behaviour was positively influenced. Whilst respect has been identified as a fundamental quality of fruitful relationships (see section 2.4.2.1), this finding points to how respect extends beyond the dyad of the child-teacher relationship forming part of school culture.

Perhaps one example of the way in which school culture and ethos can become more respectful and relationship-focused is through employing school-wide programmes. In Ireland at present, a restorative practice pilot programme is being offered in schools in urban areas of designated disadvantage. Restorative practice (RP) is described as

both a philosophy and a set of skills that have the core aim of building strong relationships and resolving conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner. The word 'restorative' comes from the word 'restore'. Being restorative means being able to easily and effectively restore broken relationships and, more importantly, consciously prevent relationships breaking down in the first place.

(Childhood Development Initiative, 2014, p. 8)

Schools that partake in the pilot project are committed to 'building and repairing' relationships and resources such as space and time are prioritised for this purpose (see [www.twcdi.ie](http://www.twcdi.ie)). This school in which this study is situated is part of this pilot project. It will therefore be interesting to see how this programme is being experienced and indeed if children and teachers refer to its underlying philosophy in their descriptions of their relationships with one another.

#### **2.5.4 Classroom context**

In primary schools, teachers and children are mostly in one another's company in individual classrooms for the duration of the school day. Therefore, despite sharing certain features with the larger school context, the classroom context may have a particular bearing on the kinds of relationships that can be developed. Given that this study is situated in an area of designated social disadvantage where class sizes are deliberately smaller (see section 1.2), I will consider in particular what existing literature offers on the relationship between 'social disadvantage', 'class size' and the child-teacher relationship.

##### **2.5.4.1 Class size.**

An ethnographic study in the US, (Watson, 2011) found that the relatively small numbers at the school (70 students in total) and smaller class sizes enabled the development of high quality student-teacher relationships where students were given time to work one-to-one with teachers, if desired. A U.K. study (Blatchford, Bassett, & Brown, 2011) reported as a main finding that smaller classes can benefit all pupils in terms of individual, active attention from teachers. It would be simplistic to suggest that smaller class sizes result in better quality student-teacher relations. However, as both Thayer-Bacon (2004) and Hederman (2012) suggest large class sizes are generally un conducive to developing meaningful personal relationships. From personal experience, I find that I have a better relationship with the postgraduate student teachers with whom I work. I partly attribute this to the smaller number of those students compared to undergraduates. The smaller numbers facilitates easier engagement with extra-curricular activities such as excursions, which in themselves have been found to promote better quality student-teacher relations (Cramp, 2008). This can result in a feedback loop effect where relationship quality is concerned. A teacher: pupil ratio of 24:1 is the current recommendation for upper primary classes in DEIS band 1 schools and these smaller class sizes may impact on the quality of relationship between the teacher and children.

Smaller class sizes may mean that time is less pressurised and perceptions of the availability of time may impact on the quality of relationships. In a Canadian case study (Hirschhorn, 2009) which focused on the experiences of one student teacher, the issue of time emerged as a strong theme impacting on the student teacher's ability to develop relationships with

his students. Because of a perceived time pressure to deliver content, the student teacher became stressed about and solely focused on the efficiency of his content delivery despite having decided to become a teacher in order to connect with students (Hirschhorn, 2009). The language of performativity is evident here ('efficiency' and 'content-delivery') and is indicative of the wider political and school context that come to bear on the classroom context. Teachers' and children's personal contexts are also interacting in these complex, dynamic relations.

#### **2.5.5 Children and teachers' personal contexts: Readiness for relationship?**

If we accept that education is located in the space between teachers and children (Biesta, 2004), it is worth considering whether or not everybody can access that space and therefore, education in the same way. By this conceptualisation, for those who cannot enter into relation with one another, their educational opportunities could be seen as compromised. Perhaps there is a need to consider 'readiness' for relationship. A paper compiled by a multi-disciplinary team with an interest in child development at Harvard University (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p. 5 ) considered readiness 'not exclusively a matter of fostering literacy and number skills' suggesting the concept ought also to 'include the capacity to form and sustain positive relationships with teachers, children, and other adults...'.

Dockett and Perry (2009) reposition 'readiness for school' as a relational construct. They highlight how readiness is often interpreted as the assessment of individual children against some set of predetermined standards. They argue instead for readiness to be seen as relational whereby children and schools have a part to play, referring not only to children's readiness for school but to 'schools' readiness for children' (Stipek, 2002). In a similar way, one can imagine that both children and teachers need to be ready to enter into relation with one another. It may be the case that one party or both is not yet ready to 'stand in that particular form of direct relation that is education' (Hederman, 2012, p. 60). When teachers and children meet at the beginning of a school year, rather than being *tabula rasa*, they are shaped by their previous experiences and particular contexts (Davis, 2003). Referring to a similar idea, Hodkinson et al. (2008) highlight the inter-relatedness of the past life of the individual and the past history of situations on current learning. Whilst these authors refer

to *learning*, of particular interest to this study is how such past relational history interacts with current relationships.

The majority of literature addressing the idea of previous relational experience comes from the cognitive psychological tradition. Over the past twenty years, a large body of research has emerged concerning the relationship between children's early parental attachment and their subsequent ability to develop relationships, particularly in the early years of school (see for example Myers & Pianta, 2008; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Such research draws on 'attachment theory' which is based on infants' attachments to their primary caregiver and therefore assumes a similarity between parental attachment and the child-teacher relationship. Mayo (2004), writing in the field of relational pedagogy, argues that family cannot serve as a model for meaningful educational relations. Rather than drawing on pre-existing frameworks, this study seeks to describe the particularities of the child-teacher relationship from a phenomenological perspective.

The isolation of certain individual factors such as 'ethnicity' or 'gender' and how these interact in the child-teacher relationship is another common focus in studies of child-teacher relationships. Many studies point to girls having closer, less conflictual relationships with their teachers (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). Similarly, Palsdottir, Asgeirsdottir, and Sigfusdottir (2012) found that girls perceive more support from teachers than boys which, they suggest, might affect their well-being during lessons. In the Irish context, results drawing on data from a nine year cohort from *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Frawley, McCoy, Banks, & Thornton, 2014) provide evidence to support the idea that boys and girls experience and engage with school very differently. However, the authors hasten to add that rather than treating gender as a single entity, the focus needs to be on *specific* boys and girls and their specific reasons for disengagement.

In contrast to the studies summarised in this section which, consistent with their psychological heritage, focus on factors such as gender or ethnicity, the advice offered by Frawley et al. (2014) is more in keeping with the philosophical thrust of this study. This study does not seek to identify individual factors which impact on the child-teacher relationship because to do so would position the study within a positivistic paradigm. Rather, considering Heidegger's (1962) concept of '*Mitsein*' and cognisant of Hederman's

(2012) assertion that within the educational relationship, the pupil and teacher cannot be separated, this study foregrounds the relationality of the child-teacher relationship. Therefore, using methods suited to lived experience research (see section 3.8); I will be attuned to teachers' and children's descriptions of the specific nuances of how their individual contexts interact with their relationships with one another.

## **2.6 A Need for a New Kind of Knowledge of the Child-Teacher Relationship**

As outlined in the introductory chapter (see section 1. 3), relational pedagogy is largely a theoretical discourse and Aitken et al. (2007) have identified a need for studies at the 'micro level'. Most studies of the child-teacher relationship have been conducted using psychometric tools focusing primarily on one or other party. Indeed, for many years, studies of the child-teacher relationship were conducted solely with teachers as research participants. Reflective of a trend to reposition children as subjects rather than objects of research (Greene, 2005) and in line with article 12 of the UNCRC which requires children's participation in all matters affecting them, an increasing number of studies of the child-teacher relationship in upper primary school contexts are inviting children to participate. These studies come primarily from a cognitive psychological perspective and children's participation is mainly facilitated through questionnaires. Commonly used questionnaires include the Relatedness Questionnaire (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and the Quality of Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Davis, 2001). These tools assess children's perceptions of the emotional quality of their relationships with teachers focusing on areas such as perceived support, utilisation (willingness to rely on the teacher), and sense of relatedness (the extent to which students feel successful in their bids for belonging and sense of acceptance) (Sabol & Pianta, 2012, p. 215). Items on the questionnaire, whilst empirically sourced, are nonetheless limiting when compared to the rich descriptions that children could offer. This study seeks to offer children more open-ended approaches through which to describe their relationships with their teachers. Through adopting a phenomenological approach, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature making teachers' and children's personal, lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship its focus.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have traced the theoretical origins of relational pedagogy and explored how such pedagogy is defined in the literature. I have examined how the child-teacher relationship can be characterised before attending to the context-embedded nature of educational relationships. Consonant with the theory of relational pedagogy which holds that education and building relationships are synonymous, this study seeks to emphasise the significance of relationships for primary education in Ireland. I have outlined that whilst there is a significant body of theory on relational pedagogy, there are few studies examining how such theory is lived in practice beyond the early years environment, outside the lens of cognitive psychology and incorporating both teachers' and children's perspectives. I have suggested therefore, that detailed accounts of teachers' and children's lived experience of relationships in upper primary contexts would be a welcome addition to the literature. This is the explicit aim of this study. The theoretical framework, methodology and associated methods employed in the study will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework and methodology guiding the design of this research. I delineate how each methodological decision taken relates to my position regarding the nature of the reality of the child-teacher relationship (ontology) and how it can be known (epistemology). Having outlined the research aims and questions, I present a detailed description of the research design. I explain the process of participant recruitment and selection, ethical considerations concerning participants, data generation instruments and analysis. Finally, I offer a critical overview of the research methods employed and describe how data were analysed. Data sources are referred to throughout this chapter using short codes. Appendix A provides full details of each of the data sources to which these short codes relate.

### 3.2 Research Design

The design of this study is depicted in Figure 3.1. The research question encircles a series of bubbles referring to relevant aspects of the design. Arrows depict connections between certain aspects. For instance, the open phenomenological attitude links to the 'dwelling' aspect of data analysis. Similarly, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are linked to the use of reflexive notes as a data generation instrument. Each feature represented in the diagram will be dealt with in turn in the sections that follow.

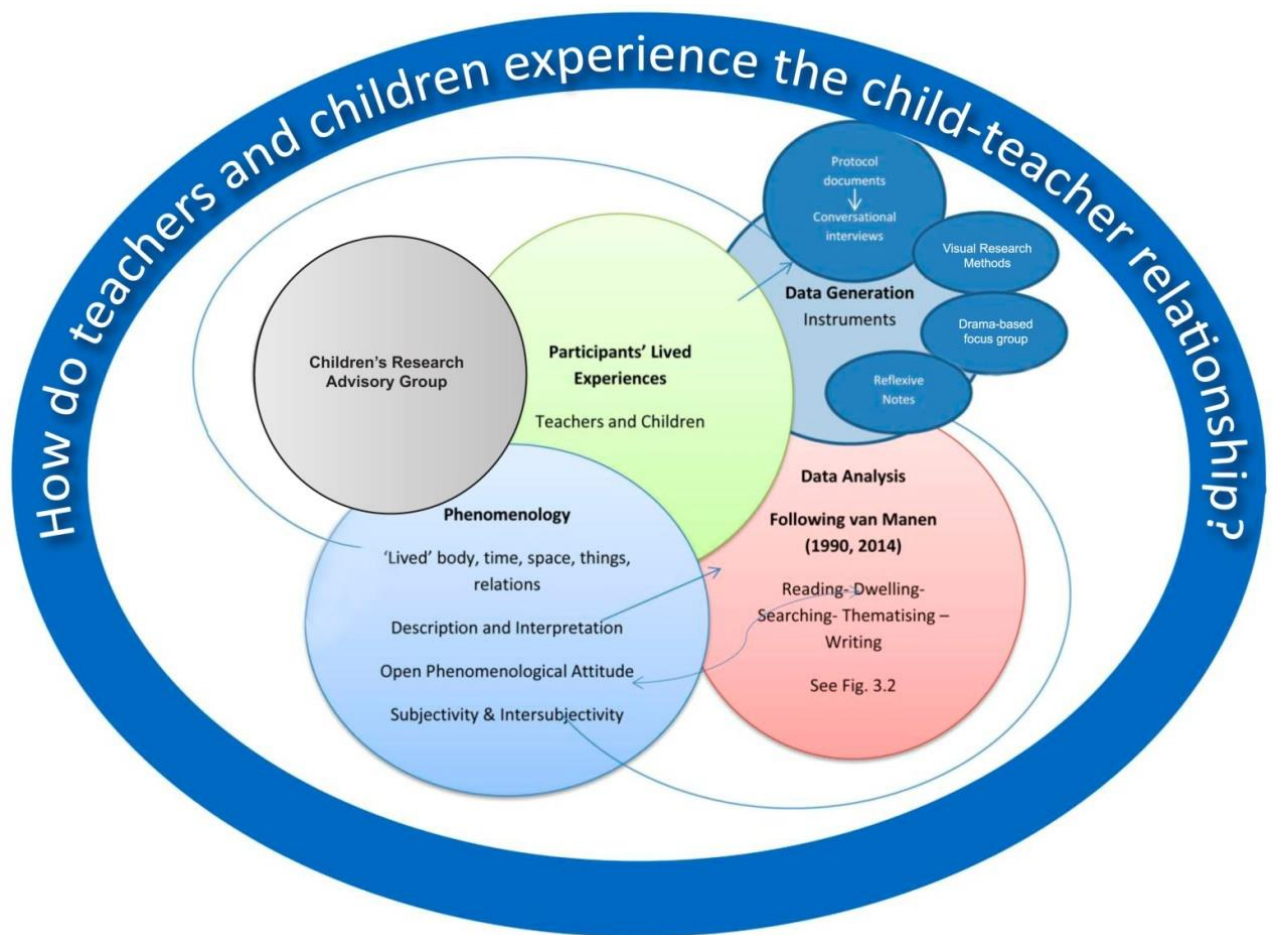


Figure 3.1 Research design

### 3.3 Research Question and Aims

Many studies begin by taking the nature of the child-teacher relationship as a given and proceed to investigate questions relating to its impact on other elements such as school adjustment or academic achievement. This study takes a step back and wonders about the particular nature of the child-teacher relationship as experienced by those involved. The term 'wonder' is used deliberately here referring to the nature of phenomenological inquiry which honours the complexity of these relationships. Rather than hoping to problem-solve or find answers (van Manen, 1990), the aim is to illuminate aspects of mystery surrounding the child-teacher relationship.

This phenomenological study has been designed to address the following research question:

How do teachers and children experience the child-teacher relationship?



As outlined in the introductory chapter, this is a ‘meaning’ question which is non-propositional in nature and thus can never be ‘closed down’ nor provide answers or solutions (van Manen, 1990, p. 23). Rather it aims to

- illuminate teachers’ and children’s lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship and
- look beneath and beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about the child-teacher relationship.

This study comes at a time when there is considerable concern about an increasingly marketised, competitive view of education (see Lynch et al., 2012; Ó Breacháin & O’Toole, 2013). At present, the Irish primary curriculum is under review and significant decisions are being made about what ought to be prioritised. It is my hope that both relational pedagogy, which underpins this study, and its outcomes can inform policy makers as they go about re-shaping the future of primary education in Ireland.

### **3.4 Ontological and Epistemological Position**

Underpinning any research activity are the basic assumptions ‘about the nature of reality and the way we comprehend it’ (Kuhn, 2008, p. 179). In this section, I make explicit my assumptions about the phenomenon of interest in this study, namely the child-teacher relationship. By so doing, the justification for selection of my methodological approach, research design, methods and analysis should become apparent.

This study is based on the assumption that relationships are complex, social systems which are embedded within other complex systems in the sense that they are ‘arising from and giving rise to’ these systems (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 46). This means the child-teacher relationship cannot be extracted from the complex web of interrelating systems in order to be studied in isolation. This implies a situated approach to the study of the child-teacher relationship. Further, the child-teacher relationship is seen as comprising multiple, complex experiences between teachers and children which are not possible to describe from one party’s perspective (Sidorkin, 2000). This implies that knowledge of the relationship necessitates accessing both teachers’ and children’s experiences.

This study further sees the participants and the researcher as active players in the generation of knowledge rather than as ‘detached observers’ (Morçöl, 2013, p. 175). This epistemological stance implies privileging of subjective and intersubjective experiences recognising that knowledge of the child-teacher relationship is *generated* rather than *gathered* by an objective researcher. The instruments employed (see section 3.8) are dialogic whereby together the participants and researcher wonder about the nature of the child-teacher relationship.

### **3.5 Locating a Suitable Methodology**

As discussed in the literature review, many studies are based on an assumption that knowledge is ‘cognitive and reflective’ bypassing ‘other more pathic forms of knowing that may actually constitute a major dimension of our experience and practice’ (van Manen, 2007, p. 21). Pathic knowing relates to sensuality: the lived, felt, experienced mode often overlooked because of our familiarity with it (van Manen, 1997). It is to this pathic knowledge that this study turns, choosing to investigate the child-teacher relationship through a phenomenological lens.

At this juncture, it is important to distinguish between phenomenology as a ‘philosophical endeavour performed by philosophers or philosophers of education’ and phenomenology as a ‘methodological endeavour performed by professional educators within education’ (Saevi, 2014). This study orients towards the latter whereby phenomenological inquiry is being employed to better understand the child-teacher relationship in upper primary school contexts through accessing ‘lived experiences’.

In the sections that follow, central aspects of phenomenological inquiry including; ‘lived experiences and the life-world themes’; the role of ‘description and interpretation’; ‘subjectivity and intersubjectivity’ and an ‘open, phenomenological attitude’ will be explored to show how these have been understood in this study.

#### **3.5.1 ‘Lived’ experiences and existential themes**

Burch (1990, p. 132) wonders what an ‘experience might be if it were not lived’, questioning the need for qualifying any experience as ‘lived’. There is less confusion when the German word, ‘erlebnis’ (from which ‘lived experience’ derives) is examined (Burch, 1990). The

emphasis is not simply on 'what is felt or undergone by sentient beings' but rather on what 'is meaningfully singled-out' (Burch, 1990. p. 133). Similarly, van Manen highlights the need to do more than simply recall experiences arguing that we must recall experiences in such a way that essential aspects, 'the meaning structures as lived through are brought back' (1990, p. 44). Therefore, researching lived experiences demands a commitment not only to subjective experiences but to their meanings. In the field of educational drama, we identify 'key moments' in stories as those with most dramatic potential. Similarly, lived experiences are those set apart from ordinary or unremarkable experiences. Van Manen highlights how the meaning of a certain experience disclosed by a participant may be 'hidden or veiled', calling for a special attentiveness on behalf of the researcher (1990, p. 27). He adds a further proviso to those involved in phenomenological inquiry insisting that descriptions of lived experiences ought to be recognisable as 'a possible interpretation of that experience' (van Manen, 1990, p. 41). If a phenomenological description does not resonate with a reader as an experience that they 'have had or could have had', van Manen argues, then it has failed to accomplish its own end (1990, p. 27). In this study, it was my responsibility to ensure that I remained oriented to the phenomenon and to lived experiences. This meant orienting participants to the phenomenon of interest and re-directing them to description of lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship during the data generation phase.

Van Manen (1990) following Merleau-Ponty (1962) identifies four fundamental life-world themes used in phenomenological inquiry namely lived space (spatiality); lived body (corporeality); lived time (temporality) and lived relation (relationality). In his recent publication, van Manen (2014) adds lived things (materiality) to this list. These themes can be seen to 'pervade the life-worlds of all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness' (van Manen, 1990, p. 101). The 'lived' dimension of themes is consonant with that of lived experience generally in so far as it relates to how we experience each of these existential elements and their significance to us. 'Lived body' is to be understood as embodied consciousness which engages with its world (Finlay, 2011, p. 30). Bullington highlights the ambiguous unity of 'lived body' and its world which is 'both subject and object, both mind and body, intertwined, understood in terms of levels, or planes of signification rather than mutually exclusive categories of being' (2013, p. 30). 'Lived body' relates to the 'felt sense' dimension of bodily experience (Finlay, 2011) which,

in this study, relates to how it feels to be part of the child-teacher relationship. 'Lived time' concerns not clock time (van Manen, 1990) but how we experience time such as how time might seem to pass slowly or quickly in school. Likewise, 'lived space' relates to the way in which place is experienced such as the way in which a classroom can feel inviting or hostile. 'Lived things', van Manen (2014, p. 307) explains, incorporates physical objects as well as 'thoughts, deeds, experiences, events and discoveries' and therefore could be associated with teaching and learning episodes and experiences.

The element of lived experience in focus in this study is teachers' and children's 'lived relation' with one another and whilst the five existentials, described above, unify in the form of the life-world 'we can temporarily study the existentials in their differentiated aspects whilst realising that one existential always calls forth the other aspects' (van Manen, p. 105). Therefore, the five existentials were drawn upon during participant interviews (see section 3.8.3) to provide a starting point for discussing the child-teacher relationship where participants needed a concrete point of departure.

An important point with respect to lived experiences is the impossibility of accessing such experiences 'directly'. In thinking or talking about an experience, the experience itself has always passed. As van Manen (2014, p. 55) explains 'there is always an interval between *being* touched and *feeling* touched'. Therefore, that which is accessible is an account of the lived experience which is filtered and altered and necessarily different to the actual experience.

### **3.5.2 Description and interpretation**

Whilst all phenomenological inquiries are concerned with lived experiences, there are two main schools of thought regarding the function of phenomenology. Husserl (1859-1938) saw phenomenology as a rigorous discipline for human science research which enabled reflective inquiry into consciousness. Phenomenology, for Husserl, aimed to understand 'essences' or typical structures inhering in themes through description of lived experiences (Danaher & Briod, 2005). Husserl's student, Heidegger (1962) emphasised the interpretive nature of description.

Descriptive phenomenology concerns unearthing essences or typical structures found in lived experiences. Dahlberg (2010) feels that the word 'essence' has inherited a bad name in philosophy owing to the mysterious or hidden quality given to it in common parlance. She argues that, for Husserl, essences meant simply 'aspects or qualities of objects as intended' (Dahlberg, 2010, p. 11). 'As intended' refers to the object's intentionality and in phenomenological terms, intentionality applies to all thinking, perception and action. When the phenomena 'presents, as something, it presents its essence' (Dahlberg, 2010, p. 12). Essences for Husserl are non-individual (Zhok, 2012). They are those qualities of objects as intended that are common or have a recognisable quality. Essences, Dahlberg (2010) explains, 'are not something what we as researchers explicitly add to the research' pointing to their a priori nature. Van Manen (1990) usefully clarifies how phenomenology makes meanings that are already inherent in accounts of lived experiences explicit: '[Phenomenology] attempts to articulate the content and form of text, the structures of meanings embedded in lived experience (rather than leaving the meanings implicit as for example in poetry or literary texts)' (van Manen, 1990, p. 11).

Heidegger (1962) argued our every perception, cognition and action is interpretative. Whilst this interpretative dimension is more apparent to us such as when we are consciously thinking about what something means, Heidegger argues that it applies to everything we perceive, think and do. For instance, we may believe that we can just "see" a glass of water but to see it as such, we are interpreting the structure as a glass and its contents as water. This is an example of the basic structure of interpretation that *Dasein* (Heidegger's term for 'being-in-the-world') 'exhibits in everything that it does' (Wrathall & Murphey, 2013, p. 15). The term 'hermeneutical phenomenology' describes the particular phenomenological orientation which emphasises interpretation.

Kakkori (2010) however, sees the tension between phenomenology (with its emphasis on essences) and hermeneutics (with its emphasis on temporal, historical meaning) as problematic and cautions researchers about blindly combining the two distinct disciplines. Others such as Finlay (2013) see such interpretations of phenomenology as characteristic of its dynamism and adaptability. The approach taken in this study follows van Manen (1990, p. 77) who, influenced by Heidegger (1962), recognises that all description is interpretative

suggesting that the purpose of 'the phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something'.

### **3.5.3 An open phenomenological attitude**

A key aspect of phenomenological research, according to Finlay (2012, p. 175), is an open phenomenological attitude which involves being 'open to the phenomenon - in order to go beyond what they already know from experience or through established knowledge'. She refers to this setting aside of pre-existing knowledge as a process of 'seeing with fresh eyes'. She highlights its centrality in distinguishing phenomenology from other research approaches which explore experience and subjectivity. Van Manen (1990, p. 46) argues that 'the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much'. In this way, he points to the 'taken-for-granted' nature of educational phenomena like the child-teacher relationship in the case of this study. Whereas Husserl recommended 'bracketing' our assumptions and previous knowledge in order to prevent them contaminating the data, van Manen (1990, p. 47), following Heidegger, recommends making these assumptions explicit to 'deliberately hold them at bay.' Rather than seeing this as an effort to be unbiased or objective, as some misinterpret it (Fitzpatrick & Finlay, 2008, p. 145), the aim is to attempt to see the world differently and more actively attend to participants' views. In reflecting on the phenomenological attitude, Hansen (2010) makes a convincing case for a 'phenomenology of wonder' which is incorporated into this study through developing a drama -based group method (see section 3.8.4). The themes highlighted in the literature chapter of this thesis show an awareness of empirical and theoretical knowledge regarding the child-teacher relationship. To conduct phenomenological inquiry, awareness of these themes is required if only to set them aside to allow for genuine wondering about how teachers and children *experience* these relationships.

### **3.5.4 Subjectivity and intersubjectivity**

Subjective experiences are at the heart of phenomenology as it is through the subject that knowledge of a particular phenomenon is accessed. This is in contrast to the idea of knowledge as objective and outside of a person's historical and contextual understanding. Crucially, phenomenology from a Heideggerian perspective rejects the idea of the

independent and self-sufficient subject, 'a person is never given without a world and without others' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 124) giving rise to the idea of intersubjectivity. Zahavi (2001, p. 165) describes this as 'a priori intersubjectivity' arising out of Heidegger's concept of *Mitsein* or our primordial state of 'being-with others' (see section 2.3.1). Zahavi (2001) suggests that intersubjectivity cannot be reduced to the concrete encounter with another but is a more fundamental interrelatedness. The concrete encounter only serves to unfold what was already there (Zahavi, 2001). This has implications for research with other subjects as is the case in this study. Firstly, considering this a priori element means that, even before our first encounter, the participants and I already participate in a communal tradition (Zahavi, 2001). Secondly, in our physical encounters with one another, 'a co-created and mutual research knowledge and relationship' emerges (Pascal, 2010, p.175). In this study, the interactions between participants and I seem to follow a predictable rhythm where I ask a question and the participant replies. However, the dynamic was likely much more complex where the boundaries between researcher and participant were blurred. Finlay (2002) criticises how many who undertake phenomenological inquiry ignore their own subjectivity and the intersubjective dynamic. In this study, reflexive notes were used as a way of accounting for this intersubjective dimension (see section 3.8.5).

### **3.6 Research Context**

The fundamental objective in researching lived experiences following van Manen (1990, p. 22) is to attend to essential meanings over 'mere particularity' of the historical context. In this study, the research context is significant as it determines the kinds of data generation instruments to be used and frames the phenomenon of interest. This study took place in an upper primary context which was understood as the final four years of primary school in Ireland. Whilst there are many studies on the child-teacher relationship in the recognised 'Early Years' phase, this is not the case with upper primary. Morgan's (2014) descriptions of children's developmental stages seem to suggest that the children in this study are a distinct group. Children in upper primary may have more mature concepts of self, including an awareness of who they are and significantly in the context of this study, an ability to evaluate themselves. Furthermore, they may be at Bruner's (1966) 'symbolic stage' of cognitive development with increased capacities for language. This may mean they are more capable of engaging in discursive modes of inquiry and can offer rich, verbal accounts

of lived experiences. They may be able to ‘discern the emotions of other people’ (Morgan, 2014, p. 6) meaning that their descriptions of encounters with their teachers ought to be richer in emotional language than children at earlier stages of development.

The hypothetical language used in this account of the upper primary phase is deliberate because of a certain discomfort with the tidiness and manageability of such categorisation. However, such categorisation can be used to inform the selection of data generation instruments namely ‘protocol writing’ (see section 3.8.2) and ‘conversational interviewing’ (see section 3.8.3) whereby participants focus on ‘the feelings, the mood, the emotions’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 64).

### **3.6.1 Research participants and choosing ‘examples’**

Sidorkin (2000, p. 4) criticises studies on student-teacher relationships which focus only on teacher’s perceptions or experiences and those that employ psychometric tools with teachers only. He argues that if ‘we are to give advice to teachers about classroom relations, this is all but impossible without including students in some dialogue about relations’ (Sidorkin, 2000, p. 4). Whilst this study does not intend to advise teachers about relations, the point Sidorkin makes is relevant. To better understand the child-teacher relationship, both teachers’ and children’s experiences need to be included.

Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) criticise how few qualitative studies justify their sample size. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot (2013) offer three methods to justify sample size for any qualitative research where interview is used as the principal data generation method. The first method is to cite recommendations by qualitative methodologists, the second is to act on precedent by citing sample sizes used in studies with similar research problems and designs, and the third involves demonstrating saturation within a dataset (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 13). Data saturation is the point in the data analysis phase at which ‘no new insights, properties, dimensions, relationships, codes or categories are produced even when new data are added’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 601). I outline how the first two methods were employed in selecting sample size for this study. Data saturation, the third method, is a common feature of grounded theory studies but is not widely used nor accepted in phenomenological studies. This is because phenomenology does not look for



patterns or sameness but 'aims at what is singular and a singular theme or notion may only be seen once in experiential data' (van Manen, 2014, p. 353).

With respect to recommendations of sample size by phenomenologists, van Manen (2014, p. 352) reminds us that phenomenology is not concerned with questions of 'how many'. He wonders about the appropriateness of sample size in phenomenological inquiry when such inquiry does not 'strive for empirical generalization, from a sample to a population'. Van Manen (2014, p. 258) prefers the word 'example' arguing that from a phenomenological perspective, researchers seek *examples* of experiential descriptions from people who have experience of the phenomenon in order to 'discover what is exemplary and singular about a phenomenon or event'. He suggests recruiting enough participants to generate experientially rich anecdotes. Others, including Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008), recommend seeking richly varied experiences rather than particular numbers of participants. Giorgi (2008) suggests a minimum of three participants allows for such variety.

With respect to precedence, whilst some phenomenological studies are conducted with one participant where there is an interest in their unique experience (see Finlay & Molano-Fisher, 2008), phenomenological studies generally include between two and ten participants. To help me to determine the number of participants required for this study, I reviewed several other phenomenological studies and compiled a summary (Appendix B). I found that most phenomenological studies are conducted with one group of participants e.g. students *or* parents *or* teachers *or* school managers. The selection of examples in this study is complicated by the inclusion of both teachers and children because having two distinct groups has implications for the number of examples required. Precedence is not established in this regard. Therefore, the approach adopted in this study was to select a sufficient number of examples from teachers and children who are in relationship with one another. This study included eighteen participants in all – three teachers and fifteen children. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007, p. 107) highlight that sampling involves more than the number of participants included in the study and is a process that also 'includes the number of contacts with each participant, and the length of each contact'. Multi-modal data generation instruments were used and included close observation (see section 3.8.1); protocol documenting (see section 3. 8.2); conversational interviews (See section 3. 8. 3); drama-based group method (see section 3.8.4); reflexive notes (see section 3.8.5) and visual

methods (see section 3.8.6). Three teachers were closely observed as they interacted with the children in their classes on two occasions lasting for between forty minutes and seventy minutes. Three teachers and two children from each of their classes (six in total) generated protocol documents and were interviewed individually. The duration of the individual interviews was longer than if the sample size was larger or a different qualitative methodology employed. Whilst Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) suggest interviews lasting sixty minutes are common in both grounded theory and phenomenological studies, they highlight that there is little evidence to support selecting sixty minutes particularly. Nonetheless, longer interviews are generally conducted on the basis that they provide opportunities to capture the complexity of the phenomenon (Prescott, 2011) and result in deeper more nuanced descriptions (Englander, 2012). Following precedence within phenomenology, interviews with adults lasted about an hour and interviews with children lasted about half an hour. The drama-based group method was used with all fifteen children and all three teachers engaged with the visual methods. This deep, iterative engagement with participants is characteristic of phenomenological inquiry.

### **3.6.2 Inclusion criteria**

Having included 'examples' both of teachers and children, the next step was deciding who specifically to include. The process of selecting participants required remaining attuned to the focus of the research namely how teachers and children experience the child-teacher relationship. In considering participants, Englander (2012) advises asking 'do you have the experience that I am looking for?' This was the first criterion in the purposive sampling process. To answer this question in the context of this study involves careful consideration of what the 'experience' entails. Whilst many may not identify themselves as being 'in relationship', the child-teacher relationship is arguably experienced by all teachers and all children. It was on this premise that the selection process was based.

Next, I looked to the kind of school that would be included. Initially, I considered including three schools serving contrasting communities believing that this would offer more balanced descriptions. However, I discovered that I was conflating ideas from different methodological approaches. The perceived need to include three schools, as representative of schools in general, misaligns with phenomenological inquiry. Van Manen (2014, p. 29)

highlights how phenomenology contrasts with other qualitative approaches which 'require repetition...calculation, technicization and comparison of trends...' Guided instead by the idea of finding rich examples of the child-teacher relationship, one co-educational, suburban school with designated disadvantaged status was approached. Following an oral briefing to all staff teaching in the upper primary classes (3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class), teachers self-selected based on their interest and availability to partake. Thereafter, children from those teachers' classes were briefed orally and they similarly self-selected.

### **3.7 Power and Participation: Considering Participants' Roles**

Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach (2009) highlight the difference between rhetoric about power distribution and commitments to such power distribution in practice. In this section, I delineate how distribution of power was considered in the practice of engaging with participants in this study, beginning with the participating children.

Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) see research roles and power relations along a continuum from highly differentiated at one extreme and highly collaborative roles at the other. There are many examples of projects where children and young people take central roles in the research process including notably Kellett (2010) where children choose their own research topics. The aims and purposes of such research are somewhat different to this study which rather than aiming to empower children is focused on discovering how they experience the child-teacher relationship. Nonetheless, the children's sense of agency and heightening their awareness of themselves as 'experts by experience' (Krol, Sixma, Meerdink, Wiersma, & Rademakers, 2014) was considered important. With this in mind, the children's research advisory group (as described in section 3.10.4), which positions the children as co-researchers, was established. Lundy et al. (2011) would see this as a limited interpretation of the term 'co-researcher' since they argue that to be considered co-researchers; children must be involved at every stage of the research process including selecting the research topic. However, when research roles are considered along a continuum (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009), the picture is more nuanced.

Data generation methods used demanded quite intense engagement. This was especially true in individual interviews where the power dynamic between the individual child and a

relatively unknown adult was a significant factor. Cruddas (2007, p. 482) argues that the binary relation between adults and children is inescapable and that those who seek 'to privilege the disempowered half of the binary relation...are simply trying to render the operations of power invisible'. Whilst it is naïve to think that this dynamic could be circumnavigated or turned on its head completely, I had to find a way to disrupt these power relations. I needed to consider how to make the children feel safe, informed and to understand the nature of their involvement in the research before embarking on individual interviews. In the next section, I explain how I tried to disrupt the traditional researcher-participant dynamic.

### **3.7.1 Playful approaches – devising a drama workshop**

I was encouraged by the work of Greenstein (2014) who notes opportunities that playful approaches provide for creating a less hierarchical, inclusive dynamic for research. Further, O'Sullivan (2011, p. 514) highlights the benefits of role-play including how children can ironically 'develop agency and an increased awareness of self' through adopting roles. My professional experience working in and through drama led me to develop drama-based workshops. I was mindful, however, of Hill (2005) who cautions against choosing seemingly 'child-friendly' methods without due reflection. Therefore, I questioned why I chose a dramatic approach and why workshops were deemed suitable for the children but not for the teachers.

The purpose of the children's drama workshops was fourfold. Firstly, they were designed so that I could create a dynamic where it was acceptable for me to be a co-player thus diminishing my perceived status (Maddrell, 1994). This was particularly necessary if children might otherwise have associated me with other classroom visitors such as the educational psychologist, for example. Secondly, they were designed to offer children an opportunity to seek clarification on the research topic. They enabled me to explain my genuine desire to seek their knowledge on that topic, something which Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p. 511) suggest is created by the researcher's 'incomplete' position as one who is 'seeking knowledge'. Thirdly, using drama enabled the children to tap into insights their bodies hold about the experience of lived relation (Finlay, 2011). Lastly, workshops were designed to

help me to become acquainted with the children so when it came to selecting children for interview, I wasn't relying solely on teachers' knowledge of the children.

I designed two forty-minute workshops. The first workshop aimed to develop a trusting researcher-participant relationship and to introduce some basic elements of research in a playful manner. Co-operative drama games were played, during which I became a co-player. Some games involved creating montages of people 'thinking', 'reading', 'examining', 'sorting' 'writing', 'talking' and 'sharing with others' which were then explained as elements of research. Other games involved physical positioning of furniture 'as if' the furniture were other things or other people. Finally, we played some power games (Boal, 1992) which were useful in preparation for the second workshop.

The second workshop was designed to facilitate clarification of the research topic and to afford time for children to generate protocol documents. The first activity centred on their understanding of 'relationship' and in small groups, the children tried to convey the meaning of relationships using their bodies. A conversation about the meaning of the word relationship (using the silent conversation technique) developed thereafter. This meant that children first had an opportunity to represent relationship bodily before conversing with others about their meanings.

At an earlier stage of the research design, I intended assigning children the task of completing protocol documents (see section 3.8.2) in their own time. However, given the school's 'disadvantaged' status, which is associated with family literacy levels and the distress often associated with homework, an alternative method of generating a stimulus for the interviews was devised. This involved children creating three tableaux of themselves in relation to their teacher. They adopted the role of the teacher and used a chair to represent themselves. The first of these tableau was described as the one they felt best represented their everyday relationship with their teachers and related to 'lived relation' ("Could you pretend to be your teacher and use the chair 'as if' it is you? Make a picture of you and your teacher on a normal day"). The second was to create an image which showed a moment that stood out in their memory ("Pretend to be your teacher again and use the chair as if it is you. This time show me a picture of a time with your teacher that stands out in your memory"). The third tableau was left open whereby children were invited to show

another experience of their relationship with their teacher (“Show me any other picture of you and your teacher – you can choose this one yourself”). The children photographed one another’s images using iPads. Norris (2000), an experienced drama- based researcher, recommends this method of emergent record keeping. These photos became the children’s protocol documents. The children were told that the, visual images would be used in an interview with me. Finally, the children and I sat in a circle and they were invited to ask questions about the research and their involvement.

### **3.8 Critical Selection of Data Generation Instruments**

As outlined in chapter two, many previous studies of child-teacher relationship are conducted using psychometric tools. There are some exceptions but these tend to be in studies where the child-teacher relationship is not the primary focus but rather emerges as a significant aspect of a particular teaching and learning environment (see Riley & Docking, 2004; Watson, 2011). The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS, Pianta, 2001) is the most widely used tool to assess a teacher’s perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal relationship with a specific child with respect to three dimensions, ‘closeness’, ‘conflict’, and ‘dependency’. The STRS (Pianta, 2001) was developed based on behaviours from attachment theory and reviewing literature on teacher-child interactions (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). It is a teacher-report instrument featuring twenty-eight statements including, for example, ‘I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child’ (Pianta, 2001). Teachers respond using a Likert scale whereby number one means the statement ‘definitely does not apply’ and number five means it ‘definitely applies’. The tool, therefore, presupposes that relationships are experienced according to these fixed categories and descriptions. This could be an example of ‘complexity reduction’ and Biesta (2010) would wonder for whose benefit the complex system is being reduced. It could also be as a result of what Macintyre Latta and Field (2005, p. 564) refer to as a ‘fear of relational complexities’ in teaching and learning whereby order is imposed on complex educational phenomena in order to render them safer and more manageable. Through engaging with the teacher’s voice only, employing the STRS further assumes that the teacher has complete or at least privileged knowledge of his/ her relationship with a particular child. Sidorkin (2012, p. 98) asserts that ‘a teacher cannot know or describe her relation with students using her consistent monological voice’. Therefore, a tool like the STRS (Pianta, 2001) would be a poor

choice for this study both because of its ability to capture only part of the relationship and its focus on pre-determined features of that relationship rather than acknowledging the complex realities which teachers and children are capable of describing and interpreting. Davis and Sumara (2008, p. 37) highlight such 'analytic methods are simply inappropriate for making sense of such disperse, rapidly changing, intricately entangled sets of phenomena'. These methods also fall short when capturing how it *feels* to experience such relationships and meanings that social actors attribute to them.

A tool offering more by way of depth and complexity owing to its focus on narrative is the Teacher Relationship Interview (TRI) (Pianta, 1999). It has been used in studies where more differentiated pictures of the relational aspects of the teacher-student relationship are required (Koomen et al. 2006). In a study by Spilt et al. (2012), the TRI was used as part of more in-depth engagement with teachers whereby it was embedded into a relationship-focused reflection programme. The programme integrated teachers' narration with video footage of interactions with children. In consultation with the researcher, teachers reflected on emerging relational profiles with particular students (Spilt et al., 2012, p. 309). The TRI was deemed unsuitable for this study because of its focus on the teachers' perceptions of the relationship. This study deliberately aimed to include teachers and children's experiences.

Data generation instruments used in this study include 'close observation', 'protocol writing', 'conversational interviewing', 'reflexive notes' as well as dramatic and visual research methods. Method selection was influenced by the nature of phenomenological inquiry which aims to gain rich accounts of lived experiences. In the sections that follow, I specify how and why each method was used and include reflections on the use of each method.

### **3.8.1 Close observation**

According to van Manen (1990), close observation allows the researcher to enter into and participate in a person's life-world. Employing this method as part of phenomenological inquiry means 'assuming a relation that is as close as possible' (van Manen, 1990, p. 69) whilst retaining an awareness of the phenomenon of interest, namely the child-teacher relationship. Finlay (2011) discusses the difference between participating and observing,

highlighting the importance of researchers clarifying their role. I was aware that participation in the classroom could be problematic given that my focus was on the child-teacher relationship and in order to participate, I would have to assume the role of teacher or child thereby impacting on the phenomenon of interest. However, my presence in the classroom alone would likely change the relationship which I intended to observe meaning that non-participative observation was also problematic. Nonetheless, as one of a number of methods, close observation proved valuable in gaining a sense of the lived space and providing context for data that emerged using other methods. For instance, many children referred to behaviour systems in their classrooms which I understood having been in those spaces.

I observed each classroom at two stages during the research process, before I conducted the conversational interviews and before the drama-based group session. I spent forty minutes in each classroom each time. My engagement was quiet observation except for when either the teacher or the children addressed me directly. For ethical reasons, I decided to write about my observations immediately after rather than during the observation periods (see section 3.8.1). I tried to reduce the likelihood of the loss of data by writing up my observations whilst in the school.

### **3.8.2 Protocol writing or protocol documenting**

Van Manen (1990) describes a tool for data generation known as ‘protocol writing’ involving participants writing a first draft of an experience. He highlights one key difficulty with asking somebody to write is that it ‘forces the person into a reflective attitude’ (1990, p. 64). He argues that the reflective attitude and linguistic demands of the writing process place constraints on accessing lived experiences. The broadening of the interpretation of protocol *writing* to protocol *documenting* in this study went some way towards alleviating this difficulty by offering participants opportunities to document their experiences using their chosen mode. These documents were used in a similar way to how photos are used in photo-elicitation interviews. Therefore, they provided a stimulus for conversation in interviews rather than being considered separate data sources.

Van Manen (1990) highlights the Greek origins of the word ‘protocol’ which implies ‘first draft’. The *first* draft element is important because in phenomenological research when



studying lived experiences, the objective is getting as close to the experience as lived as is possible. In other words, insights arising from reflecting on an experience, though interesting in other forms of research, are of less concern. Therefore, participants must be encouraged to trust their first draft of what actually happened rather than allow interpretation or explanations to seep through. In this regard, van Manen (1990) provides six suggestions for producing lived experience descriptions:

- You need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations or abstract interpretations.
- Describe the experience from the inside, as it were, almost like a state of mind; the feelings, the mood, the emotions etc.
- Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience; describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience.
- Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness or as it was the first time.
- Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed) etc.
- Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 64-65)

These suggestions were useful in developing a guide for teachers who engaged in the generation of protocol documents in their own time (Appendix C). The suggestion in number six, to avoid beautifying the account, was relevant where participants decided to document their experience through visual means. It was important to clarify that the thing itself (the painting, the drawing, the diagram etc.) was not of concern in terms of its form but rather the idea was that the participants would choose a mode of expression that best suited them.

### ***3.8.2.1 Subjecting myself to protocol documenting.***

Van Manen (1990, p. 64) invites those undertaking phenomenological inquiry to document lived experiences about the phenomenon themselves to better understand the kind of data being sought. I found this a useful exercise before going into the field. I wrote a poem to one of my primary school teacher's (Appendix D). About this, van Manen might say that it

adhered to some of his suggestions about how to produce lived experience descriptions like including details of the experience that stood out as vivid and that it captured the emotion and mood of the experience. He might also appreciate the simple language and the resistance to enhance the language to 'beautify the account' (van Manen, 1990, p. 65). However, he might take issue with the distance and interpretation that comes through in the third verse (*I teach infants myself now, Miss O' Rourke*) where I reflected on the impact of the experience rather than remaining true to my lived sense of it.

Through undertaking protocol documenting myself, I became aware of how the mode of documentation influences the content. Similarly, in the case of the study participants, some aspects of the relationship may have emerged through certain modes and not others. Whilst in some studies, the reliability of this variance may be concerning, in researching lived experiences it is not so much about 'whether a certain experience happened in exactly that way' but more with the 'plausibility of the account – whether it is true to our living sense' (van Manen, 1990, p. 65). Further, given that these documents are being used as stimuli for conversational interviewing, their contents are less of a concern than the way in which they initiate a conversation about the child-teacher relationship.

### ***3.8.2.2 Reflections on using protocol documents with teachers.***

Teachers engaged with the process of protocol documenting differently, resulting in generation of varied types of documents. One teacher created a visual map placing herself in the centre of the page with lines extending to bubbles encapsulating her understanding of the roles she played as a teacher. She identified nine roles in all, eight of which related to her nurturing role and one to her role as educator. Another teacher offered a personal account which I describe as a 'textbook' phenomenological description. She included accounts of interactions with particular children, quoted dialogue and attended to her feelings and bodily reactions to various episodes. Finally, one teacher gave an account of her background as a teacher, her experience and understanding of the child teacher relationship. This account was less phenomenological and more abstract, featuring fewer examples of lived experience.

Having these documents in advance of the individual, conversational interviews meant each interview was tailored to suit the participant. For instance, with the teacher whose account

was more removed from experience, I opened the conversation with an explanation of lived experience research and what it entailed. Consequently, this particular interview featured vivid accounts of particular interactions with children.

### **3.8.3 Conversational interviewing**

Conversational interviewing, following van Manen (1990) was used as the principal data generation instrument in this study. Gadamer (1989) posited the metaphor of conversation as an ideal in terms of the hermeneutical process highlighting qualities of responsiveness, creativity and freedom central to understanding. In this regard, he rejects 'conducting' conversations preferring instead the notion of the topic of conversation taking the lead.

Van Manen (1990, p. 63) suggests two purposes of the conversational interview. The first is for 'gathering' lived experience material and the second is for 'reflecting' on lived experience material. Whilst he argues that the two are not truly separable and rather part of the same process, it may be that the focus is on one or other function, depending on the stage in the research process that they are employed. I used conversational interviews mostly for the first purpose, description. Interviews were held with teachers and children separately. The purpose was to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee about the meaning of their experiences of the child-teacher relationship.

According to van Manen (1990, p. 98), the art of the researcher in hermeneutic interviewing is to 'keep the question (of the meaning of the phenomenon) open'. He (1990) argues that it is impossible to offer ready-made questions for the interview because of the need for questions to relate to the experience being shared by the participant. The key quality in the data sought by phenomenologists is concreteness (Wertz, 2005). Details of the person's lived situation rather than their abstract views or interpretations are the ultimate aim in attempting to access the person's lived experience (Finlay, 2008). This contrasts with structured interviews where questions are the same for each participant irrespective of experiences they share in response to questions.

Whilst many interviewees might speak fluidly in response to the initial prompt on the phenomenon of interest, others might require guidance. I was mindful of Finlay's (2013) assertion that to produce rich life-world descriptions, participants ought to describe their

experiences concretely. Supplementary questions were devised where participants found the original questions abstract or inaccessible. However, I should emphasise that these questions were only used for this purpose and in response to aspects of the participants' descriptions to ensure that I was 'guiding' rather than 'leading the participant' (Giorgi, 2009, p. 123). To proceed through a list of sub-questions would misalign with the methodological approach. That is not to say that follow up questions aren't asked but as Englander (2012) highlights, such questions must be a spontaneous response to the participants' descriptions.

Interview guides for both teachers and children were prepared. These guides were on hand during interviews but were used as a resource when required. Interview guides for teachers were unique to each teacher (Appendix E) because they referenced the protocol documents that teachers prepared before the interview. Having piloted the interview with the Children's Research Advisory Group (Lundy et al., 2011), the children's interviews began with each child looking for the photographs featuring themselves. Then, the child was asked to describe what was happening in the photograph.

In developing both the teachers' and children's interview guides (Appendix F), I drew on lifeworld existentials, 'lived space', 'lived body', 'lived time', 'lived things' and 'lived relation' (see section 3.5.1) as a framework to construct possible questions. As outlined in section 3.5.1, it is difficult to attend to these themes in isolation because of their integrated nature. Indeed, 'lived relation' integrates aspects of lived body, lived time, lived things and lived space and is one of the more abstract existentials (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2011). Literature consulted in chapter two, existing scholarship exploring life-world themes with children and adults (see Hyde, 2005), as well as reflection on the research topic and question informed the generation of these subthemes.

To orient myself towards spontaneous responses, I consulted phenomenological studies in both psychology and education. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a particular form of phenomenology which has become increasingly popular in the fields of psychology and medicine. It shares many commonalities with van Manen's (1990) 'lived experience' approach. Experienced practitioners, Rhodes and Smith (2010), describe their IPA study into the lived experience of depression from the perspective of the sufferer.

Whilst reading their paper, I took account of how questions were phrased during the conversational interview. These are italicised below:

*What was that like then?*

Absolutely awful

*Can you describe it?*

Yeah like you want to scream and scream and scream as hard as you possibly can to dispel it

*Dispel what though, you're in this state and you want to scream. ... what is it?*

(Extract from an interview transcript, Rhodes and Smith, 2010, p. 405, my emphasis)

In the educational field, one study into the lived experience of delivering distant education from the Arctic (Miller, Veletsianos, & Doering, 2008; Veletsianos, Doering, & Henrickson, 2012) described how researchers began 'by directly asking about' that experience (Miller et al., 2008, p. 259). The authors explain that following the initial question, they probed the comments that were made by the interviewee: 'For example, if Jordan said, "I was exhausted and freezing", we would probe the feelings of exhaustion and freezing to illustrate a lived experience description' (Miller et al., 2008, p. 259). These practical examples of spontaneous responses were useful in my preparation.

### ***3.8.3.1 Conducting the conversational interview.***

In this section, I outline how the conversational interviews for both teachers and children were structured. I describe preparatory work, interview settings and the duration of the interviews. McNamara (2009) provides tips on implementing interviews including testing recording equipment, asking one question at a time and providing transitions. These were useful for personal training. Advice offered by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Trochim (2006) about avoiding the temptation to finish a participant's response was another area I needed to practice, given my natural tendency to do this in conversation. Van Manen (1990) shares other useful tactics such as waiting, allowing silence and repeating the participant's last sentence. In the case of participants generalising about experiences, van Manen (1990) advises inserting a question that turns the discourse back to the level of concrete experiences such as asking for a specific example.

As interviews were conversational in nature, choosing a place where the participant felt comfortable was seen as positively impacting on their ability to generate rich life-world descriptions. In this respect, van Manen (2014, p. 315) argues that interviews are not always best conducted in formal settings and suggests conducting interviews in places conducive to conversation such as around a kitchen table or in a coffee shop. Two interviews were conducted in coffee shops and the third in a hotel lobby as suggested by the participants.

Lundy et al. (2011) highlight a tension regarding research settings with children. On the one hand, they highlight how children need to feel safe and secure pointing to the suitability of the classroom environment. On the other, they recognise that activities in such settings may be interpreted by children as school work. Their solution is to find the least school-like spaces available. Interviews with children were conducted in the school library where there was less school-like seating and a carpeted floor. For child protection reasons, the library door was left open to allow 'passive surveillance by a third party' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011)

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim respecting language style and subtleties. These transcripts were supplemented by reflexive notes wherein it was possible to account for embodied elements and tone (see section 3.8.5).

### ***3.8.3.2 Piloting the teachers' conversational interview.***

I asked two primary school teachers (one a former colleague and one a teacher in a school, neither of whom were involved in this study) to advise about how the conversational interview would be explained to teacher participants. I conducted a pilot interview with these teachers to practise the skill of responding to participants with relevant questions whilst remaining focused on the phenomenon. I sought these teachers' feedback on the timing of the interview, if or when to schedule a break and other structural aspects. I also sought feedback on the conversation itself asking if, for instance, the topic was comprehensible and whether they felt I was listening and responding appropriately. This experience proved invaluable when working with the participants.

### ***3.8.3.3 Reflection on the conversational interview.***

As a first-time user of conversational interviewing, I reflected on its benefits and drawbacks through recording my reactions immediately following each interview. One drawback I noted was how difficult it was to provide affirmation of participants' responses whilst simultaneously formulating subsequent questions. Whilst I was aware of some potential benefits of conversational interviewing from reading van Manen (2014) and Finlay (2011), the practice proved convincing. I found, in particular, that it facilitated a partnership approach where research participants and I were co-navigating the interview's direction. Further, I found its open-ended structure meant that aspects of the child-teacher relationship discussed were not restricted to my understanding of the relationship.

In designing the conversational interview for the children, I understood that it could follow a similarly open structure to that designed for the teachers. My supervisors advised taking a more structured approach to the interviews with children. The challenge was to do so whilst adhering to the phenomenological approach. I found the lifeworld existentials useful in this regard. I developed a menu of possible questions which revolved around the central focus of the study, namely 'lived relation' and its interconnection with the other existentials. Without this structure, I feel the interview process may have been daunting for the children. Further, the structure enabled elements of the child-teacher relationship to emerge that might not otherwise have arisen. For instance, one child made reference to the teacher's voice and how it impacted on him (lived body) and I was able to include this as a question for others thereafter.

In a discussion with my supervisors, I referred to the richness of data which emerged from 'five of the six' individual interviews with children leaving only one interview which was more limited. My initial understanding was that five out of six was a good return. Westcott and Littleton (2005) refer to a situation where a researcher had difficulty getting a child to respond to questions. They suggest that such participants are often characterised as an 'outlier' and excluded from the sample. Recognising the possibility of this happening in my research and hearing myself articulate my 'five out of six' finding, encouraged me to reflect on that one interview.

That particular child ('Dan') seemed most keen to partake in the research. His teacher said that he wouldn't usually return forms to school and though he was slow to do so, the teacher felt returning it was significant. Further, on the observation days, he tried to connect with me. For example, he would make deliberate eye contact until I acknowledged him and then look away shyly. I recall him smirking as we passed others in the hallway on his way to the library for his interview. He seemed happy to be afforded the opportunity to partake. Once the interview began however, Dan's bodily and verbal interactions changed and he provided short responses to each question. I interpreted this as a reflection of the interview process - the setting, my expectations, his expectations of what an interview meant, the questions, the recording, being alone with the relative stranger and so on. As I reviewed the transcript, I found complex ideas stated succinctly which I had initially misinterpreted as less rich data. For instance, in a conversation about lived space, he indicated that he preferred sitting alone than with friends as he was less likely to get 'in trouble'. This contrasted with his definition of a 'happy' classroom earlier whereby being with friends was considered most important. Therefore, it seemed that his need to please the teacher was at the expense of his desire to be with friends – a rather complex insight into the child-teacher power dynamic. When I invited him to turn off the audio recorder at the end of the interview, he mentioned a 'homework pass' that he had received and spoke openly about what it meant to him. We laughed about how much he had to say about the pass once the recorder was off and with his permission, I began recording again. In the more relaxed atmosphere, he offered some valuable insights into what he thought his teacher thought of him - once again referring to his efforts to please the teacher.

Reflecting on this interview revealed three areas of learning for me as a beginning researcher. The first relates to my method selection. Whilst the embodied work followed by the individual interview 'worked' well for five of the six children, another mode may have enabled me to generate more meaningful dialogue with 'Dan'. Further, it highlighted the importance of re-listening to interview and re-reading transcripts. The laughing, captured on the audio recording, gave context to the more free-flowing dialogue that followed. Finally, when combined with my observation notes where I noticed the value attributed to personal time with the teacher; his eagerness to partake could be interpreted as reaching out to an interested adult. Therefore, the research topic was of less interest to Dan than was walking



to another space, being seen walking there and being alone with someone who cared about what he had to say.

### **3.8.4 Drama-based group method**

Group methods may seem uncondusive to phenomenological research given the emphasis on subjective experiences. Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2009), however, present a strong case for using group methods, particularly when incorporated alongside individual data generation methods. Whilst the conversational interviews offered a relatively private space to focus on subjective experiences, the group session for the children was designed to offer a forum for collective wondering about the child-teacher relationship. The group session designed was somewhat similar to focus groups insofar as a group of people was involved and there was a singular focus. In a similar way to a focus group, the purpose was to generate collective rather than individual meanings. Focus groups typically involve discussion primarily whereas the group session described here also incorporated a bodily element through drama. The purpose of the group session was the same as the individual interviews, to explore lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship. I felt that additional insights into the child-teacher relationship might be offered when participants worked collectively. In terms of power dynamics, I felt that the larger group of participants would usefully balance the one-one dynamic of the individual interviews. Further, I felt that the group method could offer potential to generate inter-subjective meanings (see section 3.5.4).

Whilst choosing a dramatic approach was influenced by my professional experience in the area, it offered additional potential benefits to both data generation and analysis. Inspired by the work of Robbins (2006, p. 194), the combination of embodied and verbal descriptions had the potential to enhance 'the vividness of an emerging memory' and provide an additional mode of accessing participants' experiences. The incorporation of drama into the group sessions freed me up somewhat. My role became less about providing cues to encourage participants to continue speaking and became more of a provocateur encouraging participants to 'read' their own scenes and images for meaning. The process became more participative since the authority to deduce meaning was shared.

Group drama sessions began with warm up games which were familiar to the children from the two workshops earlier in the study. Games played initially focused on reading meaning through concentrating on space and body, which was necessary preparation for the main activity. Working in pairs, children took turns to become a 'sculptor' of particular moments in the child-teacher relationship. The first thought that came to mind was encouraged to align with the idea of a 'first draft' in phenomenology (see section 3.8.4). In this way, children were discouraged from over-thinking the experience. The child whose experience was being shown became the creator of the piece and the other child in the pair became a malleable piece of clay. The sculptor sculpted him or herself into the piece as the teacher in the relationship and used the other to represent themselves so that they could, for a moment, step outside themselves. In this way, children used their own bodies and their partner's body to depict experiences of the child-teacher relationship. In the same way as phenomenological descriptions aim to capture the experience rather than views or perspectives, participants were encouraged to get to work on the 'clay' without hesitation allowing their bodies to describe. Therefore, they were encouraged to 'do' their images first and suspend the desire to explain. Once each sculpture was complete, the children took a photo using the iPad. iPads were suitable because they offered an immediate image which could be reviewed and re-taken if the participants felt it didn't capture the intended meaning. Once photos had been taken, reflection on the images began. Other participants in the group were asked to describe what they saw and suggest how they felt when they looked at the sculpture. The 'clay' and the sculpture too were invited to speak about how they felt in their position and in relation to the other. The combination of these embodied and verbal methods for each of the participants enabled 'multiple narratives to be represented and explored' (Nicholson, 1999, p. 101).

The sharing of meanings was audio-recorded using an unobtrusive sensitive omnidirectional microphone. However, given the inability of audio to capture inaudible and felt aspects of the sessions, I wrote reflexive notes immediately afterwards on site (see section 3.8.5). When considered in conjunction with the audio-recorded conversations, this gave greater depth to the data as discussed next.

#### ***3.8.4.1 Reflection on the drama-based group method and photographs.***

The drama-based group method usefully enabled verbal data generation to be supplemented by embodied data which was photographed. The photographs of these experiences proved effective at the beginning of the individual interviews that followed. Similar to the inclusion of the protocol documents with the teachers, the photographs gave a degree of control of the interview to the children (Bagnoli, 2009) and served as a shared central focus between interviewer and participant, an example of what Westcott and Littleton (2005, p. 148) term an 'effective joint referent'.

However, the group session (as opposed to its products) created a particular dynamic that I hadn't anticipated. When the children were brought together as a group, they showed a limited range of experiences. It seemed as though they reverted to default or stereotypical depictions of the child-teacher relationship e.g. child swinging on chair and teacher glaring. Whilst it is likely that these are experiences that the children had encountered, the group setting created a particular dynamic which meant that more specific, personal, 'phenomenological' descriptions were not forthcoming. As Westcott and Littleton (2005, p. 146) suggest, rather than looking to the children as the problem, 'we need to understand how the situations in which children are placed ...support or constrain their activity and performance'. I concluded from this and from the smaller group conversation with the Children's Research Advisory Group that the experience of being in a relationship with a teacher is personal and intimate and therefore better explored in a more private setting. The individual interviews that followed revealed more dense descriptions of the children's relationships with their teacher and children were much more forthcoming in the individual setting. This methodological finding informed the second round of data generation with teachers whereby the initial plan to incorporate a group method was reconsidered (see section 3.8.6.1).

#### **3.8.5 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity was built into the design of this study and following Sandelowski & Barroso (2002), was understood as the practice of reflecting in three interconnected ways: inward towards myself, outwards to cultural, historical, linguistic, political and other external forces and finally in-between to the social interaction between the participants and I. Tomkins and

Eatough (2010) note the tendency for dualisms to appear in many models of reflexivity emphasising 'either/or' aspects of reflexive practice. They argue for a more integrative interpretation which approaches reflexivity from a 'both/and' standpoint. Their discussion about how some models differentiate between infra-reflection and meta-reflection is of most relevance here. Infra-reflection involves immersion 'in the text, setting or research relationship and a contribution to the development of accounts from within' whereas meta-reflection involves a more distant approach, standing outside the text and research relationship 'to draw attention to their construction' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010, p.163). They argue that positioning these as 'either/or' options is a limited conceptualisation of the practice of reflexivity. The phenomenological orientation of Tomkins and Eatough's (2010) work makes it particularly valuable for this study. They highlight how phenomenology characteristically pushes 'beyond theories and models and a priori definitions' (2010, p. 177). Therefore, the creativity and flexibility afforded by a phenomenological research orientation allows for more integrative approaches to reflexivity. Phenomenology further accommodates bodily dimensions of reflexivity. Finlay (2008), following Merleau-Ponty, offers three inter-related approaches to reflexivity namely 'bodily empathy', 'bodily self-awareness' and 'embodied intersubjectivity'. Bodily empathy relates to the researcher's attentiveness to body language and gestures on the part of the participant; self-awareness relates to the researcher's own embodied feelings during encounters with participants and embodied subjectivity involves paying attention to both bodies as they share the space (Finlay, 2008). Finlay's (2008) use of the term 'awareness' in the description of these reflexivities suggests an understanding of bodily reflexivity as a conscious practice. In light of Tomkins and Eatough's (2010, p. 177) suggestion to incorporate a 'both/and' interpretation of reflexivity; bodily reflexivity may also have an unconscious dimension.

In this study, in line with its phenomenological orientation, infra and meta-reflexive practices were integrated and particular attention was given to bodily reflexivity. For illustrative purposes, I include two examples of reflexivity from the study. The first relates to a conversational interview with Miss Elliot and evidences the three dimensions of reflexivity outlined by Sandelowski &Barroso (2002). The second concerns an interaction with Miss Vaughan following an interview and pertains to bodily reflexivity, following Finlay (2008) but with the added dimension of reflecting on external forces at play.

In conversational interviewing, questions are not pre-determined but rather arise spontaneously in response to experiences shared by participants (see section 3.8.3). A sensibility to reflexivity acknowledges interactional and positional dynamics as well as the constructed nature of conversations. In the excerpt below, Miss Elliot is talking about the waves that she has drawn on her concept map. Initially, she had thought they were representative of the turbulent nature of her classroom but in this excerpt, she sees another meaning:

Miss Elliot: I will tell you one more thing about these waves now....We have been looking at our curves, the curves for our school as opposed to from a non-DEIS school [...]We've been looking just to see....to compare our results on a trend graph with the results of a non-DEIS school and the 'norm' to see how we compare.

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Elliot: Maybe that's why these sort of trend graphs....entered my head....

Annie: Because it's on your mind...

Miss Elliot: Yeah because I have been looking at them for so long, for the last few days, you know? Analysing....wondering why we're not doing as well....(little laugh).

Annie: And you've been thinking about that? [...]

Miss Elliot: We have been looking at our curves[...] our school as opposed to from a non-DEIS school.

The interview continued with Miss Elliot giving significant detail about her experience of the pressure of performativity. Her relationship with the children in her class is knotted with perceived external pressures to 'do well'. This resonates with me as the researcher because of its alignment with one of my motivations for this study, namely to counter the dominant discourse of accountability and performativity in the Irish Primary Education context. The excerpt serves as a good example of the ongoing dynamic interplay between 'infra' and 'meta' reflexivity in this study and indeed of the relationship between 'inward', 'outward' and 'in-between' modes of reflection suggested by Sandelowski & Barosso (2002). By saying 'because it's on your mind' and asking 'and you've been thinking about that?' I encourage Miss Elliot to continue with this train of thought. Therefore, I contribute to the data generated (infra-reflexivity) but it is also in analysing the specifics of the language used that I appreciate how I opened up this area for discussion (meta-reflexivity). Further when analysing the transcript, I become aware of how the external pressure that Miss Elliot

describes as well as her reference to 'the norm' is evidence of the political shaping the personal (meta-reflexivity). In that analysis, I also note how the atmosphere changes in response to the topic of the participant making reference to the 'culture of performativity' (Ball, 2003) (meta-reflexivity). I begin to say less meaning that pauses in the conversation are longer than usual. On reflection, I imagine that I was conscious of withholding my position in relation to the topic in case I would unwittingly turn the focus of the interview towards myself. This is a reflexive risk described by Tomkins and Eatough (2010, p.166) as 'the risk of narcissism'.

The second example of reflexivity concerns an interaction with Miss Vaughan following the first conversational interview. During the interview, Miss Vaughan shared her rationale for becoming the kind of teacher she is and included personal, emotional information relating to her own childhood. The impact of her revelations on the interview dynamic was palpable. At the end of the interview, while getting ready to part company (and where one typically shakes hands), she asked if she could give me a hug. We hugged. It felt necessary. It seemed as if my body accepting her body momentarily was acknowledgment of the intimacy of what had been shared. Aspects of her rationale for being a particular kind of teacher resonated with me. Though this wasn't spoken between us, our bodies recognised that in one another. Being attuned to Finlay's (2008) reflexivity and intersubjectivity meant that I was consciously attending to this flow between the participant and I. Considering Tomkins and Eatough's (2010) point about the co-existence of conscious and unconscious modes of reflexive engagement, there may also have been unconscious bodily interactions during the interview that enabled the hug to take place or enabled the hug to feel right at the time.

Afterwards, as I drove from the interview site, I audio-recorded my reaction to the hug:

Just at the end of the interview there, Olivia (pseudonym) said she felt like giving me a hug and I could see where that was coming from [goes on to describe what was shared]...I could totally see... she was quite vulnerable in the interview... like she opened up... I don't know if she intended to open up as much as she did so I can see why she wanted to give me a hug at the end. And I was glad... you know... that was fine, I let her give me a hug... em...and I was glad she felt comfortable enough to do so.

(RRAN, 17.02.15)

Listening to the recording and reading the transcript (meta-reflexivity), I can hear my own doubt about how the hug could be interpreted. I know that when I say about it being 'fine', I am conscious of external forces such as the academy or the ethics committee and am trying to reassure myself about the appropriateness of my actions. I acknowledge that it was fine for her to give me a hug as though I did not partake in it but only accepted it. I am therefore distancing myself from the hug in the recording perhaps again conscious that this 'data' and my professionalism could be called into question by some external force. Even the act of recording my reaction highlights that once I was removed from the site where my focus was on my relationship with the participant and her relationship with the children in her class, my focus shifted to questions of moral and ethical normativity.

These reflections were recorded in a journal. The idea that reflexive notes could be considered data was new to me but the practice of writing in that way was familiar. Since starting the doctoral programme, I have kept a series of journals for each phase. Some entries are rather cold and factual summarising research papers and others have a more embodied character where I record how something I have read transported me to a particular place and time where I vividly describe my feelings (see Appendix G).

Reflexive notes were written or audio recorded whilst on site and after the formal engagement with participants had ended (meta-reflexivity). This was in recognition of the fact that writing in front of a participant creates a distance (Finlay, 2011) which would counter the aims of the instruments chosen.

### **3.8.6 Visual research methods**

Having decided against a group method for my second round of data generation with teachers (see section 3.8.6.1), I returned to my research question and methodological framework to consider next steps. Encouraged by how the protocol documents (see section 3.8.2) changed the interview dynamic and gave a degree of control of the interview to the participants (Bagnoli, 2009), I began thinking about how visual methods could help to generate phenomenological descriptions. Tinkler's (2015) assertion that incorporating visual research methods into interviews can be more productive than 'talk-only' interviews was encouraging and aligned with personal experiences from my master's research.

Mitchell (2011) highlights how the multidimensionality of artefacts can facilitate access to the complex autobiographical, social and historical narratives that they carry. Riggins (1994) suggests that artefacts can be considered for their denotative (or literal) meanings and/or for their connotative meanings (associated stories/emotions). I decided to invite teachers to choose three 'things' that would help them to describe their relationship(s) with the children in their class. The second set of individual interviews with teachers began with a conversation about the artefacts chosen and what they meant to them thereby exploring connotative meaning. In order to focus explicitly on 'lived relation', I decided to introduce drawing of that relationship into the interview process. Teachers were invited to depict their relationship with the children in their classes using a concept map. The particular use of concept mapping which encouraged 'those mapping to talk about the ideas being represented' followed Chappell and Craft (2011, p. 373) and enabled co-generation of visual and verbal data. Following a discussion about the significance of their artefact, teachers were invited to map their relationship with the children in their classes. The mapping was not viewed as a distinct activity or as an appendix to the interview but as part of the conversation. I hoped that talking while drawing would create a more immediate representation of the individual's thoughts (Katz-Buonincontro & Phillips, 2011) which aligns with my phenomenological approach.

#### ***3.8.6.1 Reflection on visual methods.***

The use of visual methods with the teachers did not feature in the initial research design. Rather, I had intended to use a drama-based focus group with the teachers as I had done



with the children. However, the dynamic that the drama-based focus group created influenced my decision to use visual methods instead. The decision to include the use of artefacts with the teachers proved successful for two reasons. Firstly, they served as a focal point or 'joint referent' (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p. 148) whereby the dyadic dynamic of a one-to-one interview was diverted towards the artefact. This created a relaxed atmosphere. Secondly and more importantly, the artefacts offered an access point to aspects of the child-teacher relationship that I feel would not have otherwise been discussed. For instance, it is unlikely that Miss Vaughan and I would have talked about her experiences of being a primary school child in an ordinary conversational interview. Her decision to bring a glass vase that her primary school teacher had given her meant that conversation was directed to that relationship. Quite quickly, we were conversing at a deeper level about the significance of that relationship for her both as a child (then) and as a teacher (now).

Teachers were reluctant initially to engage with the concept mapping with many being conscious of their perceived lack of artistic abilities. The introduction of the concept mapping after the discussion of the artefacts meant that a relaxed tone had been set. I feel concept mapping would have been less successful had it been the first part of the second interview. Once again, concept mapping seemed to facilitate deeper conversations than the first conversational interview.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Finlay (2013) highlights the often overlooked significance of data analysis in phenomenological inquiry. She argues that many novice phenomenological researchers spend too much time and energy gathering an unnecessary volume of data 'as though that is the real research' rather than concentrating on processing data and analysing meanings (Finlay, 2013, p. 184). In this section, I show the data analysis process employed in this study in diagrammatic form before explaining each phase in detail. Literature on phenomenology as a methodology highlights the impossibility of offering a standardised format for analysing data. The structure which I adopted is an interpretation of guidance offered by van Manen (1990, 2007) and Finlay (2008) and is 'uniquely suited to this particular project and individual researcher' (van Manen, 1990, p. 163) following a nonlinear approach.

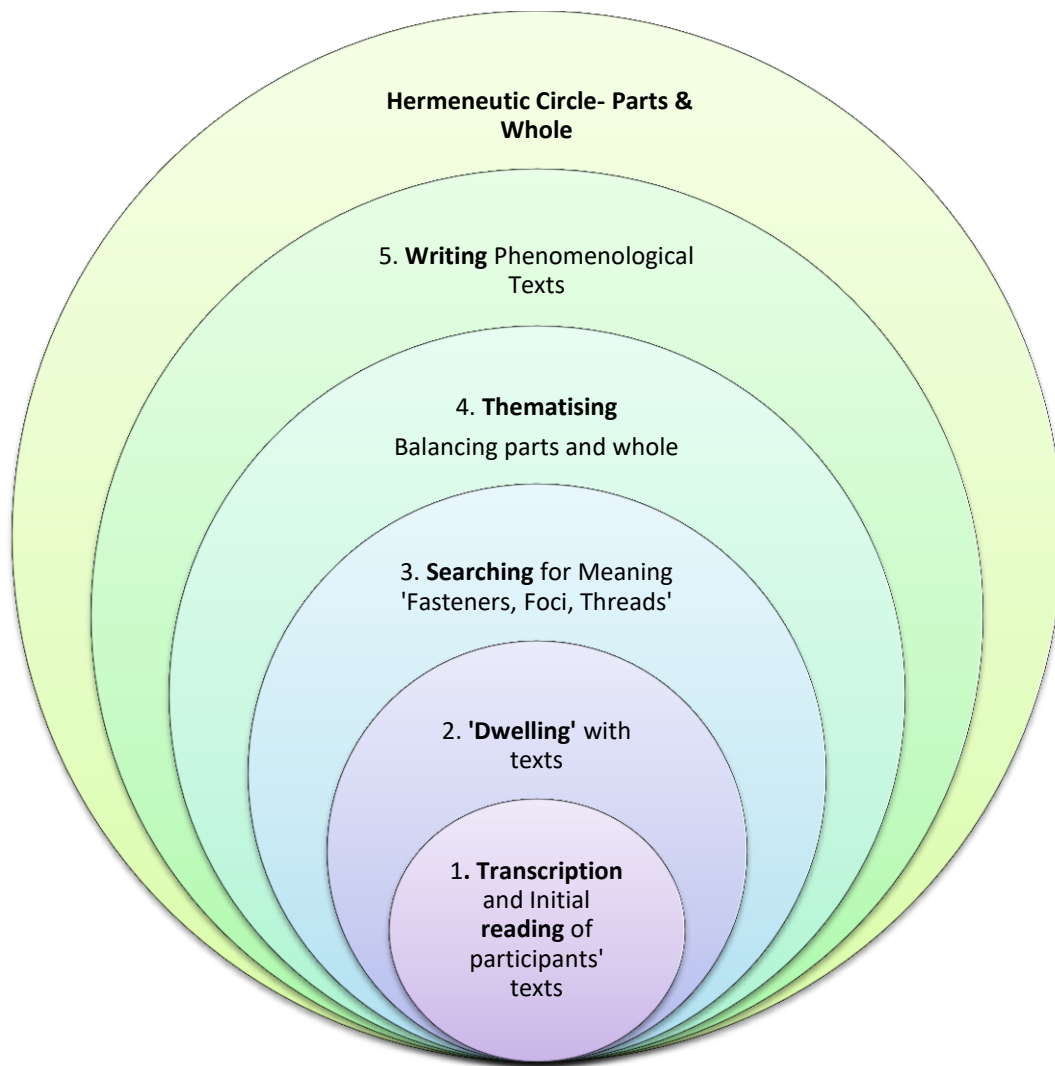


Figure 3.2 Graphic representing data analysis

### 3.9.1 Interpretation: Gadamer and Bruner

The nested circles depicted in the graphic representation of the data analysis phase above (figure 3.2) point to Gadamer's hermeneutical circle which describes the circular nature of interpretation. Gadamer (1989) described the way in which with every part of a text read, inferences are made whereby the reader must 'project before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 722). As each part of a text is encountered, previous experiences and assumptions are projected onto the text by the reader and assumptions about the whole are made. As the text is navigated some of these assumptions are challenged because the text pulls the reader up short or fails to align with a previous assumption (Gadamer, 1989). Jerome Bruner (1991) too emphasises the hermeneutic property of narrative texts, to which this study

pertains, and how this hermeneutic element pervades in the construction of narrative (the participants lived experiences) and the comprehension of such narratives (my analysis). The phases of analysis in this study, though separately described in the sections that follow, are understood to be subject to this interpretative dance and the interplay between part and whole. I include three appendices (Appendix H, I and J) which illustrate how various data sources were brought together in the analysis phase.

### **3.9.2 Transcription and initial reading of participants' texts and associated photographs**

As a first step, each conversational interview was transcribed being read in its entirety. These were re-read following completion of all interviews with participants. I followed the same process with observation notes and transcripts from the group session. Photographs were reviewed with each reading of the associated reflective conversations. Reflexive notes which pertained to each session were read at this time also. In keeping with the open phenomenological attitude, I refrained from 'rushing in' to impose meaning structures on the texts but rather tried to ascertain a general sense of participants' experiences.

### **3.9.3 Dwelling**

Following the initial reading of texts and photos, I embarked on a deliberate process of 'being-with' those texts and photos. 'Empathic dwelling' is the term that Churchill, Lowery, McNally, and Rao (1998) choose to describe this state of staying with, listening to and remaining open to participants' descriptions. This is a phase that appealed to me, as I often find great clarity of thought in the most unusual places such as at the local Buddhist centre; in my car on the way to/from work; in some remark passed by a friend in a coffee shop; or in a conversation about a film or a play. To facilitate such 'dwelling', I got three identical notebooks – one for my handbag, one for my car and one for my office at work and used these as research journals where thoughts were recorded. These informed the next phase of the analysis.

### **3.9.4 Searching for meaning units: Fasteners, foci, threads**

The next phase was to begin to re-visit the data in order to ascertain meaning units. Van Manen (1990, p. 78) suggests that identifying meaning units render the text more

approachable. He likens such meaning units to ‘fasteners, foci, or threads’ around which the phenomenological description is facilitated. Finlay (2009) explicates this process saying that the phenomenological researcher’s role is to go beyond the surface level of the text and ‘read between the lines.’ Following Saldaña (2013) individual texts were analysed line by line and statements representing meaning units assigned in the margins. Similarly, each photo was taken in turn and analysed separately (see Appendix K). The next phase was to compare meaning units across individual texts in order to prepare for the next step, ‘thematizing’.

### **3.9.5 Thematizing – balancing part and whole**

Phenomenological analysis typically results in the generation of themes. However, these themes differ from those that are generated through employing other qualitative frameworks such as ‘grounded theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) owing to the nature of phenomenological essences. One of the key aspects of phenomenological essences is their ‘super-empirical’ nature in the sense that they cannot be conceived as something ‘wholly adventitious, dependent on the peculiarities of factual experiencing’ (Zhok, 2012, p. 102). Van Manen (1990, p. 22) asserts that phenomenological knowledge is empirical insofar as it is based on experience ‘but it is not *inductively* empirically derived. It goes beyond an interest in mere particularity’. In his most recent publication, van Manen (2014, p. 348) clarifies that ‘phenomenology describes not the factual empirical but the existential empirical meaning structures of a certain phenomenon or event’ and ‘even though phenomenology employs empirical material, it does not make empirical claims’. The first step within the thematizing phase therefore was to re-read the meaning units assigned to individual texts and search for evidence of emerging themes both within those individual texts (vertically) and across all data sets (horizontally). Thematic codes were applied and Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), Nvivo 10, enabled efficient storage of the codes. Appendices H, I and J provide an example of how Nvivo 10 was used. The use of Nvivo 10 meant that subsequent rounds of thematizing where changes or additions were made became less cumbersome than had codes only been applied manually (see figure 4.1 for final themes).

### **3.9.6 Writing phenomenological texts**

In contrast to some researchers who talk about 'writing up' their findings, van Manen (2006) highlights the challenge and skill required in generating phenomenological texts. These texts are often referred to as having both a scientific and poetic quality (see Finlay, 2013; van Manen, 2007). Further, from a reader's perspective, a phenomenological text ought to resonate with their experience of ordinary life:

Perhaps a phenomenological text is ultimately successful only to the extent that we, its readers, feel addressed by it — in the totality or unity of our being. The text must reverberate with our ordinary experience of life as well as with our sense of life's meaning. This does not necessarily mean that one must feel entertained by phenomenological text or that it has to be an "easy read." Sometimes reading a phenomenological study is a truly laborious effort. And yet, if we are willing to make the effort then we may be able to say that the text speaks to us not unlike the way in which a work of art may speak to us even when it requires attentive interpretive effort.

(van Manen, 2007, p. 26)

Having been drawn to certain publications in order to better understand phenomenology as a research methodology, such was the nature of the writing, I found myself reading full texts on topics entirely unrelated to this study. These included: the experience of hearing with a cochlear implant (Finlay & Molano-Fisher, 2008); the experience of being gay in Ireland (Rodgers, 2013); the experience of postnatal care in Ireland (Healy, 2006); as well as several of van Manen's publications on the phenomenology of parenting and teaching. To ascertain the extent to which my own writing was achieving the resonant quality, I asked two critical friends to read early drafts. Their feedback as well as feedback from my supervisory team informed the re-drafting process.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

In the sections that follow, I outline measures taken to ensure that this study adhered to ethical principles in every aspect of its design including the selection of participants, methods and data analysis. Participants' welfare with respect to consent, participation and the potential for outcomes counter to the aims of the project was of utmost concern. Ethical approval for this study was sought from the School of Education Ethics Committee at the

University of Exeter. An approval certificate was issued on the fifteenth of December 2014 (see Appendix L).

### **3.10.1 Gaining access and informed consent**

Before accessing those participating in the research, gatekeepers including the school principal and the children's parents were consulted. Initial contact with the school principal was made by phone and thereafter a meeting was organised wherein the nature of the study, its aims, details of the time commitment and information about how findings would be published and disseminated were discussed. I asked the school principal if I could introduce the study to teachers at the next staff meeting. I briefly outlined the study's purpose and gave each teacher a copy of an information sheet and consent form (Appendix M) so that they could consider their interest in participating. Approaching participants directly in this way rather than asking the principal to approach particular teachers was considered more respectful.

The next step was to await contact from teachers. Two teachers made contact and I met with each of them to outline the nature of the study and, in particular, the details of their participation and the children's participation. On one of these occasions, I met a third teacher and we began to chat about the project. She was most interested but mentioned that she was reluctant to volunteer in case she 'wouldn't be able to offer what I was looking for'. Following another conversation about the nature of the study, she became my third teacher participant.

With respect to seeking consent from the children, the element of choice was somewhat reduced given that their class teacher had opted into the study. Nonetheless, given that only five children were required and that classes typically had 25 children some element of choice remained, unlike in the case of a teaching and learning intervention. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) fundamentally affords children the right to participate in 'all matters which affect them'. However, Lundy et al. (2011, p. 719) remind researchers that participation is a choice rather than an obligation. Apart from the right to participate, I was aware that the UNCRC 'accords children a concurrent right, namely the right to protection (Article 3)' (Nairn & Clarke, 2012). Balancing the child's agency with their vulnerability presents a challenge to researchers (Tisdall & Punch, 2012).

The UNCRC articles implied that in this study, children needed to be invited to participate and for those who accepted, their well-being needed to be safeguarded.

There was a need to acknowledge children's stage of maturity, as addressed in Article 5 of the UNCRC, (1989). One could argue that these nine to twelve year old students were in a position to understand the nature and consequences of the study. Such children, Masson (2005) argues, have the capacity to decide about participation without parental consent. However, Nairn and Clarke (2012) highlight that a sizeable proportion (up to 20%) of any sample size may be vulnerable from a mental health perspective and therefore researchers cannot assume that all children will be in a position to consent to participating in research. Further, ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, the British Psychological Society and the School of Education at the University of Exeter where this study was conducted, suggest taking extra precautions where children are concerned. It was with this in mind that parental consent was also sought. A parental information document and consent form was prepared (Appendix N). Parents were asked to consider their contents and to discuss the study with their children before giving consent. However, their consent was contingent upon the child also separately giving consent.

Designing this study, I was conscious of devising ways of explaining to the children who participated that their knowledge and experiences were valued. I further wanted to make explicit the nature of research, how data would be generated and the value of their role in this regard. This was in recognition of the idea that 'fully detailed and complex descriptions of relationships contribute to the trustworthiness of the study and align with relational traditions' (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013, p. 990). It was further driven by a vivid memory of my participation in a research project at age four upon which I reflected in preparation for this study. My experience of being unaware of the purpose of the research and being frightened by the strangers was foremost in my mind when designing the information letter for children and their parents.

Guidelines from the University of Dublin, Trinity College (Children's Research Centre, 2006) suggest preparing clearly worded, visually attractive information for children to read and further suggest reading the information to the children. Therefore, in consultation with the school principal and the class teacher, I organised a time when I could explain the nature of

the study to all the children in the teacher's class. I further explained the process for selecting the small number of children at that time (see section 3.6.2). Thereafter, children were given an information sheet and a consent form to consider with their parents (Appendix O).

The rationale for seeking consent from both children and their parents was explained both to children (verbally and in writing) and to their parents (in writing). Both parties were informed that the child would participate only where both parental consent and the child's consent had been given. This was necessary from a child-protection perspective where, despite having necessary documentation such as Teaching Council registration and Garda<sup>1</sup> clearance, I was unknown to the participants.

### **3.10.2 The right to withdraw**

Teachers were informed of their right to withdraw from the process at any stage. It was agreed that should a teacher wish to withdraw, they could make contact by email, phone or by asking a third party to contact me on their behalf. The 'right to withdraw' can cause problems where issues of power and status are at play and this was a concern where child participants were concerned. I was essentially a 'stranger' who arrived in their school occasionally. This meant that the children may not have had much opportunity to communicate their wish to withdraw nor felt comfortable telling me they wished to do so. Acknowledging that 'the power inequity cannot be resolved by superficial attempts to create friendly environments' (Belanger & Connelly, 2007), class teachers were asked to explain this right in my absence. This ensured that a familiar adult not connected to the research facilitated this discussion. Children were told they could withdraw at any stage by letting their teacher, parent or the researcher know. Teachers and children were informed that should they choose to withdraw, their decision would not have negative implications.

### **3.10.3 Anonymity and confidentiality**

At all stages of the research process, I ensured the anonymity of participants by deliberately constructing pseudonyms for the school and participants and editing any information which could result in teachers, children or their school being identified. Further, I promised all

---

<sup>1</sup> An Garda Síochána is the police force in Ireland. All teachers must be vetted by this body and obtain clearance before taking up a teaching position.



participants that any publications arising out of the study for wider dissemination would be anonymised using generic rather than specific demographic and biographical details.

The confidentiality of all records resulting from observations, interviews and group sessions with teachers and children was safeguarded. Protocol documents (see section 3.8.2) were retained by the researcher but copies made available to individual participants if requested. Conversational interviews and discussions at the group sessions were audio-recorded using a voice recorder that enables outputting of content in MP3 format. Following the data generation phase, the protocol documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office which is located in a teacher education institute with 24 hour security. MP3 files were saved on a password protected computer within the same office and removed from the voice recorder.

#### **3.10.4 Children's research advisory group**

Freire's (1999) advice regarding equality and the facilitation of dialogue as opposed to paternalistic notions about knowing what's best for others was a useful guide for ethical thinking. It informed the process of including children as research advisors at three different points in the process. Danaher and Briod (2006) highlight that phenomenological inquiry with children aims to clarify, describe and interpret children's unique way of attending to the world. However, they argue that the child's life-world is largely closed to adult understanding which presents a methodological challenge. Despite being a qualified primary school teacher, I had been removed from the daily experiences of engaging with primary school children for seven years at the time this study was conducted. I decided to establish a Children's Research Advisory Group (Lundy et al., 2011). Lundy and her colleagues developed the concept of a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) in light the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) in order to fulfil children's participation rights, in particular. A CRAG is generally established on the basis of the expertise they can bring to the research as children with contemporary experience in similar peer groups to the research participants (Lundy et al., 2011). Therefore, the CRAG has an advisory function and can be involved in every aspect of research design from generation of research questions through to dissemination of findings. This study involved a more limited interpretation of the CRAG than Lundy et al. (2011) espouse. The group comprised six

children from the school in which the study took place. The CRAG was consulted on three occasions for twenty to thirty minutes. The group was asked to advise on the comprehensibility of material for children and to pilot data generation instruments. Parental consent (Appendix P) as well as the children's consent for participation in the CRAG was sought (Appendix Q). As advised by Lundy et al. (2011), information generated by the CRAG was not considered data and these children did not become research participants. Participant involvement is outlined in the schedule of fieldwork (Appendix R).

### **3.10.5 Validity, rigour and plausible insight: Ethics of data generation and analysis**

In the phenomenological tradition, reliability and validity of data generation and analyses phases are discussed as issues of rigour (Laverty, 2003). The term 'validity' is also used in phenomenological inquiry albeit focused on 'existential validity' whereby experiential and felt aspects of reported experiences are deemed valid. In this section, I offer my interpretation of how ethical dimensions such as validity and rigour were considered in this study. Choosing a particular research method over another is in itself an ethical decision. Methods in this study were chosen on the basis of their suitability to the research question and on their ability to position participants as agentic, knowledgeable subjects. A common thread connecting the methods chosen in this study is the way in which participants are guided but not led (Giorgi, 2009), whereby questions were asked out of a place of genuine wondering. However, these methods have limitations and ethical implications.

Observation was a sensitive aspect of the design given my present role as a teacher educator which involves observing student teachers on their school placement for assessment purposes. It was, therefore, important that teachers in the school did not have prior experience of my supervisory role and were aware of the purpose of the observations. Notes pertaining to the observations were taken immediately after rather than during the observation period. This allowed for more discrete engagement and served to distinguish my role from that of Department of Education inspectors who note-take when in assessment or evaluative mode.

Conversational interviewing and protocol documenting rely mainly on language as the 'primary carrier of experience and meaning' (Danaher & Briod, 2005 p. 221) and offer a limited and partial picture of experience. It was with this in mind that additional methods

including observation, a drama-based group method and my supplementary reflexive notes were chosen, aiming to 'fill in' aspects of the felt experience that were difficult to capture through language. However, these methods too are limited. One of the greatest difficulties with employing drama techniques is how participants can fail to account for the complexities of the 'real' world and adopt instead a reductive, stereotypical position (O'Sullivan, 2011). This is particularly true of the more naturalistic genre employed in this study. O' Sullivan (2011) advises the researcher to encourage critical reflection on choices being taken in the fictional scenario. It was with this in mind that the drama-based group method incorporated a discursive element to facilitate critical reflection on the 'sculptures'.

A limitation of reflexive notes is that their author may read or 'feel' more significance into a situation than the participants. Finlay (2011, p. 223) describes how a participant with whom she was engaging in a validation process deemed the metaphors she used made too much of the ordinariness of her experience. There lies a dilemma because on one hand, phenomenologists must learn an almost poetic writing style and on the other, they must remain true to the living sense of the experience. In this study, the inclusion of multiple data sources which comprised observations, protocol documents, conversational interviews, drama-based group method, reflexive notes and visual research methods contributed to its rigour.

Analysis and reporting often happen simultaneously in phenomenological research whereby writing and re-writing is regarded as much part of the process of analysis as it is of reporting (van Manen, 1990). Trustworthiness can be established through clearly articulating the analysis phase in a systematic manner. The data analysis procedure followed in this study is described in section 3.9. Validity can further be established through attending to how the qualities of 'vividness', 'accuracy', 'richness' and 'elegance' emerge in the text (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 46). The last of these, 'elegance', is a matter of opinion and was a new departure for me as outlined in section 3.9. However, these principles were useful guides both in guiding participants and writing phenomenological texts. Insofar as the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to gain understanding of how we experience the world pre-reflectively, data should provide 'originality of insights' (van Manen, 2014, p. 348) that give deeper understanding of phenomena. This research was designed to allow for such insights to be generated. This process does not rely solely on empirical data but is also 'animated

by... observation, reflection and judgment' (Sharkey, 2001, p. 22). This is an ethical consideration insofar as the creativity associated with such observation, reflection and judgement necessarily impacts on themes that emerge.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

I began this chapter by clarifying the research question and outlining the ontological, epistemological and methodological position that underpins this study. Other sections presented in this chapter included an overview of the research design, context, a critical discussion on ethical issues including informed consent, the recruitment process, data generation instruments, analysis and the interpretive process undertaken in this research.

Themes presented in the next chapter represent an inter-subjective interpretation of lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship and are historically, culturally and contextually bound. These themes do not 'close down' (van Manen, 1990) the question of the nature of the child-teacher relationship between teachers and children but rather offer an opportunity for other researchers to add to the conversation.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We now sit down to write, aware that three challenges lie before us: achieving some degree of scientific credibility; expressing the phenomenon evocatively; and integrating phenomenological concepts within our writing.

Finlay (2014, online)

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the key findings of this phenomenological inquiry into teachers' and children's lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship. In line with Finlay's (2014) advice to express the phenomenon evocatively, participants' words, images and actions feature heavily. This chapter ought to provide a felt sense of how the teachers and children who participated in this study experience their relationship with one another. The chapter is organised into three overarching themes, each containing subthemes. These overarching themes are summarised as follows: children and teachers relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings through the interdependent polarities of closeness and distance, structure and freedom and as knotted with other social/contextual relationships. These themes and their associated sub-themes are illustrated in the diagram overleaf.

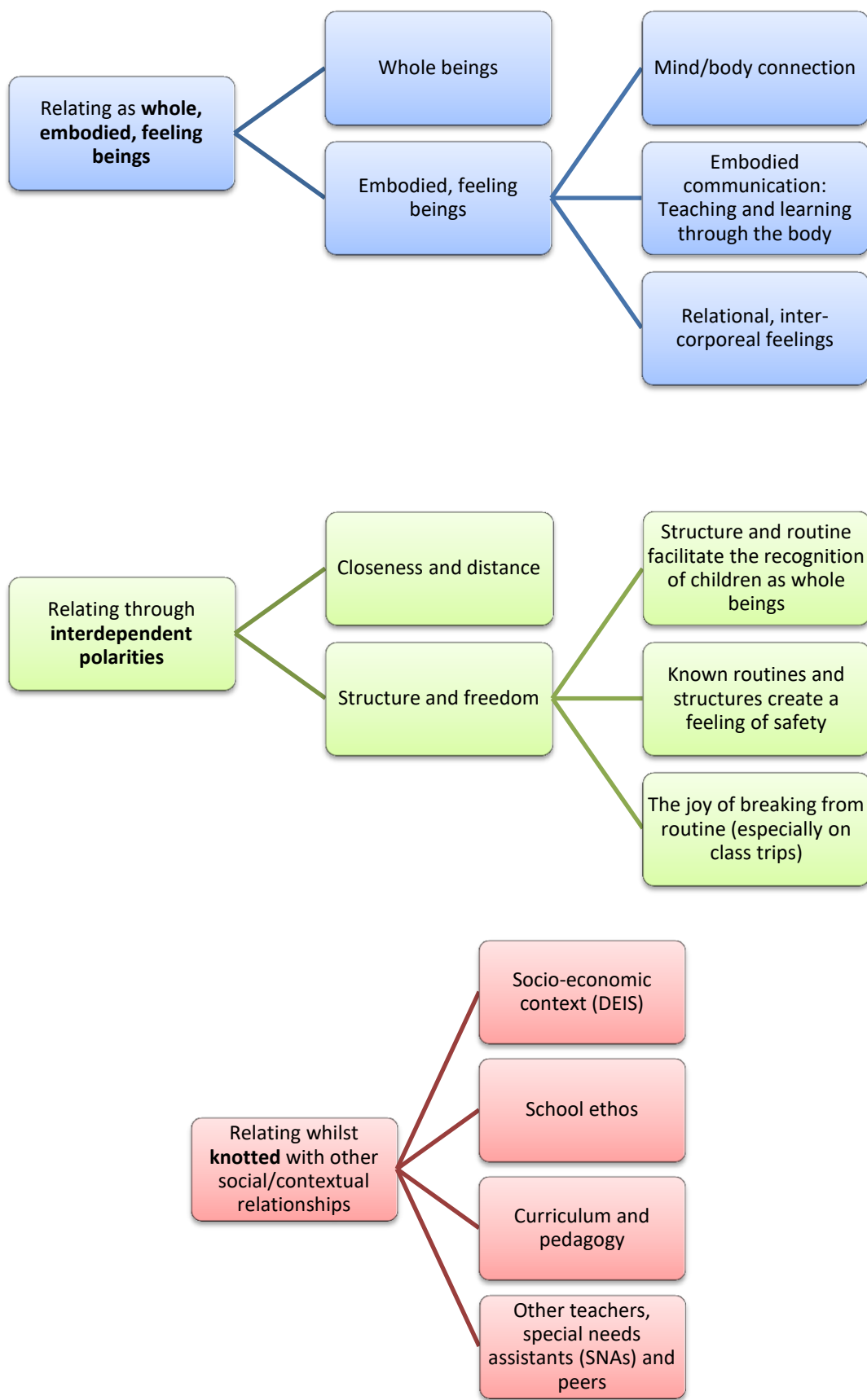


Figure 4.1 Graphic summary of thematic findings

Each section in this chapter follows a similar structure whereby the theme is defined and examples are included as supporting evidence. Into each theme, I interweave a discussion about its relevance in light of previous literature. In the final sections, I include a theoretical discussion aligning the findings of this study with three different domains to which I feel the findings best relate: 'relational pedagogy' drawing on Bingham et al. (2004), Hutchinson (2004) and Hederman (2012); Stengel (2004) and Thayer-Bacon (2008); 'embodied teaching and learning' with reference to Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003); Moje (2000); Peters (2004); Ross (2004) and Stolz (2015) and 'complexity' drawing on Davis and Sumara (2008); Fenwick (2012); Morrisson (2006) and Osberg, Biesta, and Cilliers (2008).

#### **4.2 Relating as Whole, Embodied, Feeling Beings**

Primary schools could be defined as places where teachers come to teach curricular content and children come to learn that content and as such the relationships between teachers and children would be defined within those parameters. However, a strong finding arising out of the data analysis process was that children and teachers in this study are intensely involved in one another's lives. They relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings. Each of these terms requires explication which I offer here before exploring them in depth with support from the data.

In referring to 'whole' beings, I am suggesting that teachers and children relate to one another as multidimensional people. Their past experiences, their present concerns, the fullness of who they are as people is brought to bear on their relationship with one another. This is in direct contrast to a more reductionist view of this relationship whereby teachers could be seen to relate to children solely as 'learners', for instance.

My analysis of the data brought another aspect of this wholeness to the surface as it became clear that teachers and children alike experience their relationships with one another as whole *embodied* beings. Stolz (2015) particular take on embodied learning is relevant here because he approaches it from a distinctly philosophical point of view. Therefore, by 'embodied' I refer to how we 'do not think about the world from some position beyond the body or outside it (Stolz, 2015, p. 480) but rather we approach the world as living bodies. I explore how mind and body simultaneously interact in child-teacher

encounters and how teaching and learning are communicated through the body. Feelings are often seen as individual or personal but later in this section, I explain how feelings are embodied phenomena which sometimes have an inter-corporeal dimension and are experienced relationally (Cromby, 2015).

#### **4.2.1 Whole beings**

In the case of all three teachers, I found that how they 'are' with the children (Aspelin, 2011) or the philosophy that guides their practice is strongly bound up with who they are as people. Having finished my last day of observation at the school, I noted the following in my observation journal: 'Teacher is just the name that refers to the job that a *person* does' (RRJ, 27.05.15). I was referring to the sense of distance that the title 'teacher' creates between the person and the profession. The person can potentially hide behind the formal role. The nature of primary schools in the Irish context and in many other jurisdictions is that teachers and children are together in one room for the most part of the school day. This is significant as it seems, from the data generated in this study, that under such circumstances, it is not possible to suppress or conceal aspects of the whole person. In other words, teachers and children bring their whole beings to their relationship with one another.

To illustrate this point, I include an excerpt from an interview with Miss Elliot wherein it becomes clear that her role as a mother shapes how she behaves both towards a colleague and to children in her class. This serves as an example of how the professional and personal teacher are not easily distinguishable and rather the whole person is present. You join the conversation at a part where Miss Elliot has explained that another teacher who was in charge of a school show did not want to allow two children from Miss Elliot's class to dance and offered them a poem to read instead:



Miss Elliot: So the girl herself maybe knowing that I'm a bit of a softie, came to me then after and said 'Miss, I really don't want to do that poem, we wanted to do our dance' [...] I sort of thought it was my responsibility to stand up for them because they were in my class now [...] 'I'll look after them', you know?

Annie: Yes. Why did you feel so strongly about that?

Miss Elliot: I think I am a bit of a softie in some ways. ... [Pause] Actually do you know what it was, I think more so? I think I was thinking 'If that was my girl, my Leanne'.

Annie: Yea.

Miss Elliot: I would want her to be able to do the dance and I think that's what actually could have made me a bit softer maybe....after having my baby myself because this was last year in fifth so I would have been just back from maternity leave in September[...] so she was only about three months old so I was probably a bit soft.

Annie: Yes. (Both laughing)

Miss Elliot: Yea but you would think 'oh I wouldn't want my child to be spoken to like that' or to be disappointed like that over something small that can be fixed.

(C11, ME)

It is interesting how in talking through her experience, Miss Elliot initially attributes her reaction to being 'a bit of a softie' but comes to the understanding that her new role as a mother guides her judgement. She wasn't aware at the time of the incident what had compelled her to take such a strong stance against a colleague. On reflection, it seems she was imagining the same thing happening to her own child. There is a sense, therefore, of her personal and professional selves being inextricably connected. In other words, Miss Elliot's whole being is present in this interaction with no distinction between her mothering role and her teaching role. Through imagining her own daughter in their place, she sees these two children as more than their failings as dancers. By so doing, I would like to argue that she enters into the 'I-Thou' realm to which Buber (1937) refers (see section 2.3). Buber suggested that there are two distinct ways of relating to others as 'I-It' or 'I-Thou'. 'I-It' concerns a relation to another as an object completely outside of oneself and we maintain an awareness of ourselves as outside of the object. In an 'I-Thou' relation, on the other hand, our whole being is involved or as Hederman (2012, p. 60) puts it we stand in 'direct relation'. In this example, it seems that Miss Elliot does not hold herself apart from the

children's experience but is instead herself bound up in her relation to them (see section 2.3.1). Her treatment of the children is an example of the intimate and personal relationship that Hederman (2012) argues is at the heart of true education.

Another example of the whole person being present in the child-teacher relationship emerged in the first interview with Miss Vaughan. She shared how her family background has influenced the kind of teacher she has become with particular emphasis on the affective dimension of her role:

Miss Vaughan: My mam was tough as nails. She wouldn't...you wouldn't get comfort...you know [...] If you fell she would say 'get up now, you're fine'.

Annie: You're grand, yeah.

Miss Vaughan: [...] there was no 'ahhhh'. I always wanted to be...crying with my dad, do you know what I mean? Somebody to be on your side. I felt like my mam and dad were a bit tough on me. They weren't on your side... [...] But I know I have kids that are growing up in a similar situation where there are things missing and dysfunction...

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: I suppose I identify with that because I would have had a fairly dysfunctional background, you know [...] You are constantly making those judgment decisions, those tight rope decisions, do I say anything, do I not? do I meet this head on? should I believe this? should I not? You are constantly sapping your energy into what's the right thing to do? I need to do the right thing here.

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: Because you are building futures.

(CI1, MV)

The burden of professional judgement weighs heavily on Miss Vaughan and seems to be connected to her personal background and family experiences. She fears making the wrong decision, saying the wrong thing or choosing the wrong course of action. Her reference to 'building futures' carries particular weight whereby it is clear that her own experiences with 'tough' parents have impacted significantly on her professional outlook and practices. She identifies with many of the children whom she believes to have similarly 'dysfunctional' families to her own. In describing her own upbringing, she is aware that her interactions with children in her class potentially influence how each child feels about him/herself. There

seems to be some connection between the absence of care and love she describes as characteristic of her own upbringing and the emphasis she places on the affective dimension of her role as a teacher. In the artefacts interview, Miss Vaughan shared memories of her personal experiences with two different primary school teachers. She found one teacher to be harsh and cold but shared particularly fond memories of the other teacher, Mrs. Reilly. She brought along a vase given to her by the teacher. I noted that it was wrapped in tissue paper which she unwrapped slowly and gently. She held it with one hand at the stem and rested the top of the vase on her inner arm, very much like a baby. These gestures along with Miss Vaughan's words suggested a very special bond. Their close relationship extended beyond primary school into her adult life and seemed to have a profound effect on her outlook as a teacher ('I would hope to be kind of a nurturing teacher for her' CIVM, MV). There is a strong sense, therefore, in which Miss Vaughan's entire person complete with her past relational history is present in her relationship with the children in her class. Were this study situated within a cognitive psychological context, then such connections between current and past relationships might be explained using attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Indeed, much of the literature on the child-teacher relationship draws on attachment theory (see section 2.5.4). From a cognitive psychological perspective, poor attachment with primary caregivers is seen as contributing to poor relationships with teachers (see O'Connor & McCartney, 2006). The linear cause-and-effect model underpinning attachment theory is incongruent with the approach adopted in this study.

Considering Miss Vaughan's relational history, in light of the phenomenological approach adopted here, it seems that there is a more complex relationship between her past relational experiences and her current relationships with the children in her class. Her relationship with her mother seems to be part of that history. There is a medley of other connections including her identification with the children's 'dysfunctional' backgrounds and her relationship with two different primary school teachers of her own. With respect to relational history, this study aligns with an idea offered by Hodkinson et al. (2008, p. 27) which holds that 'both the past life history of the individual and the past history of the situation strongly influence current learning' or in this case, the *location* (Biesta, 2004, p.11) of that learning namely current relationships (see section 2.3).

Finlay (2011, p. 254) asks those using phenomenological inquiry to approach the data with openness which may allow surprising findings to emerge. The final example that I use to illustrate the presence of the whole person of the teacher in the child-teacher relationship came as a surprise to me and yet I identify with it at a personal level. It concerns how teachers can depend on the child-teacher relationship to fulfil desires or needs that extend beyond pedagogical boundaries. Miss Sullivan acknowledges explicitly that the children in her class fulfil a nurturing or motherly desire in her. Her statement that she doesn't have children of her own indicates the special importance of the relationships that she has with the children:

Miss Sullivan: Aww it's lovely [...] I don't have children so it's nice. I say to them 'you're my kids', 'you're my guys', 'we're gonna win', we're going to be the very best we can, we're going to achieve the best we can' and it's lovely that these are your kids. They make you proud.

(CI1, MS)

Similarly, Miss Vaughan draws connections between her own insecurities as both a child and a beginning teacher and the needs that the children in her class fulfil:

Miss Vaughan: I think in the earlier years, I needed the bond with the kids, I needed the sense of belonging.

Annie: Yeah, tell me more about that. [...]

Miss Vaughan: Well I think I needed that in those days. I definitely would have needed that for my identity too because I do feel it's that sense of belonging. I had grown up with the... you know... I wouldn't have had that sense of belonging myself growing up and I felt like I was one of the kids in a way.

Annie: Oh right.

Miss Vaughan: I felt like I was an eleven year old kid [...] I have evolved. I don't need them as much as I used to... it was a gap in my own... upbringing and my own friendship groups I think.

(CI1, MV)

The emergence of Miss Elliot's mothering instinct in a school scenario, the lasting impact of Miss Vaughan's upbringing and the children fulfilling needs and desires in the teachers are clear illustrations of the way in which the teacher brings her whole self, and not just her professional self, to classroom situations and to her interactions with children.

In a similar way, children present in their relationships with teachers not as ‘pupils’, ‘learners’ or ‘students’ but as whole people with histories and contexts. In the excerpt that follows, Kate has just been talking about usually feeling happier in the morning times in school. She describes how her feelings from home are carried with her into school and into her interactions with others:

Kate: Yes... sometimes... it depends on if it’s a good day or a bad day.

Annie: What would be a good day in school?

Kate: A good day in school would be...I suppose it’s really what happens before I come to school because some of the mornings my brother would tease me when he has to go to school.

Annie: Ok.

Kate: He calls me names and everything so...I have to deal with that.

Annie: And then come into school?

Kate: Yes and I’m annoyed at everything and everybody

(CI, Kate)

Kate shows remarkable self-awareness by relating her annoyance at ‘everything and everybody’ in school to the difficulties she encounters with her brother at home. She captures the very essence of what it means to present as a whole, feeling being. Kate’s struggle to describe a ‘good day in school’ without reference to what happens in her life before she comes to school illustrates how the person of the child is a complex phenomenon which cannot be simplified or separated out into constituent parts, an idea consistent with complexity (see section 2.3 & 4.5.4).

Given what Kate has shared about the impact of her home life on her school day, it would be reductive to see her as a ‘pupil’ or ‘learner’. Her interactions with others in the school community are bound up with her feelings about what happened at home. Insights such as this highlight the importance of teachers and children knowing the fullness of one another for teaching and learning to be meaningful. It points to the argument that Hederman (2012) makes about improving education through looking to human relations rather than the teacher, the child or the teaching approach in isolation (see section 2.2). In the current era of rationalisation with the increased bureaucratisation of education (Carman, 2013; Lynch et

al., 2012), and the emphasis on all children attaining certain standards, it is easy to see how the whole person of the child and the teacher could be forgotten. It seems to me that the upper primary classroom, in which this study takes place, ought to be conceived of less as a place where certain outcomes and standards can be achieved in advance of progression to secondary school and more as a community of people trying to learn about themselves and the world.

#### **4.2.2 Embodied, feeling beings**

In the following subsections, I include examples from the data of how children and teachers relate to one another as embodied, feeling beings and the significance of this finding in light of existing literature and current policy developments. Each subsection relates to a particular aspect of embodiment. The first relates to the mind-body connection in child-teacher interactions. The second concerns embodied communication and the final subsection relates to how feelings are sometimes experienced relationally as inter-corporeal phenomena.

##### ***4.2.2.1 The mind-body connection in child-teacher interactions.***

In this subsection, I include an example from one of the conversational interviews with Miss Vaughan which points to the mind-body connections in child-teacher interactions. She recalls a time when she lost her temper with a child. This conversation began with Miss Vaughan describing days when she goes home and feels 'devastated' by something that has happened in school. I asked her for an example of such an incident and she struggled to think of specifics. The conversation we have about such incidents in general is almost as revelatory as the example she thinks of afterwards as she captures how she experiences devastation not just in her mind but in her body:

Miss Vaughan: ... it's been a while now, thank God...

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: Since I've had one of those sickening evenings where you are just... just devastated (said in a whisper).

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: You know... you are crying all evening...

Annie: You can describe the feeling actually without the event? You said a sickening feeling?

Miss Vaughan: Oh sickening. [...] Oh I know one... I know one now... one kid lost it and I had to hold him by the jumper [...] Yeah but I felt I lost it with him, I felt within the struggle that I lost my temper. I don't remember shouting at him or anything but I do know that I lost my composure...

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: I remember being very affected by it [...]

Annie: Yeah... so you were affected by... ?

Miss Vaughan: I was surprised... actually I remember now... I was actually pregnant... so it was about two years ago.

(C11, MV)

Miss Vaughan's description of the physicality of the encounter, her temper and how much she was affected by it highlights an idea consonant with a phenomenological standpoint which recognises that the self is always embodied (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) contrasting with the Cartesian notion of mind-body separation. Stolz (2015) supports a Merleau-Pontian phenomenological view and argues that every experience embodies reaction and interaction of the whole organism meaning that no experience can be solely mental or physical. In this example, Miss Vaughan has captured the inseparability of mind and body in child-teacher encounters.

In the excerpt below, Miss Elliot articulates feelings of hurt and confusion following a particular encounter with a child in her class. The excerpt below vividly describes how profoundly feelings associated with the child-teacher relationship manifest in the body:

When I heard this story my first reaction was fear, a tightening feeling in my throat, my mind started racing to all kinds of scenarios like losing my job! A fear that she might be believed! Once the initial panic died down a little and I began to think about it rationally my feelings changed to anger, I was so annoyed with her for treating me this way. I thought about all the time that I give this child, how I genuinely do care about her, and all that I had done to help her [...] I felt this was like she was throwing it all back in my face. I was confused, I had no idea why she had decided to do this.

(PCD, ME)

Miss Elliot shares how fear manifested itself in her body (a tightening feeling in my throat) which was felt simultaneously with her 'mind racing' thus supporting the inter-relatedness of mind-body in child-teacher interactions.

One of the children in the study also indicates the impact of an interaction with his teacher on his body and how that, in turn, would have affected the likelihood of him attending school the next day. In the excerpt below, Reggie and I have been talking about a time when, unusually for him, he 'got into trouble' with his teacher and decided to tell his father:

Annie: Why did you decide to tell him?

Reggie: Because if I kept it in I would have got a little bit blaaa (makes retching noise), I would have felt a little bit sick. I wouldn't come to school.

(CI1, Reggie)

These examples suggest that interactions between teachers and children simultaneously engage mind and body. To think of the mind and body as two separate and independent entities has implications both for our understanding of the child-teacher relationship and for education more generally. To conceive of the relationship between teachers and children without due regard for the bodiliness of both parties negates the fullness of who we are, as we relate to one another. hooks (1994, p. 139) reminds us that 'we are all subjects in history' and we need to be aware of how the body is part of that history and cannot be erased or neutralised. Knowing that this is the case might help teachers to understand why a tightening of the throat might accompany the mind racing, to use Miss Elliot's example and how this is part of how the teacher relates to the child. Developing such awareness involves attunement to the body. In relation to this emerging theme within my analysis, I have found a connection with the work of Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) whose ideas I



draw in here for the first time. They offer five body positions that teachers assume and one of those, 'the position of listening', seems relevant here. This position involves developing an awareness that teaching is 'not only an intellectual project using reason, analysis, and calculation' but also 'that it is important to be able to listen to the voices of one's own body' (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003, p. 712). A practical application of this mind-body connection in the child-teacher relationship might be for teachers to heed Gilbert's (2013) advice to attend to their physico-mental state in preparation for teaching, at least as closely as to the formal preparation of materials.

This finding also has implications at a broader system-wide level. An educational system that is built on a dualistic separation of mind and body could justifiably follow a transmission model. By contrast, a system of education that recognises the wholeness of the person and conceives of mind and body as interrelated might emphasise the building and development of interpersonal relationships. Highly regarded early childhood curricula such as Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1993), Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the relatively new early childhood framework in Ireland, Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009) formally acknowledge mind/ body connections and place interpersonal relationships at their core. However, the same is rarely true of curricula in the upper primary setting where this study is located. In upper primary, teaching and learning can become focused on a disembodied mind. Ross (2004, p. 275) argues that the student body's presence in the classroom gets quieter and quieter as children progress through primary school until upon reaching upper primary, 'it is effectively mute'. In a conversation with Miss Elliot (see section 4.4.1), she mentions inviting 'the *mind* to learn' irrespective of what difficulties or upsets the child has experienced at home. This is evidence of how the mind-body split and the privileging of the mind has become ingrained in the language of learning. Though the pervading culture in upper primary is to silence or ignore the body, the data presented here serves as a reminder that teachers and children are always relating to one another as whole, embodied beings.

#### **4.2.2.2 Embodied communication: Teaching and learning through the body.**

If, as Biesta (2004) suggests, the location of education is in the gap between teachers and children (see section 2.3.3), then the embodied nature of communication between teachers

and children is significant for teaching and learning. At the level of theory, policy and practice, it is sometimes assumed that disembodied minds are doing the teaching unto other disembodied minds. In section 2.4.1, for instance, I presented Furedi's argument that schools ought solely to be concerned with teaching intellectual content (Delaney, 2015). However, McWilliams (1996, p. 477) argues that 'the way we feel about each other, our relationships –physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual- are pedagogical material'. Children in this study were invited to 'show' their relationship with their teacher through embodied image work (see section 3.8.4) which undoubtedly meant that the emergence of an embodied element in the data was more likely. The resulting images were valuable and show the significance to the children of what the teacher communicates and indeed teaches through her body. I include two examples from the data which highlight this phenomenon. The first is from the conversational interview with Cian in which we are looking at photographs of his image work and the second is from a similar interview with Kate.

In their image work, the children made choices about the positioning of bodies and certain body parts (see section 3.8.4). Children had some prior experience of interpreting the significance of body positioning and space (see section 3.7.1) meaning that they could make more informed choices when these techniques were applied to the topic of their relationships with their teachers. In the two examples that follow, I include photographs of the children's images which were created in response to the prompt 'show me a moment with you and your teacher that stands out in your memory'. These photographs have been edited for privacy and anonymity purposes and I acknowledge that such processes diminish the quality of the photographs. To counter the loss of detail in the photographs, I include some of my analysis of the photos as well as an excerpt from the conversational interview with each child.

In Cian's image (see Figure 4.2), the child represents the teacher and the chair represents the child. The body positioning gives us some indication of the nature of this encounter. The teacher stands facing the child with hands open and palms facing up to the ceiling, the legs are relaxed. The gaze is soft directed towards the child. These body positions give a sense of a relaxed atmosphere, a level of comfort and ease. The teacher appears warm and open.



Figure 4.2 DBFG, Cian

Further context is given in the subsequent conversation with Cian where he and I are looking at the photograph. He explains how his teacher is a 'fun person' and refers to the importance of knowing 'your teacher' generally:

Annie: Why did that stand out in your memory, the way that she uses her hands?

Cian: I think it's just a part of her... when you have a teacher I think it's good to know your teacher.

Annie: Yes.

Cian: So that's just a thing that stands out...when she does that (doing the action).

(CI, Cian)

Cian refers to what his teacher *does* and how she *is*, indicating the often overlooked importance of what the body teaches. Cian seems to suggest that 'knowing' his teacher is also about knowing how her body moves. He knows about how she uses her hands to 'describe things'. He seems to intuitively understand the concept of the embodied self when he refers to the gestures as being 'just a part of her'. The teacher uses her body to teach 'things' which likely refers to curricular content but she also teaches a hidden curriculum through her body. She communicates messages about expectations, values and norms. Children's ability to learn such messages is often overlooked. Cian's suggestion that 'it's good to know your teacher' could be interpreted as a reference to how children are

required to interpret and negotiate each teacher's expectations of them. This complicates the meaning of learning. Not only do children have to learn the content and skills of the formal curriculum but they have to navigate the more ambiguous terrain of the hidden curriculum which differs from year to year depending on the teacher in whose classroom the child is placed. Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) found strong evidence that children closely observe and interpret their teachers' bodies. They argue that body positions are cultural practices whereby the same position can have different meaning depending on the context. They suggest that 'teachers are moral agents, whose body positions function as tools of the language of practice, teaching children how to interact with others in school in appropriate ways'. They refer to the 'moral messages' communicated by the teacher's body. According to Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003, p. 709), 'even when [teachers] "only speak"... a smile or a certain kind of gaze tells the pupils what they are expected to do'. In the next example, Kate articulates her felt sense of this phenomenon.

Kate created an image which relates to a time when she 'got into trouble'. The image (Figure 4.3) shows how teachers communicate power to children through the body. Kate's picture shows the teacher in a much more powerful position than the child.



Figure 4.3 DBFG, Kate

The teacher (represented by the child) is taller and has to bend down slightly to reprimand the child using the outward pointing finger. The teacher's face is harsh and the eyes are

down. The power differential is marked by the distance, the finger, the height of the teacher compared to the seated child. The data from the conversational interview gives greater depth to the moment to which Kate refers and points to the way in which power can be experienced more fluidly whereby the teacher is rendered less powerful by the child's actions:

Kate: Ehmm there's a boy called Vincent and he got dots. I was talking to myself but the teacher thought I was talking about... because I said 'why'... because I was reading what the questions were and then what happened was I was talking and the teacher said 'leave the room' and I walked out of the room doing that (makes a hand gesture) saying 'you're smart' and I got in a lot of trouble.

Annie: Oh and you were doing this thing to the teacher? (I repeat the hand gesture)

Kate: Yeah

(CI, Kate)

It is clear from the excerpt above that Kate struggles to articulate what had happened and what she was trying to say about her relationship with her teacher through sharing this incident. The image work afforded an opportunity for Kate to communicate her experiences in a more immediate way ('show me'). This was particularly appropriate for the moment that she was trying to describe which concerned the communication of power through the body. The phrase 'you're smart' may need some clarification here. It is sarcastic having almost the opposite meaning. Its intended offence could be heightened when accompanied by the hand gesture that Kate describes.

Kate made this comment and gesture to her teacher as a reaction to what she believed was an unjust reprimand for talking and subsequently got into 'a lot of trouble'. It seems that doing this hand gesture, which might be more commonly used among peers, prompted the teacher's reaction (asking Kate to leave the room). The inherent imbalance of power in the child-teacher relationship to which O' Grady (2015) refers is certainly evident in this example. Ultimately, the teacher emerges more powerful because of the resulting reprimand. However, the authority that the teacher holds in her 'mini-kingdom' (hooks, 1994, p. 17) was momentarily challenged. Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective, Moje (2000) wonders about how we enact power with the positioning of our own bodies and the bodies of others. She suggests that our bodies make power as we engage in relationships.

Such a Foucauldian perspective seems relevant to this discussion since Kate's anecdote reflects the idea of power being enacted through the body. Kate attempted to discount the teacher's authority, which supports Bingham et al.'s (2004) argument that authority can be experienced relationally (see section 2.4.3). When accompanied by the associated excerpt from the conversational interview, the image tells the story of a power struggle between the teacher and the child experienced through the body. Through getting into 'a lot of trouble' for challenging the teacher's authority, for something she feels she didn't do, Kate learns that the teacher holds the ultimate power. Such 'lessons' are not taught or made explicit but are rather part of the child's lived experience.

The body, rather than being a neutral entity, significantly influences how teachers and children relate to one another. Many new pedagogical practices purport to enhance the relationship between children and teachers. For example, one of the assumptions underpinning Roche's (2015, p. 19) 'Critical Thinking and Book Talk (CT&BT)' is that the teacher recognises the child 'as a real person' rather than as a general or abstract pupil, an idea consonant with Buber's 'I-Thou' relation. It strikes me that perhaps the way in which *bodies* are set up to engage with CT&BT may influence this becoming a reality. In contrast to the traditional classroom configuration of teacher standing at some distance from seated children, in CT&BT, children are seated in a circle. It is worth considering what the physical bodily shift in CT&BT communicates to children, what 'moral messages' (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003) are being conveyed and how that can impact on the child-teacher relationship.

#### ***4.2.2.3 Relational, inter-corporeal feelings.***

One piece of data, an excerpt from Miss Elliot's protocol document, marked a profound moment for me in the data analysis phase. I felt it was important but could not quite articulate why. I revisited it many times but it was only in light of Cromby's (2015) assertion that feelings can be experienced relationally did its significance emerge. I began reflecting on the possibility that feelings in the child-teacher relationship sometimes do not 'belong' to any one person but rather are experienced *between* bodies relationally as inter-corporeal phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). In other words, teachers and children are so involved

with one another on an emotional level that feelings are sometimes fluidly moving between them and bodily boundaries are blurred.

It is interesting to note the multi-directionality of feelings and upset bodies in the excerpt below. Miss Elliot describes how she noticed a boy in her class who began 'twitching- like a nervous twitch' during a lesson and goes on to talk about how this observation initiated a significant incident between herself and the child:

I became a little worried and brought him outside to have a chat and it transpired that he was being treated very badly by a step parent. He was extremely upset and as he talked and I couldn't help but get upset myself. I started crying. (I was surprised at myself as I am usually very good at concealing my own emotions in the classroom!)

(PCD, ME)

In the excerpt above, the point at which one feeling body ends and another begins is not clearly demarcated. There is an intermingling of the child's and teacher's upset. Rather than feelings belonging to one individual, there is a sense of feelings being experienced relationally. This inter-corporeal dimension challenges the idea of the bounded teacher and child. Once again, Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch's (2003) 'position of listening' seems relevant here whereby teachers could become attuned to feelings generated in their encounters with children.

The finding that teachers and children relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings contrasts strongly with the dominant rational view of education (see section 2.2) which increasingly positions teachers and children as disconnected, independent thinkers. Recognising the deep embodied connections between teachers and children highlights that this relationship is not peripheral to the work of education but at its centre.

#### **4.3 Relating through Interdependent Polarities: Closeness and Distance; Structure and Freedom**

The lived experience approach adopted in this study generated rich information about how lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), lived body (corporeality), lived things (materiality) and lived relation (relationality) are experienced in the child-teacher relationship. The analysis of these existentials unearthed two necessary paradoxes in the

relationships between teachers and children in this study: a need for both closeness and distance as well as a need for structure and freedom.

#### 4.3.1 Closeness and distance

In this section, I describe how the relationship between teachers and children in this study seems to depend on a balance between closeness and distance. I found that whilst closeness between children and teachers afforded personal and educational connections, a certain space or distance was also required.

Miss Vaughan's concept map features coloured dots which she explains represent how close or distantly she relates to each of the children (see Figure 4.4 below)

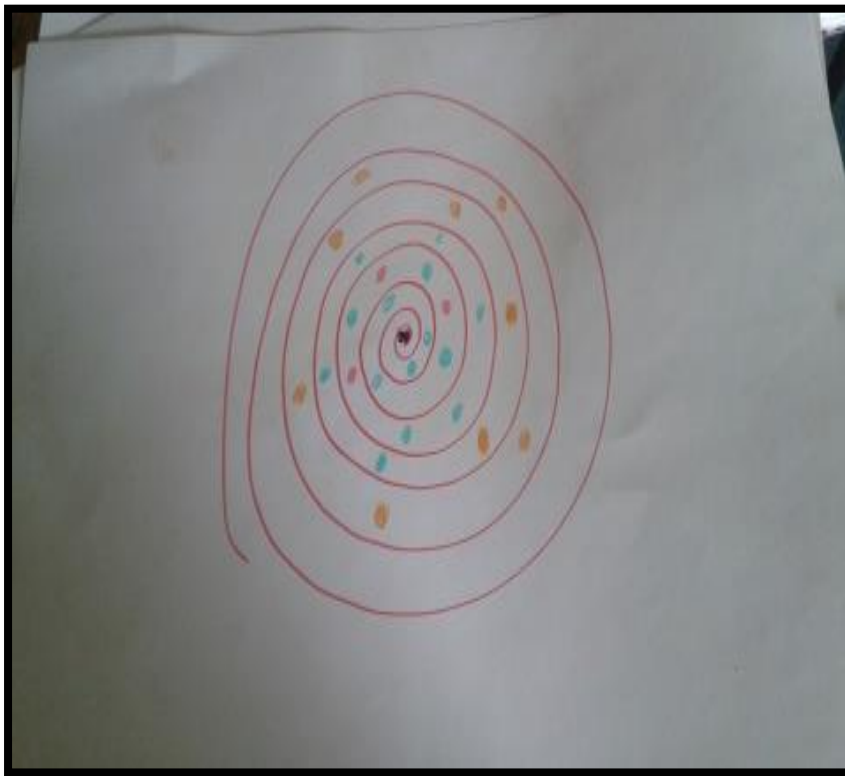


Figure 4.4 Miss Vaughan's concept map, CVIM, MV

It is significant that this theme emerged through her concept map given that she could have drawn anything that helped her to describe the relationship she had with the children in her class. She used different coloured dots to represent children with whom she had a close or more distant relationship. Miss Vaughan explained that dots on the outermost edges of the spiral are those children to whom she finds it difficult to relate. One such child is Liam. Miss



Vaughan explains that she and other teachers who have taught him, have had difficulty relating to him. This has had significant negative impact on his learning. Miss Vaughan described moments when she experienced occasional connections with him such as how positively he responded when she jokingly told him that the reason she was bringing him with her on an errand was that she loved him. His positive response to that remark gave her some insight into how she could address his disconnectedness both from her and from his learning. Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003, p. 708) refer to the 'attractiveness' and 'unattractiveness' of pupils and teachers to one another. Though bodily appearance is certainly part of the attractiveness to which they refer, they also suggest that attractiveness has to do with how the actions of one or other party appeal to the other. Looking at Miss Vaughan's spiral diagram and listening to the conversation we had about it, it strikes me that there are children with whom she finds it easy to have close relationships ('attractive') and others who either choose to be more distant or are kept at a distance ('unattractive'). It may be, as Miss Vaughan suggests, that some children do not want or need to be close to their teacher. Dan, from another class, was certainly adamant that this was the case for him. He did not feel close to his teacher nor had he ever felt close to any teacher in school. For Cian, however, feeling close to his teacher was important as evidenced by the many references he makes to it. He equates closeness to a feeling of being at home:

So, anytime you hear her voice you kind of feel like you are at home [...] Like it's your mam or dad speaking because you feel close to the person, because you know the person because you have been with them for one or two years.

(CI, Cian)

I discovered that distance needs to be afforded in the child-teacher relationship so that one party does not dominate or try to control the other. I found that some instances of children's 'bad behaviour' were reactions to a perceived invasion of the distance that they desire. This was certainly the case of Kate's example referred to in section 4.2.1. Miss Elliot depicts this balance between closeness and distance rather succinctly in her concept map (Figure 4.5 below) which features waves representing the children and their moods and the sun representing herself.



Figure 4.5 Miss Elliot's concept map, CVIM, ME

Talking about the concept map, she highlights the distance between the waves and the sun as representative of distance she tries to maintain between herself and the children. In our conversation about the concept map, she describes the tension between distance ('I do keep them at a bit of a distance') and closeness, ('I am kind and I will give them a hug every now and again'). In another conversation, she explains the importance of children at this age and stage developing independence. For instance, she likes them to learn how to resolve their own conflicts without her intervention highlighting once again the need for certain distance.

This finding strongly supports Biesta's insistence on the necessity of space for relation to occur (see section 2.3.3). Indeed, the space between the waves and the sun in Miss Elliot's drawing could represent the gap in which, Biesta (2004, p. 13) suggests, communication occurs and without which there would be 'no relation in education'. This finding also bears strong resemblances to Rodgers' (2013, p.5) work wherein she captures the necessary tension between closeness and distance: 'interestingly, that which makes education possible – the relation – may also be that which, if at all out of balance or characterized by too much distance, impedes education'. Such delicate balancing highlights the precarious

nature of the child-teacher relationship. Rodgers (2013, p. 11) does not offer a solution but rather suggests that awareness of the necessity of relational space 'allows us to define one another while highlighting our connectedness to one another for understanding and for education to occur'.

#### **4.3.2 Structure and freedom**

In this section, I share some examples of how the child-teacher relationship is experienced through certain structures and how, paradoxically, children and teachers seem to need occasional opportunities to be free of those structures. I found that teachers and children referred extensively to structures and routines experienced as part of their relationship. These included school-wide structures as well as those particular to individual classrooms. There seemed to be a number of reasons why such structures existed. The first of these reasons concerns how schools are shared spaces. In relation to the term 'shared', I refer to the necessary sharing of the school space as opposed to how someone might *choose* to share a space such as a park bench. Similarly, the management of time seems to generate a need for structure. Finally, in the context of this particular school, teachers' perceptions of some of the children's home lives as unstructured also gave rise to a perceived need for tight structures at school.

##### ***4.3.2.1 Structure and routine facilitate the recognition of children as whole beings.***

Consistent with the finding that teachers and children relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings (see section 4.2), I found that school and classroom structures and routines facilitate the recognition of children as whole beings. The structured organisation of time and space affords opportunities for the relational aspect of education to be nurtured. One structure which aims to nurture the relational nature of teaching and learning is the school-wide adoption of restorative practice (see section 2.5.2). The restorative practice approach is used not only to resolve conflicts between children but also between children and their teachers. Teachers and children follow a known structure of affording the 'victim' uninterrupted time to share their side of a story.

Whilst restorative practice is primarily used to resolve conflict, other structures are in place in the school to manage time. Teachers and children in this study experienced time (lived

time) as pressurised and in short supply. I found that children's one-to-one time with the classroom teacher was particularly precious. Each classroom had a structure to facilitate opportunities for one-to-one time. One example is Miss Elliot's 'Bubble Time'. Dan explains how it works:

Dan: We have little bubble things we put on a board and she comes in and talks to us.

Annie: Ok yes. So, what kind of things could you talk to her about?

Dan: People calling you names and getting slagged.

(CI, Dan)

'Bubble Time', generally conducted outside the classroom space, provides opportunities for every child in the class to speak to the teacher individually. Miss Elliot brought one of the bubbles along to the artefacts interview (interview 2) and explained that 'Bubble Time' allows children who otherwise could become invisible to connect with her: 'some of the time, I kind of think it's like 'you wouldn't know I was here, never mind be aware that they overheard a conversation [at home that] they shouldn't have'.

The design and implementation of Bubble Time therefore acknowledges the presence of the whole child and the importance of the child's well-being. In section 4.2.2.2, I argued that the physical positioning of bodies may influence how relationships are experienced. In 'Bubble Time', an individual child and teacher sit beside one another to converse, which arguably creates a more democratic relationship. 'Bubble Time' may also be one way of facilitating engagement with the child as a person when, as the teachers' consistently described, class sizes are getting larger and supports are decreasing.

Structure is such a significant part of the child-teacher relationship for Miss Sullivan that two of the three objects she chose for the artefacts interview related explicitly to structure and routine (see Figure 4.6). This is noteworthy given that she could have chosen any 'three things' to describe the relationship she has with the children in her class.

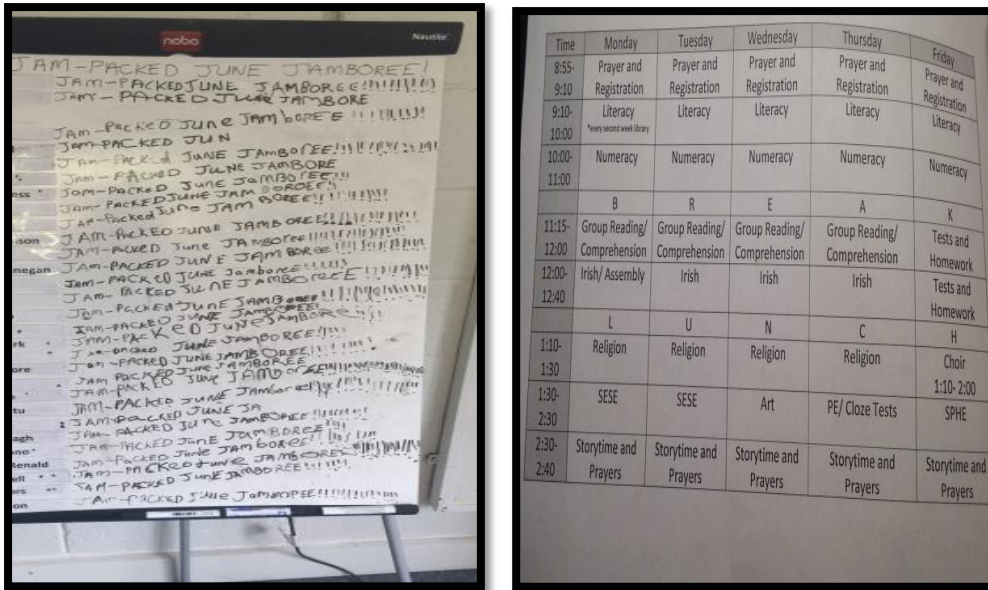


Figure 4.6 Behaviour board and timetable (CIVM, MS)

The importance of such structures for Miss Sullivan concerned a delicate balancing between progressing with teaching and learning mindful of the children’s presence as whole and feeling beings:

My guys, they are so emotional. There is so much crap they have to face before they walk in my door at 9 o’clock. They have had massive battles. They have been abused verbally, emotionally and then they get into school and I’m talking about Maths! That’s not what you start with, strip that, start again.

(C1, MS)

Looking a little more deeply into the structures and routines that teachers have put in place for children, which may at first seem rigid, reveals that often their purpose is to acknowledge and respond to the whole child.

#### 4.3.2.2 Known routines and structure create a feeling of safety.

All three of the teachers referred to some of the children’s home lives as lacking in structure. It seems that this is part of the reason for the emphasis on structure and routine in Norestown. In my first conversation with Miss Sullivan, she made several references to the importance of the children having a definite routine in place to provide a feeling of a safe space. Miss Sullivan suggests that were some element of the known routine to change, the classroom atmosphere would be disrupted and children would be upset. Therefore, in

relation to routine and how the space is managed, she tries to ensure that 'nothing ever changes' (CIVM, MS her emphasis). This was reflected in the children's accounts of their daily routine in Miss Sullivan's class. For example, when Oriana is asked to describe a typical day, she starts by talking about the consequences for children who don't do their homework:

Oriana: Then on the Tuesday morning they come in with no homework.

Annie: Oh right and what happens if they have no homework done?

Oriana: They stay in for break.

Annie: They stay in for break? Do they do their homework then?

Oriana: Yeah. But if they just don't do it altogether, they have to stay in for second break

(CI, Oriana)

Oriana recites this routine with certainty. It seems that Miss Sullivan's strongly held belief that predictability creates safety results in children being certain about expectations and consequences of non-adherence. Whilst each classroom space was organised differently, a common theme across classrooms was the children's knowledge of how their particular classroom works, as evidenced by Carrie from Miss Vaughan's class:

We'll do literacy in the morning and then we'll do Maths, then you have your lunch and go to yard then we come back and we do our Irish, we have our lunch, go to yard and then we come back and probably do some history and geography.

(CI, Carrie)

This use of a 'behaviour board' was common practice in all three classes and in individual interviews, children frequently referred to the behaviour board. Miss Sullivan considered it 'hugely important' and 'the centre of the classroom'. Cian from Miss Vaughan's class explains how the board works in their classroom:

Cian: Well, we all have letters on the board and your name is at the side of the board. Every day if you do a good thing... say like Grangewood Farm Trip... you get letters if you are good so you would get a 'G' for starters.

Annie: Oh I see.

Cian: You have to get the whole thing and then you go on the trip.

Annie: Oh I see.

Cian: If you are not being good you get a dot beside your name. If you get three dots you get a letter wiped off and then you don't get to do an activity.

(CI, Cian)

Any child that mentioned the behaviour board was entirely clear on its function, on how to get 'letters' and avoid 'dots'. As a school wide system, its structure is therefore well known to the children. Whilst it could be argued that such a system provides only extrinsic motivation for children's learning, such discussion is not warranted in this study where the focus is on richly describing participants lived experiences. In the relationship between children and their teachers, the behaviour board serves as a way to manage the shared classroom space, to enable its smooth running and to create a feeling of safety.

The children's knowledge of the workings of their individual classroom seemed to create a sense of ease and comfort for them. Conversely, the children seemed somewhat concerned about changes to routine and structures including substantial changes such as moving on to secondary school but also minor changes such as being moved seats:

Kate: I think it's weird because I got moved from the front to the back.

Annie: Why was that?

Kate: I think it's because teacher trusted me more, I think.

Annie: Oh, so do you think that being closer to the front means...

Kate: That she doesn't trust me as much.

Annie: Oh ok.

Kate: Or else she was just doing that because she wanted a boy beside a girl.

(CI, Kate)

In this instance, it seems that Kate is unclear about the teacher's motivation for moving her to a new seat in the classroom. The teacher has obviously not shared her reasoning with Kate. Kate tries to make sense of the move identifying it somewhat hopefully as an indication of the teacher's trust in her. However, the possibility that the teacher wanted a gender balance means that Kate is left unsure as to the meaning of the move for her relationship with her teacher.

I draw on the work of Bae (2012) here for the first time because of the relevance of her work on interactions between children and teachers. She characterises interactions as 'spacious' or 'narrow'. These metaphors 'refer to the interactional space which is created between the teacher and the children' (Bae, 2012, p. 58) and to the potential for children to express themselves. She found that sometimes teachers were involved in spacious patterns whereby a child would be enabled to ask questions, engage playfully with the teacher and make mistakes. Conversely, 'narrow' interactions were characterised by the teacher being 'much more in control of how the interactional processes develop' (Bae, 2012, p. 63). This research seems relevant to this finding concerning known routines. Kate's example could be characterised as 'narrow' whereby her agency was not recognised and rather the teacher was in control. Bae (2012) found that interactional patterns between teachers and children were not black and white but were rather more complex, falling into different categories at different times. The data generated in this study would similarly suggest that there are times when the same children and teachers are engaged in 'narrow' or 'spacious' interactions.

#### ***4.3.2.3 The joy of breaking from routine.***

The theme of structure and routine permeated the data and, at the same time, I found that teachers and children experienced a certain joy in breaking away from structure and engaging with one another more freely. These experiences fell into two main categories, 'unusual moments in the normal school day' and 'class trips'. I include examples of each in this section. Miss Elliot, who describes herself as 'serious' and who rarely laughs with the children, recalls a day when she did 'actually have to laugh':



Miss Elliot: One of the little fellas, he has dark skin, he got tippex on his nose. All of the kids in his group were laughing and sniggering at something and I asked 'what are you laughing at? What's going on here?' [...]

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Elliot: I went down to them (laughs) and he had tippex wiped all around his face, all the way around his face, his cheeks, his chin, all the way back up to his forehead and his nose, tippex!!

Annie: (Laughs)

Miss Elliot: On his dark skin. I kept a straight face for the majority of it and I said 'what have you got... what is that on your face? [...] Come on now [...] Who did that to you?' Then he explained that he had done it himself because he had got some tippex on his nose and he had tried to wipe it off. [...] I just couldn't help but laugh. Then they thought that was hilarious 'oh teacher's laughing! teacher's laughing'.

(CIVM, ME)

Both the teacher and the children clearly enjoyed this break from the familiar, serious atmosphere. Similarly, several children from Miss Vaughan's class referred to stories that she told one day when she was trying to encourage them to be more creative in their writing. The stories, which they remember vividly, relate to times when Miss Vaughan was at her most human - having an accident whereby she 'did the splits' on a public bus and trying to fit herself, all her friends and their belongings into a very small hired car. The children seem to relate to Miss Elliot's laughing and Miss Vaughan's stories because of the opportunities they provided to breaking from routine and 'glimpsing into' their teacher's life (Hutchinson, 2004).

Of all the material things experienced as part of the child-teacher relationship, none were quite as significant, both to teachers and children, as class trips. Their significance was not determined by the number of times to which they were referred, though that number is high, but by the way in which both teachers and children became animated when speaking about them.

Miss Sullivan plans for trips every two months. Interestingly she prefers 'non-educational' trips because she sees them as opportunities for the children to be freed from the constraints of the rule-bound classroom. Miss Sullivan's tightly run, timetable-governed, utterly predictable classroom routine contrasts starkly with her description of a class trip:

Miss Sullivan: ...And we're having a barbeque. So, a park, a petting zoo, and one of the teachers who is retiring is cooking the barbeque for us. They love this.

Annie: Right.

Miss Sullivan: So they get to stand by the barbeque and talk... just talk with me and Marie who is doing the barbeque and they will have a one-on-one conversation...

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Sullivan: We are equal at this stage...

Annie: Right.

Miss Sullivan: We're all out, we are all running around. They LOVE that!

(CIVM, MS)

The 'we' to whom Miss Sullivan refers includes herself. She emphasises 'love' in the last sentence but only with reference to the children. However, when reflecting on the form of the bus she drew as part of her concept map (Figure 4.7 below), I began to think that Miss Sullivan might 'LOVE' the trips too: 'There's something very jovial about the bus, about its form - like a bus from a children's cartoon. I can't help thinking that it captures a joyousness associated with the trips - for all concerned' (RRJ, 03.06.15).

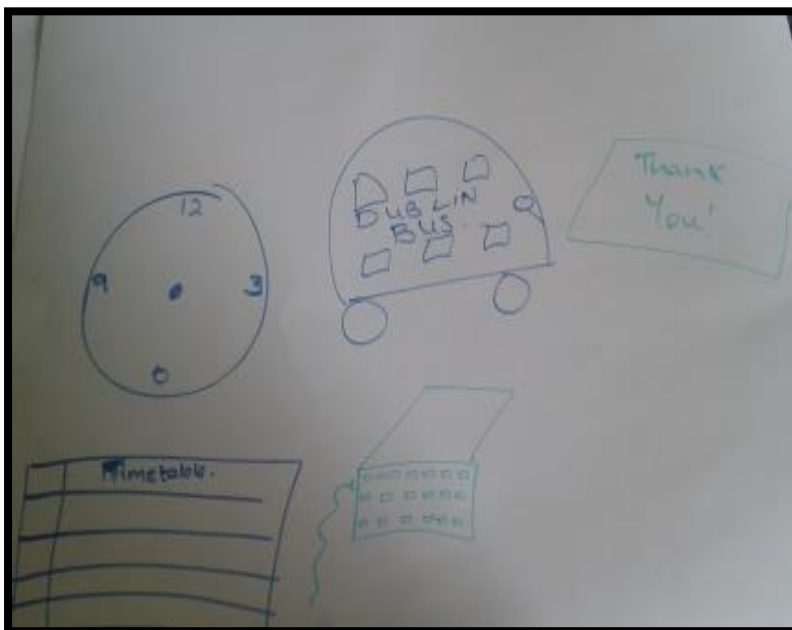


Figure 4.7 Miss Sullivan's concept map, CIVM, MS

The bus creates a visual contrast with two other features in the drawing, the timetable and the clock. The drawing serves as a vivid illustration of the nature of this paradox, namely the need for structure and freedom from that structure. Even when teachers plan for *educational* class trips, there seems to be more flexibility in the teaching approach and more of a connection to the outside world than is usually the case, as exemplified in the following excerpt from Miss Vaughan:

Miss Vaughan: Then we were walking up O' Connell Street looking at the bullet holes in O' Connell monument because we are doing 1916 this month and I wanted them to picture what it was like and the GPO and everything.

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: So they were standing in front of the GPO and of course one of these guys came across with rosary beads, gave them all free rosary beads and everything (laughing).

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: You know one of these fanatical fellas? (laughs).

(C11, MV)

The example above is illustrative of Palmer's (1998, p. 54) assertion that knowing of any sort is relational 'animated by a desire to come into deeper community with what we know'. Visiting the GPO and seeing the bullet holes is part of developing a relationship with knowledge. The encounter with the 'fanatical' street seller is also a considerable factor in facilitating an altered, more personal child-teacher relationship.

Children relish opportunities to see their teacher on a human level; to sit beside her, to see her having fun and all of these things are possible on class trips, as Carrie describes:

Carrie: And we went singing, carol singing, when it was coming up to Christmas.

Annie: Oh yeah?

Carrie: Then we went in and had our dinner and we had some dessert. We all sat down. I remember when we were with Miss Kiely [...] and I was sitting down with her.

Annie: Oh you got to sit with her?

Carrie: Yes.

Annie: You're smiling now, why is that? What did you like about that?

Carrie: Everything (little laugh).

Annie: Like what?

Carrie: We were all sitting down telling jokes because we got the hats and got to pull a cracker.

(CI, Carrie)

I wonder whether perhaps the trips whilst joyful and significant in themselves, seem even more so when seen as a break from the otherwise rigid routine. Their power seems to lie in the how they free both teachers and children from the restraints of school, which have become associated with the school building. In the case of Norestown, trips are more than just an annual outing and are often used as a reward. Van Manen (1997, p. 21) might argue that in the same way 'an easy chair invites our tired body to sink into it' a trip away from our classroom invites us out into the world and significantly, it is a joint invitation for the teacher and the child. Whilst being away from the school building is one part of the joy, it is certainly being away from the school building *together* that seems to create the special quality of class trips.

Raufelder et al. (2013), to whom I refer in section 2.4.1, refers to the lack of opportunities for teachers and children to relate to one another at a 'being' level. It seems that class trips are one such opportunity. The importance of a class trip for child-teacher relationships strongly echoes Cramp (2008) who found that school excursions in themselves promote better quality child-teacher relations. If we take seriously the idea of relationships as the core of education then class trips, as 'lived things' that provide opportunities for children and teachers to strengthen their relationships with one another, have inherent educational

value. The idea that freedom and structure are necessary polarities in the child-teacher relationship appears to be a new contribution to the field. Its relevance is discussed in greater detail in section 4.5.2.

#### **4.4 Relating whilst Knotted with Other Social/Contextual Relationships**

Whilst the phenomenon in focus was the child-teacher relationship in the upper primary school, my reading of the data suggested that this relationship does not exist in isolation but is rather entangled with a myriad of other relations including the broader social and political (DEIS) context, school ethos, curriculum, relationships with support staff and with other members of the classroom community. During both the conversational interviews and the image work with the children, I found it difficult to maintain their focus solely on the relationship with their teacher. In referring to that relationship, they often made reference to school systems, relationships with support staff such as special needs assistants (SNAs) and relationships with other children in the class. Similarly, in their conversations about their relationships with children, teachers frequently referred to the broader social context in which they were working, curricular content, the children's home lives and to both their own and children's relationships with support staff. The term 'knotted' relationships therefore captures the nature of the interrelatedness I describe. Initially, I felt that these relationships were 'embedded' or 'nested' one inside the other, suggesting an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, closer analysis showed that the relationships were not impacting on each other in any particular direction but were rather overlapping and entangling. This supports one of the relational propositions outlined by Bingham et al. (2004, p. 7) which states that the child-teacher relationship is part of multiple intersecting relations.

In the sub-sections that follow, I provide evidence of how the children and teachers experience their relationship with one another as knotted with the DEIS context, school ethos, curriculum and pedagogy as well as with other teachers support staff and the children's peers.

#### 4.4.1 The DEIS context and the child-teacher relationship

The school in which the study took place is located in an area designated by the Department of Education and Skills as socially and economically disadvantaged (see section 1.2). In my conversations with each of the teachers about their relationships with children in their classes, they referred explicitly to the DEIS context. In the excerpt that follows, Miss Elliot sees a link between the school's DEIS context and the children's classroom behaviour. It is noteworthy that it is not specifically 'bad' behaviour that is mentioned although from my in-school observations, I noted that staff refer to 'behaviour children' as those with behaviour that is deemed troublesome or problematic: 'I think probably... because it's a DEIS school, it's not the same as a normal school, not a normal school but a school where you wouldn't have the same behavioural issues (CIVM, ME).

She further believes that the behaviour which she sees as connected to the DEIS context impedes children's learning.

Miss Elliot: In a school like ours the first priority is classroom management [...] making sure they are positive and if they are coming in, in a bad humour or something is happening at home that there is still inviting the mind to learn. That kind of stuff is more important [...]

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Elliot: So maybe there is more emphasis on that than there would be in a.....  
(both laugh as if Miss Elliot might say 'normal' again)

Annie: Non-DEIS!! (laughs)

Miss Elliot: Non-DEIS yeah and I think a lot of the learning in our school is hindered by the behaviour.

(CIVM, ME)

It seems that Miss Elliot's particular focus on positivity in her relationship with the children is intertwined with her belief that such positivity is more of a necessity in the DEIS context than it would be in another 'non-DEIS' context. Therefore, the way she relates to children in her class is coloured by her perception of the DEIS context. She also associates bad behaviour with the DEIS context suggesting that children's learning is affected by such behaviour. This has obvious potential implications for practice. It may mean that all

children's experiences of learning are compromised because of the 'bad behaviour' of some. It may mean, as O'Brien (2004) fears, that the teacher's expectations of the children's capacity to learn are lowered.

Miss Vaughan spoke about her belief that the DEIS context makes for a different relationship with the children's homes and parents than might otherwise be the case. She finds that parents are mostly concerned with ensuring that 'their kid is happy, you know, if their child is unhappy with you, in our school, they'd be ringing up giving out murder' whereas in 'a more middle class school, you'd hear more about the academic achievement' (CI1, MV). This means that her relationship not only with the children in her class but also with their parents is affected by her understanding of what the disadvantaged status of the school means.

In their references to interactions with home, the teachers refer mostly to speaking to parents about social, emotional and behavioural issues. I could infer that those teachers' beliefs about children's home contexts result in less emphasis being put on academic achievement. It may be the case, however, that no less emphasis is put on academic achievement but rather that conversations with home are more focused on what Miss Vaughan calls the 'pastoral aspect' of her relationship with the children. This might be because of a belief that parents are more interested in that aspect or because of the significance all of the teachers in this study attribute to the social and emotional needs of the children to enable learning to take place. In any case, it seems that from these teachers' experiences, academic achievement whilst communicated formally at parent /teacher meetings and in school reports, forms a much lesser part of informal communication with home which they see as connected to the DEIS context. Thayer-Bacon (2004, p. 172) highlights how 'we cannot focus just on the individual student, or even the student-teacher relationship...for we must take into consideration the larger social context' (see section 2.3.2). Examples offered here show how the relationships between teachers and children in this study are experienced in a particular way because of their interconnections with the DEIS context.

#### **4.4.2 School ethos and the child-teacher relationship**

From my earliest conversations with management, staff and children in Norestown, I sensed a positive, caring school ethos. The ‘nurturing ethos’ was also noted in the Whole School Evaluation conducted by the Department of the Inspectorate in 2009. When I outlined the nature of this study to the school principal and later to teachers in the school, I sensed a genuine eagerness for involvement. I found two significant emphases which contributed to the positive school ethos: dialogue and care. These emphases proved significant in terms of how the child-teacher relationship was experienced by the teachers and children in the school. I will address each of these in the subsections that follow.

##### ***4.4.2.1 Dialogue.***

Norestown Primary School is involved in a Restorative Practices (RP) project aimed at developing community and managing conflict and tensions by building relationships and repairing harm (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2012). Restorative Practices emphasise the importance of dialogue and fair process, demonstrating and maintaining respect for each other, and developing social collaboration and supports (Macready, 2009). The school-wide adoption of that programme was perhaps one of the reasons why a research project such as this was readily accepted in the school. Teachers and children had ‘bought in’ to the approach and spoke most positively about restorative practices and the ‘circles’ in particular. I learned that ‘circles’ are one of the tools of the programme designed to enable dialogue. My understanding is that the kind of dialogue they enable is what Buber (1947) would refer to as ‘technical’ as its purpose is to understand the other’s circumstance (see section 2. 4.3). The practice of affording structured opportunities to listen to one another was appreciated both by teachers and children and meant that difficulties in their relationships with one another were addressed quickly. I found several examples of consultation with children on matters significant to them such as choosing a classroom novel or choosing a destination for their class trip. I also found evidence of ‘genuine dialogue’ (Buber, 1947) from my conversations with teachers and children. Genuine dialogue (see section 2.4.3) is spoken or silent communication that ‘has in mind the other or others . . . and turns to them with the intention of establishing a mutual relation between himself and them’ (Buber, 1947, p. 19). Such dialogue is centrally concerned with democracy



and is somewhat similar to Bae's (2012) characterisation of 'spacious' interaction patterns (see section 4.3.2.2) whereby children are agentic. One example of this genuine dialogue or spacious interaction patterns is the individual conference that Miss Sullivan organises with children prior to the parent-teacher conference. Children reflect on their own learning and critique grades assigned to them in tests in light of how they feel they are achieving more broadly. By promoting genuine dialogue, teachers in the study showed respect for the children's agency which seemed to strengthen their relationships with one another.

#### **4.4.2.2 Care.**

Care was felt and shown by participants in a number of different ways. Firstly, there were explicit references to caring for one another by both teachers and children. Secondly, there was the more implicit sense of care which was hinted at in my interactions with them. Finally, there was evidence of caring beyond the present time-bound relationship, into the future. I will share examples of each of these manifestations of care characteristic of the school ethos in Norestown which impact on child-teacher relationships.

In referring to a time when he was sick in hospital, Cian spoke about how not only his class teacher but all of the other teachers and SNAs were in contact with his mother checking on his progress. I asked him how that made him feel, to which he replied: 'It makes you feel warm in a way... special. It makes you feel like you are loved in school and not just away in a corner' (CI, Cian). In a conversation with Oriana she mentioned that 'if there was a fire in the school [the teacher] would open the window and she would let us all jump out and then she would jump out after us'. Each of these examples point to the children's lived sense of how they are cared for by their teachers.

The caring ethos was felt more subtly at times. In a conversation with Kate when she was referring to hating school because of an on-going bullying situation, she said that she felt bad that Miss Elliot knew that she hated school. When I pressed her on that, her reasoning was that the school was Miss Elliot's place of work and she wouldn't like her to know of her feelings of hatred towards that place. There are many threads to that particular element of our conversation but it struck me that perhaps because of the care Miss Elliot had shown to her in dealing with the bully (discussed at an earlier point in the conversation), she equally wanted to care for Miss Elliot by not insulting her place of work.

Another example of a more implicit sense of care emerged following my observation of a maths lesson where Miss Sullivan insisted that children engage in more challenging tasks. She mentioned that being able to complete the task would benefit them in secondary school where there may not be the same opportunity for trial and error. I noted that 'sometimes focusing on quality teaching is a profound display of care on the part of the teacher' (RRJ, 30.01.15). This was a revelation to me and challenged my understanding of what constitutes care. This relates to one of the most interesting aspects of the care that I witnessed in Norestown namely how it was not bounded by the official timespan of the child-teacher relationship (usually one or two years). This could be seen as an example of Heidegger's 'leaping ahead' (see section 2.4.2.3). Miss Sullivan could have reduced the maths task's complexity but to do so would be to disempower the children and possibly create difficulties for them in the future. Instead she provided scaffolds to the children's learning, prompted their thinking through questioning and encouraged the children to persevere with the task. Another example of 'leaping ahead' was evident when Miss Elliot was talking about a dilemma she faced when completing a form for a child transitioning to secondary school. She was initially going to write 'Chloe is always looking for attention' but she questioned how the new teachers would respond to that: 'I didn't want them to take an instant dislike to her thinking "oh this one, always looking for attention"'. I wanted them to know that there is a reason she needs this attention. I put in that "Chloe just needs to know that she's loved", that's what I wrote on it' (CI1, ME).

The thought and reflection evidenced in the excerpt above shows the profound level of care that Miss Elliot felt for Chloe as she moved to a new phase in her life. Although writing in a leadership and organisation studies context, Tomkins and Simpson's (2015, p. 1017) point that 'our engagement in the present is infused with the temporal hues of past and future' seems relevant here. Miss Elliot's caring action, though taking place in the present, acknowledges future possibilities.

The ethic of care in education, championed by Noddings (1984), has come under threat with an increasingly marketised view of education. Many theorists to whom I referred in section 2.4.2.3 including Noddings (1984), hooks (1994), Hederman (2012) and Palmer (1998) argue that care is a necessary condition for education. The findings of this study indicate that a 'position of care and love' (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003, p. 713) evidenced by mutual

respect is crucial in the development of positive child-teacher relationships. The evidence of care in the examples offered here seem very much part of the ethos at Norestown, highlighting the knottedness of the child-teacher relationship with school ethos. The finding that school ethos is significant in the fostering of positive child-teacher relationships supports a similar finding by van Maele and van Houtte (2011) (see section 2.4.2.2).

#### **4.4.3 Curriculum, pedagogy and the child-teacher relationship**

As distinct from personal relationships, the child-teacher relationship is centrally concerned with teaching and learning. The way in which teaching and learning is experienced is dictated to a large extent by the given curriculum and associated pedagogy. I include some examples below of times when the curriculum became what Stengel would describe as the 'third' in the child-teacher relationship (see section 2.3.4). In other words, teachers and children connected with the content as something with which they could relate together rather than being a cold, outside body of knowledge. I also offer a contrasting example illustrating the disconnected way in which curriculum is experienced. The first excerpt from my reflective journal relates to a lesson that I witnessed on one of my observation days in Miss Elliot's class:

Each child sits with the teacher for about five minutes. They tell her about the novel that they have chosen, why they have chosen it and what part they are reading at the moment. They read aloud and she listens. After a short while, she stops them and asks the child questions like 'what would you have done if you were William?' and 'Why does he say that, I wonder?' She also makes comments such as 'I don't believe it!' when surprised by something in the story. The children seem to want to stay longer than their allocated time saying 'and I also read this part, do you want to hear me reading that?', for example.

(RRJ, ICO2)

There are a number of factors that seem to make relating both to the content and to one another more possible in the example above. The organisation of the lesson whereby children have an opportunity to work one to one is significant. Unlike in a whole class lesson, children are required to participate. The dialogic nature of the pedagogy employed whereby children are invited to engage with the content and insert themselves into the story also enables a relationship with the content to be established.

In other instances, children and teachers approached curriculum almost as if it were an imposter, a task to be completed or something to be endured. Below is an excerpt from my reflective journal following my observation of an Irish language lesson:

The teacher wants the children to work independently on the Irish questions that follow a piece of text that they have been trying to read together. Most of the children don't seem to know how to answer the questions. They really struggled with the reading too (though the teacher praised their pronunciation and ability to recall the meaning of some nouns and seemed genuinely pleased). The girl beside me is copying a sentence from the story which contains one of the key words in the question. The teacher has left now and the children are looking to me and the SNA for answers and complaining about having to do the task.

(RRJ, ICO1)

Neither the children nor the teacher had established a connection with the content of the Irish language lesson described in the excerpt above. The children's lack of understanding of the content inhibited their ability to establish a relationship with it. The pedagogical approach which lacked active participation and creativity further hindered the possibility of connecting with the content. The approach further fails to acknowledge the embodied nature of learning whereby knowledge is presented as purely cold, cognitive material. Stolz (2015, p. 478) who comes from a Merleau-Pontyan perspective, suggests that as educators, 'we need to recognise that a large part of our interest in the world is emotional, practical, aesthetic, imaginative and so on'. The Irish language lesson described above does not invite emotional or imaginative engagement and therefore neglects to address the whole, embodied person of the child.

This finding has implications both for teachers' practice and for those designing curricula. With respect to teachers, it seems that they ought to seek out opportunities to create connections between themselves, their students and the content they wish to teach. This has clear resonances with an argument that Palmer (1998, p. 11) makes regarding teachers establishing 'a complex web of connections between themselves, their students and their subjects.' To see curricular content as outside of the relationship with teachers and children could result in education being reduced to mere instruction easily facilitated by technology (Hederman, 2012). Themes chosen for inclusion as content on the national curriculum need to reflect the interests and diversity of backgrounds of teachers and children. It is difficult

for teachers and children to relate to themes and topics that are outdated and non-reflective of the diverse nature of society. Further, emphasis ought to be put on pedagogical approaches that invite teachers and children to engage creative dimensions of their beings and to relate to one another and to curricular content.

#### **4.4.4 Other members of the school community and the child-teacher relationship**

Whilst children and their class teachers are certainly in a particular relationship with one another, I found that relationships with others in their classroom and school were particularly significant for both parties. These extended relationships influence how children and teachers experience their relationships with one another. I include below examples of how the experience of the child and classroom teacher relationship (referred to heretofore as the child-teacher relationship) is affected by relationships with other teachers, SNAs and other children in the classroom.

##### ***4.4.4.1 Other teachers and power dynamics.***

Primary school classroom teachers and the children in their classrooms are in intense contact with one another, given that for the majority of the school day, they share the same classroom. However, there are times when children have contact with other teachers in the school and I found that these encounters can impact on the relationship the children have with their classroom teacher. Both of the examples, I include, relate to how power dynamics come into play when another teacher becomes involved in a relationship between a child and his/her classroom teacher. The first example comes from Miss Elliot and relates to another teacher who was in charge of a school show in which children from her class were partaking. In the excerpt below, Miss Elliot explains the after-effects of taking a strong stance against the teacher in defence of two children in her class (see section 4.2, for the earlier part of this conversation):

When I went into the staff room and said to the other teacher that actually they are doing the dance that you told them they weren't, she wasn't too happy with me. I said 'well I'm their teacher and I am going to practice it with them'. I sort of thought it was my responsibility to stand up for them because they were in my class now this year.

(CI1, ME)

The next example also concerns power dynamics and Miss Vaughan explains that she often feels caught between the authority that the teacher feels is owed to her and the need to maintain a good relationship with the children:

Miss Vaughan: [The teacher] would have made this whole big drama out of something and actually it wouldn't have been that big a deal [...] 'I think he should be kept off the yard, he should be this, he should be that' and you are kind of going 'but he only just walked off from the line, got a ball and got back into the line?' 'Nobody else would have kept him off the yard for that...'

Annie: Yeah.

Miss Vaughan: 'except you...' But I can't say that. [...] So you have to validate the staff member and respect the staff member without penalising kids too much.

(C11, MV)

Both of these examples correspond to what Devine (2002, p. 308) calls 'power as domination' whereby teachers draw on the 'full range of their authoritative resources to socialize children in line with adult-defined goals and expectations'. Whilst Miss Elliot manages to challenge the other teacher in that particular instance, Miss Vaughan highlights how children very often fall victim to the power bestowed on teachers. It is easy to see how the relationship between children and their classroom teacher could be strengthened or weakened depending on how their classroom teacher responds to incidents such as those described in this section.

#### **4.4.4.2 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).**

Teachers and children in this study regularly referred to their relationships with SNAs. Recent recessionary cuts in Ireland and changes to policies on special educational needs have diminished the numbers of SNAs available to schools (Lillis & Morgan, 2012). In each of the classrooms I visited in Norestown however, there was some access to an SNA meaning that children participating in this study had daily contact with two significant adults, their teacher and the SNA working in their classroom. I noticed both from in-class observations and from what the children said in conversations with me, that SNAs in Norestown were significant in the child's daily experience of school. In talking to children about the relationship with their classroom *teachers*, they often referred instead to the SNA. In many of the children's photographs, the memory that stood out for them with their teacher was

actually a memory with their SNA – baking with the SNA or sitting beside her on a class trip. This highlights, that for some children at least, they do not differentiate between their classroom teacher and SNA.

Teachers in the study also frequently made references to SNAs with whom they seemed to have close working relationships. In Miss Sullivan’s class, the SNA has responsibilities for working with individual groups of children during maths lessons:

Miss Sullivan: But when we’re doing work, Ita, the SNA, would generally be with group five and I’ll move into group four and then I can go between these two if they are finding it difficult. Generally the groups are going to need that extra support.

Annie: Yeah. Then obviously the SNA is aware of this structure?

Miss Sullivan: Oh yeah, we’ve worked together... it’s the second year working together with this group but we have worked together for four or five years so...

(CIVM, MS)

Miss Elliot refers to the way in which SNAs can vary widely in how they interact with children. Her experiences include times, just like Miss Sullivan, when she felt she was in a partnership with an SNA and other times when the SNA’s approach to a child’s behaviour, for instance, complicated the relationship between herself and a child in her class. The example below concerns the latter:

Miss Elliot: When something kicks off then I obviously have to take the SNA’s side, take the adult’s side even though sometimes you think the adult is arguing just as much as the child [...] Some SNAs will speak to a particular child who is already shown to be constantly behaving badly... some people think it’s ok to go ‘oh there you go again now’, ‘there you are, at it again’ and accusing them straight off the bat before looking into what actually happened.

Annie: And that’s not how you feel?

Miss Elliot: No and it’s not restorative practice theory either. The first question in restorative practice is meant to be ‘what happened?’ So if there is an incident, you are supposed to ask quite plainly or [...] unbiased, ‘what happened?’ [said in a light, neutral tone] and the child will explain their side.

(CI1, ME)

Miss Elliot points to an interesting power dynamic by saying ‘I obviously have to take the SNA’s side’. This echoes Miss Vaughan’s experience with other teachers referred to in the

previous section. Although the children interviewed did not refer to experiences of teachers and SNAs colluding; the teachers' awareness of this phenomenon makes me wonder about how it might complicate the child-teacher relationship from the child's perspective.

#### ***4.4.4.3 Other children in the class (peers).***

Whilst I initially conceived of the child-teacher relationship as a dualistic one between two parties, I found that children are often experiencing the relationship with their teacher almost indirectly through her interactions with other children. In the excerpt below, Kate explains how the teacher's relationship with a boy in her class affects her own experience:

He jumps on tables and it just brings you down when the teacher is angry. It does bring you down. Even though sometimes you do end up laughing at him, it still brings you down at the end of the day, hearing people scream.

(CI, Kate)

Kate offers a deep insight into the wider impact of both one child's misbehaviour and the teacher's associated anger which impacts on how she relates to the rest of the group. Kate's use of the generic 'you' in her repeated phrase 'brings you down' highlights that it's not just she that is brought down but rather others generally. Reggie, who is in a different classroom, similarly relayed the impact that the teacher shouting has on his learning whereby he finds that he gets 'loads of questions wrong' as a result.

Considering the examples presented in this section, the child-teacher relationship cannot be conceived as a simple interaction between just two parties. Children and teachers are simultaneously relating to one another as well as being knotted in a 'wider web of relations' (Bingham et al., 2004, p. 6) with other teachers, SNAs and other children. These relationships are also entangled with associated power dynamics. Biesta (2004, p.11) argues that the 'location' of education is in the gap between teachers and children. It seems that the child-teacher relationship is complicated by several other relationships operating within this gap including socio-economic context (DEIS), school ethos and relationships with other members of the school and classroom community.



#### 4.5 Theoretical Resonances and Contributions

Having discussed each of the themes and sub-themes in light of existing literature, I now look to theory for points of resonance and to identify possible fresh insights within the findings. Firstly, I will consider the theme of knotted relationships. The term ‘knotted’ was chosen deliberately to capture how the child-teacher relationship is entangled with the political, socio-economic, personal and social contexts. Although teachers and children in this study described their relationships with one another using language of care and reciprocity, the pressure of the ‘culture of performativity’ (Ball, 2003) was evidenced by their need to break free of certain structures and create pockets of time to develop their relationships with one another. This is perhaps unsurprising as Lynch (2012, p. 98) argues that although both the primary and secondary sectors in Ireland have challenged neo-liberal policies, the prevalence of such ideas ‘inevitably get under your skin’. The following example points to that notion. In a Mathematics lesson that I observed, Miss Sullivan explained to the children why they were using graph paper used in secondary school rather than the simplified version typically used in primary school. In my observation notes, I wondered about her motivation:

‘Miss Sullivan says “guys, you’ll only have to learn to use the real stuff in secondary school so you might as well get used to it now”. This is an overall theme that I sense in Miss Sullivan’s class –her ‘guys’ are going to be prepared for the ‘real’ world. Is it a kind of protection?

(RRJ, 05.02.15)

My initial analysis led me to the conclusion that this was a caring encounter which can be categorised as ‘leaping ahead’ (Tomkins & Simpson, 2015, p. 1016). Considering this same piece of data meta-reflexively and in light of Lynch’s (2012) assertion that the dominance of the neo-liberal agenda is impossible to circumnavigate, I wonder if Miss Sullivan has internalised the idea that the secondary school context will be less forgiving of those who do not perform in accordance with the expectations of the system. The Irish secondary school system is described as ‘high stakes for students as opposed to high stakes for schools’ (Smyth and Banks, 2012, p.302) because of the consequences of the final exam, The Leaving Certificate, performance on which determines opportunities for students’ future education. As a high-stakes, competition-based examination, the Leaving Certificate is arguably a

tangible product of a market-led education system. Smyth and Banks (2012) suggest that while students from all socio-economic contexts acknowledge that the Leaving Certificate is a high stakes exam, there is a marked difference in how that perception is addressed. Students from middle class schools mobilise both cultural and financial capital to enable them to succeed and students from working class backgrounds get left behind. Miss Sullivan's actions might be entangled with her concern about the disadvantaged status of her school and what that might mean for the children's futures. The data from Miss Sullivan's class when considered as a whole reveals a strong protective thread. Children recounted how Miss Sullivan put their needs ahead of her own (she told them that she would wait for each of them to jump safely out a window in the case of a fire). She identified a motherly relation with them in her protocol document and often used the term 'my guys'. In this instance, it seems that Miss Sullivan is protecting them from, or trying to equip them for, the competitive values which she feels they will inevitably encounter in secondary school. This example highlights the entanglement of the personal, political and socio-economic contexts in which the child-teacher relationship is operating.

When I considered each of the themes of this study in light of existing theoretical literature, I found strong connections initially with two bodies of theory: relational pedagogy drawing on Bingham et al. (2004), Hutchinson (2004), Hederman (2012), Stengel (2004) and Thayer-Bacon (2008) and a particular branch of embodiment theory, namely 'embodied teaching and learning', drawing on Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003), Moje (2000), Peters (2004), Ross (2004) and Stolz (2015). To make sense of the connections between this study and these two theoretical frameworks, I began to diagrammatically represent points of correlation as well as examining the space where these two theories might interact.

In Figure 4.8, themes and subthemes from this study are located either under 'relational pedagogy' in blue on the left-hand side or 'embodied teaching and learning' in fleshy pink on the right-hand side. Themes have been positioned on one side or the other, based on the extent to which they resonate with each theoretical area. The purple coloured wash in the centre of the diagram represents themes that fuse elements of relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning. This section purposely flows into the other two areas to indicate fluidity between concepts.

## CHILD-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

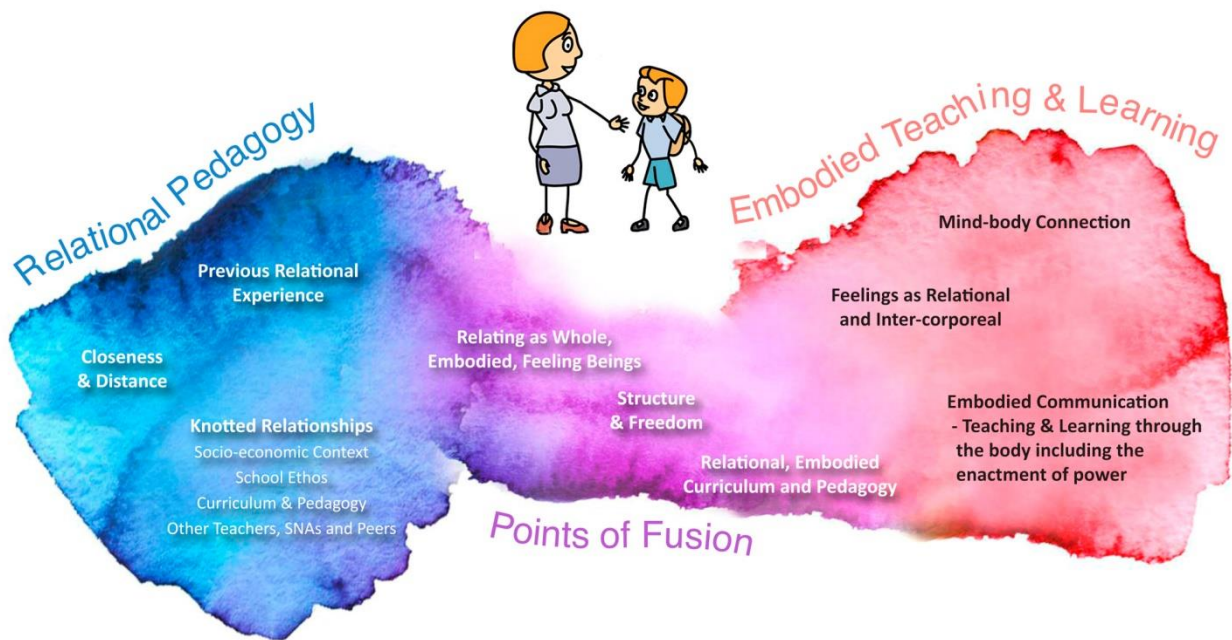


Figure 4.8 Mapping themes and sub-themes to theoretical areas

The next three sub-sections address ideas that belong in the intersecting, purple area of the diagram above and how they connect to both relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning. These include ‘Relating as Whole, Embodied, Feeling Beings’, ‘Structure and Freedom’ and ‘Relational, Embodied Curriculum and Pedagogy’.

### 4.5.1 Relating as whole, embodied, feeling beings

The idea of children and teachers engaging with one another as whole beings is acknowledged in relational pedagogy. In their manifesto of relational pedagogy, Bingham et al. (2004, p. 5) remind us that ‘schools are places where human beings get together’ and in wondering why in an age of freely available ‘knowledge’ schools still exist, the same authors suggest that this is because ‘education is primarily about human beings who need to meet together’. The central role of feelings is also recognised in the literature on relational pedagogy most especially by Hutchinson (2004, p. 87) who argues for a ‘need to understand that the emotions are a vital part of our students’ education’. With the exception of Thayer-Bacon (2004, 2008, 2011), who consistently emphasises the embodied nature of learning, embodiment is perhaps assumed rather than explicitly addressed in relational pedagogy.

'Relating as whole, embodied, feeling beings' is a principal thematic finding in this study. By placing it in the purple section of the diagram, I suggest that this theme is a point of fusion between relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning. Not only are children and teachers learning through relations with one another but they are learning through *embodied* relations. In a paper repositioning learning as cultural rather than individual or social, Hodkinson et al. (2008) criticise how theories of learning neglect the embodied, social nature of individual learning. The conceptualisation of the child-teacher relationship offered here and depicted in Figure 4.8 aligns with Hodkinson and colleagues' theory.

Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003) highlight how little attention is given in educational research to the complex combination of embodied practices that constitute education. It is at this point that the findings of this study have something to offer. Drawing on participants' lived experiences, particular embodied practices have been identified including how interactions between teachers and children are mind-body phenomena (see section 4.2.2.1) and how power can be made and communicated through the body (see section 4.2.2.2). The articulation of these embodied practices offers a contribution to educational research generally and to the child-teacher relationship in particular. If the child-teacher relationship is experienced in an embodied way and if that relationship is the 'location' of education (Biesta, 2004, p.11), then it follows that teaching and learning are embodied practices. This is not a new idea but rather can be mapped directly onto Deweyian ideas regarding the inseparability of the mind and body. Perhaps this finding serves only to highlight that we need reminding of how we relate and therefore learn as whole, embodied, feeling beings.

#### **4.5.2 Structure and freedom**

A tension between structure with respect to rigid, known routines and freedom from those routines emerged through focusing on teachers' and children's experiences of their time with one another, their experiences of 'things' such as timetables, rules, behaviour boards and school trips and how their bodies interact with such things. This appears to be reflective of the ideological tension identified. On the one hand, the teachers and children experienced their relationship with one another through material things that might easily map onto the neoliberal, performative ideology (timetables, rules, behavior boards and tests). On the other hand and perhaps as a reaction to their lived experience of the

dominant discourse, they sought breaks or freedom from those structures through more caring, reciprocal, relational material things such as bubble time or school trips. The diagram (Figure 4.8) situates the theme, 'structure and freedom' in the intersection between relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning as there are connections to both theories, which I outline here

Much of the discussion about the need for space or distance in the educational relationship concerns a theoretical space (see Biesta, 2004; Rodgers, 2013) rather than a physical or embodied space. The kind of space referred to in this study as 'freedom', when considered in light of embodied teaching and learning and when understood as a breaking free from the dominant, performative ideology brings this physical, embodied, experientially-grounded element to the theory.

Turning to literature on embodied teaching and learning offers a new way to think about structure and freedom. Ross (2004) examines how bodies are shaped by certain educational environments. Writing in a North American context, Ross (2004, p. 171) argues that the focus in many ordinary classrooms is on students' minds rather than their bodies whereby bodies are seen only as receptacles of the mind. Teachers and children in this study seemed to perceive tightly structured environments as a means both of generating a feeling of security and of ensuring that opportunities to connect on a holistic level were made possible (see section 4.3.2.1). In light of Ross's work, it is worth considering how such structure which is perhaps a consequence of the performative culture (Ball, 2003) might also shape the body. Adhering to these structures, bodies are asked to behave in a particular way. The children's bodies are bound (almost literally) by certain rules and expectations including raising hands, standing in lines or sitting and working quietly. Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003, p. 711) highlight that such body practices require children to 'behave like machines, going out and coming in according to schedule'. Such a machine metaphor is consistent with the de-humanising effect that accompanies the rise of an efficiency-based, technicised view of education. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the parallel need for freedom from such structures was identified by both teachers and children. The body, on a school tour, for instance, is often invited to move and run or interact with other bodies including the teacher's body in novel ways ('So they get to stand by the barbeque and talk... just talk with me and Marie who is doing the barbeque and they will have a one on one conversation...').

Relational pedagogy emphasises the significance and centrality of relations in education whilst embodied teaching and learning foregrounds the role of the body. The lived experience approach adopted in this study meant that teachers and children shared how their bodies relate to one another in different educational contexts. Considering this overlap between relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning, 'structure and freedom' becomes about how *embodied* children and teachers experience these phenomena and offers a new insight into our understanding of the child-teacher relationship.

#### **4.5.3 Relational, embodied curriculum and pedagogy**

The idea that children and teachers not only relate to one another and to other people and contexts but also to knowledge and pedagogy emerged as a finding in this study. Each theory considered here, namely relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning, addresses knowledge and pedagogy from its own perspective. Stengel (2004), writing from the relational pedagogy perspective refers to knowledge becoming a 'third' in the relationship between children and teachers (see section 4.4.3). Similarly, Hederman (2012) argues that knowledge cannot exist outside of a relationship.

Working in the field of embodied teaching and learning, Peters (2004) suggests that an embodied curriculum begins from an understanding of a philosophy of the body. In common with many others writing in the field of embodied teaching and learning, he rejects Cartesian dualism rather seeing knowledge as situated and involving mind-body interactions. In Figure 4.8 above, 'Relational, Embodied Curriculum and Pedagogy' is identified as a point of fusion between the two fields whereby I suggest that we can look at knowledge and pedagogy as both relational and embodied. Both Ellsworth (2005) and MacIntyre-Latta and Buck (2007), writing in the context of embodiment, recognise embodied teaching and learning ultimately as relational. Similarly, Lussier-Ley (2010) writing as a sports and performance psychologist, foregrounds the embodied self in relational pedagogy. Such understanding is as yet uncommon in the field of education and in our understanding of the child-teacher relationship.

#### **4.5.4 The child-teacher relationship through the lens of complexity**

I noticed that the first diagrammatic iteration of how my findings could 'speak to' existing theory failed to fully capture some of the challenges I encountered in trying to conceptualise the child-teacher relationship. Reflecting on this prompted further theoretical searching and I revisited complexity which had initially inspired the naming of the knotted theme (see section 4.4). The term 'complexity' is used here rather than 'complexity theory' as Kuhn (2008, p. 178) argues that 'complexity has not as yet been systematically articulated in such a way that it could be termed a single 'theory''. In my second diagram (see Figure 4.9), I began to play with the connections between the two previously identified theories, (relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning) and complexity. After many attempts to visually describe the interconnections between relational pedagogy, embodied teaching and learning and complexity, I concluded that complexity worked best as a lens through which ideas connected to the other theories could be viewed. A camera lens is used to represent the lens of complexity through which the first diagram can be viewed.



Figure 4.9 Looking at the child-teacher relationship through the lens of complexity

Complexity offers an understanding of the child-teacher relationship as an open, complex system as distinct from a closed system (such as a clock or car engine). As with any open complex system, it does not operate in a predictable, linear, deterministic manner. Rather the system is constantly becoming more complex. Interactions between various elements within the system are unpredictable with no single element having a discrete effect on another.

There are many connections between central tenets of complexity and key elements of both embodied teaching and learning and relational pedagogy. Fenwick (2012, p. 144) highlights that when complexity is applied to education, the focus is 'not upon isolated actors and



objects foregrounded against some contextual backdrop, but on the dynamic, nonlinear actions and connections flowing between all these parts'. Such language aligns closely with relational pedagogy which foregrounds the interactional, relational nature of education. Complexity acknowledges the permeable nature of boundaries (Fenwick, 2012), which is reminiscent of the rejection of mind-body dualism in embodied teaching and learning. The 'knotted' theme, considered at the beginning of section 4.5, is consistent with a thread in relational pedagogy which sees the self as a 'knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations' (Bingham et. al., 2004, p. 7). Further, complex systems feature the co-existence of seemingly paradoxical features, as Morrison (2006, p. 2) illustrates: 'cooperation together with competition, similarity together with difference, individuality with collectivity, connectedness with separation'. Therefore, the finding that 'closeness and distance' and 'structure and freedom' are features of the child-teacher relationship finds resonance with complexity. Another point of correlation with complexity is the finding that feelings can be relational and inter-corporeal phenomena (see section 4.2.2.3) because there is a fluidity or lack of clear definition of boundaries in components of complex phenomena.

There are therefore, many resonances between relational pedagogy, embodied teaching and learning and complexity. Two key ideas in complexity namely 'connectedness' and 'emergence', however, seem to offer an enhanced understanding of the child-teacher relationship. These terms are written on the camera lens in Figure 4.9 in the place where focal lengths would typically be located. The idea is that the child-teacher relationship can be best understood through focusing on these two key aspects of complexity.

'Connectedness' and 'emergence' and their relationship to the findings of this study will be addressed in the next section.

#### ***4.5.4.1 Considering the child-teacher relationship in light of 'connectedness' and 'emergence' in complexity.***

Morrison (2002) suggests that *connectedness* is a requirement of complex systems.

Connectedness, from a complexity perspective refers to the interdependence of various components. The need for complex systems to feature connectedness gives an insight into the significance of teachers and children's previous relational experiences for their present relationship with one another (see section 2.5.4). It also sheds light on the finding that

children and teachers often experience mind-body connections in their interactions with one another (see section 4.2.2.1) and the finding that feelings can be relational and intercorporeal. Further, our desire to connect with others, manifests in the idea of 'closeness' and in the examples offered by both teachers and children when referring to freedom from known routine and structure such as on class trips. The seemingly paradoxical need for closeness and distance, freedom and structure is also explained by the idea that connectedness refers to an interdependence of components. In light of complexity, it is therefore unsurprising that such a need for *both* closeness and distance and freedom and structure is required. Knowledge and pedagogy that are experienced in a relational, embodied way (see section 4.5.3) aligns closely with the idea of connectedness. In teaching and learning contexts where connectedness is a feature, there is a synergy between the people, the knowledge and pedagogy. Complex systems, to be considered such, are required to be connected. The findings of this study suggest that there are complex connections (or knots) between children and teachers' personal, political, social and socio-economic contexts.

The theme, 'knotted relationships' also makes sense in light of the concept of *emergence*, another central aspect of complexity. Complex systems and processes that are *emergent* 'arise in the interactions of many subcomponents or agents, whose actions are in turn enabled and constrained by similarly dynamic contexts' (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 34). Fenwick (2012, p. 144) explains emergence in terms of 'the continuous rich and recursive interactions' among elements of complex systems. The emergent nature of the child-teacher relationship becomes evident when it is perceived as a complex system knotted within other complex systems e.g. socio-economic context, school ethos and relationships with other teachers. The term 'knotted' again is deliberate. These varied contexts do not serve as a backdrop to the child-teacher relationship but are intersecting and shaping one another.

Emergence is also a useful way to think about the *necessary* entanglement of the child-teacher relationship given that it is a complex system. Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers (2008, p. 222) suggest that in complex systems, we cannot consider one set of structures 'ontologically prior to and therefore simply 'giving rise to' another hierarchical level of structures, as is the case with a linear understanding of process'. Therefore, the

'knottedness' to which I refer is not something to be overcome or untangled but rather a necessary feature which helps to better understand the nature of the child-teacher relationship. In concrete terms, I cannot say that the socio-economic status of the school has an impact on the child-teacher relationship because this assumes a linearity or cause and effect model suited to simple systems and processes. In light of both connectedness and emergence, I can say that personal, social, political and socio-economic are simultaneously relating to and changing one another (Battam, 1999).

Seeking to examine the child-teacher relationship presents a challenge in light of Osberg et al.'s (2008, p. 219) assertion that 'we have to acknowledge that to model or theorise any interconnected system we first have to cut it off from the other regularities or systems with which it interacts.' However, the lived experiences approach following van Manen (1990, 2014), used in this study, seemed to allow for the complexity of the child-teacher relationship to be retained resulting in the generation of themes that honour its complex nature. Van Manen (1990, p. 58) discusses how words used to refer to phenomena lose meaning and become 'flat' over time. Themes generated in this study do not explain the child-teacher relationship nor offer prescriptions about how children and teachers ought to relate to one another. Instead, I hope that they have served to unflatten its nature. Considering the intersections between relational pedagogy, embodied teaching and learning and complexity offers an understanding of the child-teacher relationship as a complex system that is both relational and embodied.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Phenomenological inquiry aims to describe and interpret experiential phenomena; in this case teachers' and children's lived experience of the child-teacher relationship. Following van Manen (1997, 2014), I have tried in this chapter to preserve rich and evocative descriptions of the experiences of the participants in this study. I hope that the findings and discussion presented here illuminate the nature of these participants' experiences of the child-teacher relationship, and that the themes and sub-themes offer a fresh understanding of concepts in both empirical and theoretical literature

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction to the Conclusion Chapter**

In this concluding chapter, I intend to draw the story of my research to a close and avail of this opportunity to step back from and reflect on the study as a whole. I will begin by reflecting on my selection of the child-teacher relationship as a topic for research before presenting a summary of the main findings of this study. Thereafter, I will consider both practice and policy implications of those findings in the Irish primary education context. I have become just as interested in the methodology employed in this study, namely hermeneutic phenomenology, as in the topic of the research itself. I will therefore include a reflection on my methodological decisions. Finally, I will outline what I see as this study's contribution to knowledge before considering future, related research projects.

### **5.2 Reflection on my Selection of Topic**

I work in teacher education, primarily in Drama Education. This research topic, namely the child-teacher relationship, was outside my area of expertise. Beginning this journey five years ago, I had never heard of the term 'relational pedagogy'. I chose the child-teacher relationship for three reasons. Firstly, as outlined in the introductory chapter, I chose the child-teacher relationship because I felt that the relational dimension in education was being sidelined in the Irish primary school context. Secondly, I discovered that each of the potential topics that I considered for my thesis had one common feature namely, a focus on relationships. Finally, in my own childhood and adolescent years my relationships with teachers were significant. Two contrasting memories concerning relationships with teachers, one positive and one oppressive, are sources of continuing reflection for me as a teacher educator.

During the analysis phase of this study, when I was exercising restraint and bearing with the initial low level analysis process, I feared that I would fail to find out anything. Colleagues regularly asked for a quick summary of emerging findings on the coffee break and I felt that I had little to offer. I was mindful, however, of van Manen's (1990, p. 13) assertion that phenomenology is unlike any other research and that is why, he says, when you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological nature 'you will listen in vain for the punch-line, the

latest information or the big news'. Engaging in phenomenological research also means, as Gadamer (1975, p. 266) asserts, 'opening up and keeping open possibilities'. As someone who works in drama education, I am familiar with the need to trust processes such as improvisation and dwell with particular moments. In the course of this study, though frightening at times, I trusted that keeping an open mind and refraining from rushing to conclusions would ultimately deliver more phenomenologically-oriented findings which might shed light on the child-teacher relationship. These findings are summarised in the next section.

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

This study set out to broadly explore teachers' and children's lived experience of their relationships with one another. Through their engagement with a variety of research methods including observation, protocol documenting, conversational interviewing as well as embodied and visual methods, children and teachers offered particular insights into how the child-teacher relationship is experienced.

Three broad themes and associated subthemes were generated. The first of these is that children and teachers relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings. This overarching theme was subdivided into 'whole beings' and 'embodied beings'. With respect to 'whole beings', I found that the totality of teachers' and children's life experiences were present in their relations with one another. The idea that either party could relate to the other solely in their role as 'teacher' or 'learner' was challenged. In relation to the 'embodied' nature of their relationship, I found evidence of simultaneous engagement of mind and body in their interactions with one another. Contrary to the image of teaching and learning as direct delivery and receipt of information from one mind to another, the significance of the body's role in teaching and learning emerged. This was especially evident where communication of power through the body was concerned. Finally, under this broad theme, I found evidence of feelings being experienced relationally rather than individually, pointing to the blurring of corporeal boundaries in the child-teacher relationship.

The next major theme was that teachers and children experience their relationship through the interdependent polarities of 'closeness and distance', 'structure and freedom'. As part

of this theme, I discussed how both teachers and children seem to need to feel close to one another but that distance is required for the healthy functioning of the relationship and indeed for learning to take place. A similar tension emerged between a need for structure and freedom. Both parties experienced their time (lived time), their classrooms (lived space) and their relationships (lived relation) as highly structured and many references were made to rules, procedures, timetables and tests (lived things). However, both parties offered evidence of a need to break free of these structures on occasion and this appeared most significantly in the form of off-campus school trips. There seemed to be a relationship between the tightly structured school environment and the dominant 'culture of performativity' (Ball, 2003) and a similar correlation between the freedom children and teachers desired and the reciprocal, caring, humanising view of education espoused by Noddings (1998), hooks (1993) and Palmer (1998).

The final theme is that the child-teacher relationship was found to be knotted with other social or contextual relationships. The children and teachers in this study offered evidence that their relationships with one another were knotted with their socio-economic context and with the particular ethos in the school. I further found that their relationships extended to include connections or disconnections with curriculum and pedagogy. Although their relationships with one another emerged as centrally important, they were also simultaneously in relationships with other teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and other children. These extended relationships and their associated power dynamics presented a more complicated picture than the term 'child-teacher relationship' initially suggests.

While some of these themes and sub-themes are addressed in existing literature (e.g. closeness and distance), others have rarely been addressed e.g. the need for both structure and freedom and the embodied nature of the child-teacher relationship. In discussing the findings, I highlighted that the child-teacher relationship could be usefully conceived of as a complex system especially in light of the concepts of 'connectedness' and 'emergence' (see section 4.5.4.1).

The findings summarised here emerged from a lived experience inquiry into the child-teacher relationship. They are not intended to be definitive but are rather one, single

interpretation. As van Manen (1990, p. 31) argues 'no single interpretation will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description'. This study invites further research, perhaps from an alternative perspective, which may deepen our understanding of the child-teacher relationship.

#### **5.4 Policy Implications**

Given that this study was conducted in a primary school context in Ireland, I will limit this discussion about policy implications to that setting. The findings uphold Biesta's (2004) argument that education is located in the relationship between teachers and children. Understanding the child-teacher relationship, and therefore education, as relational, embodied and complex has certain implications for policy makers. Such a conceptualisation positions relations at the centre of educational policy in the primary context. It further suggests that the embodied nature of education ought to gain greater recognition in the policy arena. Finally, this study would suggest that the child-teacher relationship cannot be fully understood unless it is seen to belong to, and dynamically interact with, other social and contextual relationships.

With respect to the relational dimension, the policy picture for Early Years and lower primary in Ireland is most encouraging. *'The National Early Childhood Framework for Children from Birth to Six years, Aistear'* (NCCA, 2009), places significant emphasis on relationships. The framework is slowly being introduced to early year settings in Ireland. It includes 'relationships' as one of its twelve principles under an umbrella title 'connections with others' which suggests alignment with relational pedagogy. The framework emphasises the child and the adult working together and includes 'well-being' as one of only four themes identified for children's learning. The prominent positioning of well-being is a further indication of the holistic and relational underpinning of the framework.

Equally, as highlighted in the introductory chapter, *The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (The Teaching Council, 2012) gives special recognition to developing positive student-teacher relations. The code is upheld by four core values namely respect, care, integrity and trust. Teachers are required to 'develop positive relationships with pupils/students...and others in the school community that are characterised by professional

integrity and judgement' (The Teaching Council, 2012, p. 6). Though teachers at all levels are required to develop positive relationships with the children in their classes, government policy developments at upper primary level have not aligned with the relational emphases evident in Early Years policies.

As highlighted in section 1.3, the most significant policy development at primary level in recent years has been the publication of the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011). I have argued elsewhere (Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013) that the strategy jars with the more holistic thrust of the national curriculum with which it co-exists. With teachers and children under considerable pressure to perform ('improve outcomes'), the literacy and numeracy strategy could pose a threat to the relational dimension of education. The findings of this study are opportune in terms of the current policy picture. In line with many other authors coming from differing perspectives, the findings of this study suggest that the significance of relationship between teachers and children does not expire at a certain point in primary school but rather ought to be emphasised and indeed placed at the centre of policy developments at primary level.

In chapter four, drawing on Tobin (2004), I argued that the body is often side-lined in educational discourse and that the mind and body are often artificially separated. The language used in the Literacy and Numeracy strategy including the 'acquisition' of literacy and numeracy skills as an 'urgent national priority' and the statement that 'the curriculum cannot include everything that might be desirable' are indicative of the strategy's positivistic inclination and political motivation. In classifying some areas as desirable but ultimately less valuable, the policy makes a value judgement about certain curricular areas. Literacy and numeracy are valuable and the reader can infer that those areas from which time can be taken in order to facilitate literacy and numeracy development, are merely 'desirable' but not important. The message delivered from such policies is that cognitive activities such as problem solving and *thinking* deeply are to be encouraged but *feeling* deeply, as hooks (1994) argues, is inferior and best ignored. Lynch et al. (2012) point out that teachers tend to feel instinctively uneasy with politically motivated approaches and the majority have a more holistic view of their role as primary teachers (Downes, 2003). Though the new secondary school reform of Junior Cycle curriculum offers some hope whereby 'well-being' is to be offered as a subject from 2017, such emphases are rarely seen in policies outside



the Early Years domain. Policymakers need to recognise that children's minds cannot be separated from their bodies nor can a teacher robotically achieve 'outcomes' in other beings. It might be suggested that policies such as the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011) expect just that. Perhaps the reality of the child-teacher relationship is too complex and the response through policy has been to insist on dualisms: personal and professional; mind and body, teacher and child. Looking at this from a complexity perspective (see section 2.3), and in light of the knottedness with other social and contextual relationships (see section 4.4), perhaps there has been an effort to deliberately close down and simplify an open system. Perhaps this has become the case because the alternative - a primary education system which acknowledges that teachers and children relate to one another and to others more holistically which facilitates the development of intimate relationships - would be messy, costly, complex and less politically expedient.

### **5.5 Implications for Practice**

In this section, I will consider the implications of each of this study's findings on practice. With current government demands to increase time spent on literacy and numeracy (DES, 2011), practices which acknowledge the holistic nature of primary education are increasingly at risk of being side-lined. The culture of performativity in the Irish education system has resulted in some teachers in schools with designated disadvantaged status feeling under such pressure to ensure children perform on standardised tests that their relationships with children have become a 'means to an end' (Burns, 2016, p.17). This study found that children were more engaged when pedagogical approaches acknowledged the fullness of their being. For instance, a teacher reading one-to-one with a child enabled both physical closeness and opportunities to make personal connections to the curricular content. This was in contrast to children independently answering questions on a piece of text to which they could not relate. In order to ensure that children feel connected to curricular content and stimulated by pedagogical approaches, perhaps teachers and children could reflect together on their experiences of teaching and learning. This could afford a more dialogic approach to curriculum and pedagogy thereby increasing the likelihood that knowledge becomes a 'third' in the child-teacher relationship (Stengel, 2004).

The finding that children and teachers experience their relationship with one another as whole, embodied beings means that there is a need to afford space and time in the school day to acknowledge this wholeness. Teachers and children could adopt a 'position of listening' (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003, p. 712) attending not only to the intellectual dimension of teaching and learning but becoming attuned to the body. This can be grounded in simple ways such as reflecting on bodily interactions. For instance, a teacher might note how certain children engage with learning when positioned in particular ways or lessons might be planned to allow for bodily engagement. Teacher and children could jointly plan what approaches might best enable engagement with particular topics. Perhaps a menu of teaching and learning approaches could be used with teachers and children ensuring that a balance of approaches are used across a school day. At a broader level, this finding implies that consideration be given to pedagogical approaches, whole school interventions and initiatives in light of their ability to acknowledge the whole person of the child and teacher. For instance, Roche's (2015) 'Critical Thinking and Book Talk (CT&BT) to which I refer in section 4.2.2.2, focuses on teachers and children making meaning *together* and incorporates dialogical practices. Such a holistic approach to literacy which is 'not for people who want templates and reproducibles and 'truths' about how to teach' (Roche, 2015, p. 3) aligns with the findings of this study.

One way in which the finding that the child-teacher relationship is intertwined or 'knotted' with other relationships could be acknowledged in practice is through opening lines of communication between teachers, children and all those with whom they are relating. This study found that relationships with SNAs were significant both to teachers and children and to the child-teacher relationship. The intertwining of these relationships could be acknowledged through SNAs being included in informal and formal child-teacher conversations and through attending staff meetings and parents' evenings. Similarly, structures for on-going communication between home and school would acknowledge the inter-relatedness of these relationships. Home-school links are generally strong in Early Years settings in Ireland, as advocated by recent curricular developments in those contexts (NCCA, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that these links are no less important as children progress to upper primary. Having structures in place such as a parents' room in the school or an agreed mode of communication with parents (such as writing in journals or

meeting in person on a particular day each week) could help to strengthen relationships in upper primary.

Balancing closeness and distance in practice means affording opportunities for children to feel supported while allowing space for them to develop independence. As Rodgers (2013) found achieving the optimum balance between closeness and distance is one of the most challenging aspects of the child-teacher relationship. Having an awareness of the necessity for a relational space or a 'gap' (Biesta, 2004) could guide teachers' practice. Teachers and children in this study experienced their relationships with one another through certain structures but they also enjoyed the freedom that breaking away from such structures affords. The findings of this study highlight the value of practices traditionally considered 'extra-curricular'. Rather than being an optional extra, practices such as going on school trips were found to strengthen the child-teacher relationship. This finding offers justification to teachers who value such practices and challenges others to re-evaluate the educational merit of such practices.

The findings of this study support the idea that relationships are at the centre of the educational experience. This has implications for the design of initial teacher education programmes. In section 5.8, when considering further research, I propose designing a module on relational pedagogy for pre-service teachers. Such a module would be rooted in practice and provide a forum for critically discussing the place of relationships in teaching and learning. Further, learning from that module could be used to inform the design of a course for practising teachers offered as Continuing Professional Development.

## **5.6 Reflection on Methodological Decisions**

As an early career researcher, the process of undertaking doctoral research has been most fruitful for me. I have genuinely enjoyed the programme. After year two of the Ed. D, a colleague remarked that my enthusiasm would be 'knocked out' of me by the process. Luckily, I did not have that experience. I think that may have been because almost everything I encountered was a first for me. I was in discovery mode. Further, I remained mindful of the fact that undertaking doctoral studies was not only a choice that I had made but a rare privilege. Therefore, feelings of frustration at slower parts of the process were

short lived. The most enjoyable time for me was choosing a methodology and figuring out what methods would generate the richest examples of lived experience. Though initially I seemed to be toying with every methodology and committing to none, I am now grateful for the many folders I have on ethnography, case study and narrative inquiry. These are gems that I can return to any time.

I cannot recall exactly the day I discovered van Manen's phenomenological inquiry approach but an entry in my journal reads: 'this guy van Manen seems interesting. Ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> hand book from book depository'. I remember when I began reading that first book 'Researching Lived Experiences' (van Manen, 1990) and feeling like I wanted to read it all in one sitting. It made sense. He spoke my language.

Many of my participants were fascinated by the methodology. As the initial gatekeeper, the school principal was delighted that some children from her school were involved as co-researchers (see section 3.10.6) and that others were participating in roles as important as the adult participants. She felt that the children's involvement would have a positive impact on their self-esteem. When I was recruiting teachers, one teacher told me that she would happily 'do my questionnaire' and that started us talking about a lived experience approach. She was intrigued particularly at the idea of a conversational interview. Similarly, one child from my research advisory group told another child, who was not part of the group, that I wanted to find out about 'how kids get on with teachers by asking kids and teachers'. This jarred with the advisory group's initial understanding of research which involved lab coats and test tubes.

In lots of ways, lived experience research is the simplest idea in the world and yet I found it a constant challenge to ensure that every methodological decision I made aligned with the approach. Choosing the methods that would best generate rich examples of the lived experience of the child-teacher relationship was a matter of judgement. With each decision, I wondered what could be gained and lost. In chapter three, I include reflections on my use of each method and those reflections informed next steps. Given that this was my first time to use a phenomenological approach, such reflection was absolutely necessary. Reflecting on the completed study has raised questions for me about how successful or unsuccessful particular methods proved. The use of both concept mapping and

the artefacts interview (see section 3.8.8) proved such rich means of generating deep conversations with the teachers that I regret not having had the opportunity to use similar methods with the children. At the point when I introduced these particular visual methods with the teachers, the children had already fulfilled their commitment to me. I would have had to look for additional consent from gatekeepers, parents, teachers and children to include this additional step in the research process. Whilst I was tempted to do so, I felt it would have been unfair on everyone involved. I was also conscious that for most parents and children involved, this was their first time to become involved in a research project. I therefore felt a duty to represent the practice of research as an ethical, reliable and professional endeavour. In any case, I expect that there will be opportunities in the future to try using these visual methods with children.

Overall, I feel that the flexibility and adaptability of phenomenology allowed me to explore many aspects of the teachers' and children's lived experiences of their relationships with one another. I feel that the choosing of this methodological approach was a good match for the research question and offered an opportunity to contribute to existing knowledge in the field.

## **5.7 Contribution to Knowledge**

Frelin (2013) suggests that the relational dimension of education is underestimated in educational discourse and is therefore under-researched. My experience has been that there is ample recognition of the significance of the child-teacher relationship for children's learning but research in the area comes predominantly from a cognitive psychological perspective which focuses mostly on one of the parties in the relationship (see section 3.8). As distinct from studies which investigate the child-teacher relationship using psychometric tools, this study takes a holistic view and presents the lived experiences of both children and teachers. Heretofore the question of how children and teachers experience their relationship with one another has been given little attention in the literature. Inviting children and teachers to describe their experiences with one another has given access to a particular 'lived' form of knowledge. The findings of this study support many theoretical ideas offered at the 'macro level' of relational pedagogy (Aitken et al., 2007). These include a need for space, the significance of previous relational experience for present relationships,

and the interactivity between personal relationships and other social and contextual relations. Perhaps owing to its focus on relational pedagogy at the 'micro level' (Aitken et al., 2007), this study revealed a new contribution to that literature whereby teachers and children suggested that their relationships with one another depended on both structure and freedom from that structure. This study further introduces the idea that in their relationships with one another, children and teachers engage as whole, embodied, feeling beings. This suggests a merging of key ideas from relational pedagogy and embodied teaching and learning meaning that this research makes contributions to those literatures. Whilst each of these literatures highlights how knowledge is experienced relationally (Stengel, 2004) and in an embodied way (Ross, 2004) respectively, this study offers an understanding of knowledge as both relational and embodied.

Through offering an understanding of the child-teacher relationship through the lens of complexity, this study rejects simplistic, mechanistic and functional views of that relationship. Such an understanding further rejects the idea that relationships can be rationalised. The child-teacher relationship within the dominant, neo-liberal ideology can be evaluated in terms of its ability to efficiently meet the needs of the consumer (e.g. parents or industry) and the economy. In other words, it is a means that if proven ineffective could be replaced by a more efficient means. Conversely, a relational, embodied, complex view of education sees the child-teacher relationship as the 'location' of education (Biesta, 2004). The dominant neo-liberal worldview sees knowledge and curriculum as packages to be delivered by teachers and received by children. Children's ability to reproduce such knowledge is measured and compared to other children in other 'economies' (OECD, 2010). A relational, embodied, complex view of education sees knowledge and curriculum as responsive to children and teachers as whole beings. It sees knowledge not as objective, static and detached but as socially-constructed, relational and dynamic. The dominant neoliberal ideology promotes market values such as competition and consumer choice whereas a relational, embodied, complex view promotes an understanding of people as interdependent and connected to one another and the world. Current primary education policies that relate to upper primary contexts and over-simplify the child-teacher relationship need to be challenged and future policy developments will have to acknowledge the holistic, embodied, knotted nature of the child-teacher relationship. This

study contributes to the wider debate about the need to counter the dominant neo-liberal agenda in educational discourse (Burns, 2016).

In considering the audience who might avail of these contributions to knowledge, I am reminded of a time earlier in this Ed. D. process when I was familiarising myself with a lived experience approach. I read many studies outside my field of expertise, mostly in the medical field. Whilst I intended to read just the methodology sections, I found myself curious to read about people's lived experiences of life before and after a cochlear implant (Finlay & Molano-Fisher, 2008) or the experiences of native Americans living with type 2 diabetes (Martin, 2011). I expect that were an 'outsider' curious about the child-teacher relationship in upper primary school, they might find this study similarly interesting. I can imagine several such people: a young person deciding if primary school teaching might be a career of interest; a parent whose child is moving into upper primary school; a government official with responsibility for policy developments at primary level.

However, I anticipate that this contribution will be of most interest to those in the field of relational pedagogy, embodied teaching and learning and complexity. I intend to publish articles for those audiences. I am conscious though that too often research about teaching fails to communicate with those most closely involved because of the inaccessibility of academic journals. I expect that the findings of this study would be of interest to those working in the primary education sector and the teacher education sector in Ireland, in particular. I am encouraged by a recent experience of publishing an article in a peer-review journal and subsequently publishing a shortened version in a professional journal (*InTouch*), a hard copy of which is delivered to almost every primary school teacher in Ireland. The professional publication reached a much wider audience and many teachers made contact with me following its publication. I intend to publish a succinct version of the findings of this study in that same journal. In this way, I hope to make a contribution not only to the academic study of relationships but to professional conversations about those relationships.

Further, this study offers a significant methodological contribution particularly in relation to two areas. The first is in the use of visual methods both generally and specifically in phenomenological studies. The second area concerns conducting phenomenological research with children. Harrison et al. (2007) were among the first to use visual methods in

the context of the child-teacher relationship. They refer to using both 'direct' and 'indirect' procedures, namely interviewing and children's drawings respectively, to elicit children's perspectives on their relationship with their teacher. This study used photographs of children's embodied work as a stimulus for an interview (see section 3.8.3) thus integrating the two rather than perceiving these as 'direct' and 'indirect' procedures to be dealt with separately. The integration of the visual and verbal may be of interest to those researching the child-teacher relationship in the future.

At the time of choosing data generation methods, I found little available literature on using visual methods in phenomenological inquiry. This was rather surprising given that the prominent phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty (1964) extolled the virtues of visual and artistic methods for describing experience and grasping essential meanings. A reflection on the use of visual methods in this study is offered in section 3.8.8.1. Reading this study and seeing the richness of data that emerged from using visual methods might encourage future phenomenological researchers to do likewise.

Similarly, when searching for advice about conducting phenomenological inquiry with children, I found few empirical studies. In considering phenomenological approaches to research with children, Danaher and Briod (2005) clearly explicate the differences between descriptive and interpretative phenomenological approaches. They further comprehensively address the issue of validity and describe how themes can be identified in data and subsequently analysed. They also convincingly argue that phenomenological approaches to research with children offer a deepened sense of children's life-worlds. Their work therefore offers sound theoretical support to researchers considering the use of phenomenology with children. However, literature concerning the practical implementation of a phenomenological approach is scant. For future researchers considering a phenomenological approach with children, this study has much to offer both with respect to that which proved fruitful and that which proved problematic (see section 3.8.4.1)

## **5.8 Further Research**

The Irish Primary School Curriculum is currently being redesigned and a new curriculum is expected in the next two to five years. Given both Biesta's (2004) assertion that education is



located in relationships and the findings of this study which highlight the embodied nature of education, I am interested in examining to what extent personal relationships, relational pedagogy and embodiment will feature in that new curriculum. In keeping with past trends, it is likely that the curriculum will be written in draft format and a public consultative process undertaken before a final document is published. I intend to examine the draft format and engage in the consultative process. I will draw on the findings of this study to inform my reading of the draft curriculum. In this way, I hope that I can ensure that the relational, embodied dimension of education remains part of future discourse in primary education in Ireland.

In my current role as a teacher educator, I have an opportunity to address a recognised gap concerning the relational dimension of education. Students in their fourth year of the Bachelor of Education programme undertake optional modules. These modules take place at the same time as their longest school placement (ten weeks). Rather than offering a didactic module which offers a 'how to' approach, I hope to design a fourth year module which recognises the complexity of the relational dimension of education. I could draw on the work of Romano (2004) who developed a programme to make relations more visible to beginning teachers. Student teachers on the proposed module would reflect on their emerging relationships with the children in their classes. The design and implementation of this module would form the basis of a research project wherein student teachers' learning journeys would be the primary data source. Such a project would build on the findings of this study. Students' reflections on their emerging relationships may offer further insight into the nature of those relationships. Furthermore, learning from the initial teacher education module could be used to inform the design of a course for practicing teachers. On such a course, which I could offer through the summer course Continuing Professional Development (CPD) structure, teachers could reflect on the relational elements of their existing practice and inquire into how the relational dimension could be enhanced.

The richness of data that emerged from the lived experience approach in this study has encouraged me to think about ways in which this approach could be used in future studies. I recently co-researched student teachers' perceptions of giving and receiving peer feedback. Data sources were limited to open-ended questions as part of an end of module questionnaire. I would like to conduct a deeper inquiry into the experience of giving and

receiving peer feedback through employing a 'lived experience' approach. Giving and receiving feedback on one another's teaching could be seen as sound professional practice. It would be interesting to find out how a first year student in their first semester experiences this move towards becoming a professional practitioner.

In a similar way to the positive outcomes of my use of a lived experience approach, devising the artefacts interview or 'three things interview' (as the teachers renamed it) proved a fruitful research method. I had hoped that in a similar way to the photos in the photo elicitation interviews with the children, it would serve as a joint referent (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p. 148). It did this and more, allowing, as I described in section 5.5, participants to take the conversation to new depths. I am interested in exploring this method in greater detail and perhaps writing about my experiences of using it as compared to a 'talk-only interview' (Tinkler, 2015).

Further, encouraged by the way in which the photo-elicitation method with the children created a more relaxed atmosphere and provided access to topics which may otherwise not have emerged, I would be curious about the outcomes of an artefacts interview on the topic of children's experiences of relationships with their teachers. I would take inspiration from the Christian Boltanski exhibition (1998) at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) which exhibits photographs of Chicago schoolchildren's favourite things of their lifetime wherein each child chose just one thing. I can see potential in such an approach for researching children's experiences of their relationship with their teacher. The things themselves would be interesting to analyse as would conversations about their significance in the context of their relationships with their teachers.

### **5.9 Concluding Comment**

This study was designed to explore how teachers and children in upper primary school contexts experience their relationships with one another. The findings find resonance with many other studies that highlight the significance of this relationship for both teachers and children. This study emphasises a need for this relationship to feature as a key consideration in all phases of primary schooling, not solely in Early Years contexts. Previous studies of this relationship have largely been confined to the cognitive psychological domain. The

phenomenological approach adopted in this study offers new insights into, and a new perspective on the child-teacher relationship in three principle ways. Firstly, it suggests that teachers and children relate to one another as whole, embodied, feeling beings complete with their previous relational experiences. Secondly, it argues that there is a tension between the need for both 'closeness' and 'distance' for the successful functioning of the child-teacher relationship. Further, it contends that the child-teacher relationship is experienced through certain 'structures' that strengthen the relationship but 'freedom' from those structures also play a role in supporting the relationship. Finally, the child-teacher relationship was found to be 'knotted' or interconnected with other social and contextual relationships. Such a conceptualisation highlights the need to recognise the child-teacher relationship as a 'complex' phenomenon which cannot be reduced or simplified. The three overarching themes that have emerged from this phenomenological inquiry call for the embodied, relational and complex dimensions of education to feature more prominently in educational discourse and in practice.

## REFERENCES

- Aitken, V., Fraser, D., & Price, G. (2007). Negotiating the spaces: Relational pedagogy and power in drama teaching. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 8(14), 1-18.
- Alexander, R. (Ed.). (2010). *Children, their world, their education: Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Allison-Roan, V., & Hayes, M. (2012). To be heard, to be seen, to matter: Consequences of/for self in utilizing one's narrative. *Studying Teacher Education*, 8(2), 127-141.
- Aspelin, J. (2011). Co-existence and co-operation: the two-dimensional conception of education. *Education* 1(1), 1-10.
- Bae, B. (2012). Children and teachers as partners in communication: Focus on spacious and narrow interactional patterns. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 44(1), 53-69.
- Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: the use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, 9(5), 547-570. doi: 10.1177/1468794109343625
- Ball, D. L., Sleep, L., Boerst, T., & Bass, H. (2009). Combining the development of practice and the practice of development in teacher education. *Elementary School Journal*, 109(5), 458-547.
- Ball, S. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Ball, S. J. (2008). *The education debate: policy and politics in the twenty-first century*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Batram, A. (1999). *Navigating complexity*. London, UK: The Industrial Society.
- Belanger, N., & Connelly, C. (2007). Methodological considerations in child-centered research about social difference and children experiencing difficulties at school. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(1), 21-38.
- Bergum, V. (2003). Relational pedagogy. Embodiment, improvisation, and interdependence. *Nursing Philosophy*, 4(2), 121-128.
- Biesta, G. (2004). Mind the gap! Communication and the educational relation. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 11-22). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- Biesta, G. (2012). No education without hesitation: Thinking differently about educational relations. In C. W. Ruitenberg (Ed.), *Philosophy of education 2012* (pp. 1-13). Urbana-Champaign, IL: Philosophy of Education Society.
- Biesta, G. (2013). Giving teaching back to education. Responding to the disappearance of the teacher. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 6(2), 35-49.
- Bigger, S. (2011). *Self and others: relational pedagogy for critical pupil engagement*. Paper presented at the Swindon Philosophical Society, Swindon, UK.
- Bingham, C. (2011). Two educational ideas for 2011 and beyond. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 30(5), 513-519.
- Bingham, C., & Sidorkin, A. (Eds.). (2004). *No education without relation*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Bingham, C., Sidorkin, A., Biesta, G., Margonis, F., Hutchinson, J., Lyon McDaniel, B., Thayer-Bacon, B. (2004). Manifesto of relational pedagogy: Meeting to learn. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 5-8). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., & Brown, P. (2011). Examining the effect of class size on classroom engagement and teacher-pupil interaction: Differences in relation to pupil prior attainment and primary vs. secondary schools. *JLI Learning and Instruction*, 21(6), 715-730.
- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and non-actors*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Boyd, R., MacNeill, N., & Sullivan, G. (2006). Relational pedagogy: putting balance back into students' learning. *Curriculum and Leadership Journal*, 4(13). Retrieved from [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/relational\\_pedagogy:\\_putting\\_balance\\_back\\_into\\_stu,13944.html](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/relational_pedagogy:_putting_balance_back_into_stu,13944.html)
- Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S., & Irvine, F. (2009). The phenomenological focus group: an oxymoron? *JAN Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65(3), 663-671.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1-21.

- Buber, M. (1937). *Ich und du*. (R. G. Smith, Trans.). Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark.
- Buber, M. (1947). *Between man and man*. (R. G. Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bullington, J. (2013). The lived body. In J. Bullington (Ed.), *The expression of the psychosomatic body from a phenomenological perspective* (pp. 19-37). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Burch, R. (1990). Phenomenology, lived experience, taking a measure of the topic. *Phenomenology & Pedagogy*, 8, 130-160.
- Burns, G. (2016). Relationships of surveillance, assurance and recognition: early career primary teachers' engagement with discourses of accountability and performance. *Irish Educational Studies*. doi: 10.1080/03323315.2016.1175368.
- Carman, T. (2013). The question of being. In M. A. Wrathall (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Central Statistics Office. (2012). *Survey on income and living conditions (SILC), 2010*. Dublin, Ireland: Author.
- Chan, D. (2014, February 25). The human connection in a digital world, *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-chan/the-human-connection-in-a-digital-world\\_b\\_4855478.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-chan/the-human-connection-in-a-digital-world_b_4855478.html)
- Chappell, K., & Craft, A. (2011). Creative learning conversations: producing living dialogic spaces. *Educational Research*, 53(3), 363-385.
- Childhood Development Initiative. (2014). *A community-wide restorative practices programme: Implementation guide*. Dublin, Ireland: Author.
- Children's Research Centre. (2006). *Children's Research Centre - Ethical guidelines*. Dublin, Ireland: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/assets/pdf/CRC\\_Ethical\\_Doc.pdf](https://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/assets/pdf/CRC_Ethical_Doc.pdf)
- Churchill, S. D., Lowery, J. E., McNally, O., & Rao, A. (1998). The question of reliability in interpretive psychological research: a comparison of three phenomenologically based protocol analyses. In R. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 63-86). New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Clough, P., & Nutbrown, C. (2008). *A student's guide to methodology*. London, UK: Sage.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Connell, J. P., & Wellborn, J. G. (1991). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness: A motivational analysis of self-system processes. In R. Gunnar & L. A. Sroufe (Eds.), *Self processes in development: Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology* (Vol. 23, pp. 43-77). Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Coolahan, J. (2011). Address given at the launch of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, Dublin, Ireland. Retrieved from <https://education.ie/en/Press-Events/Speeches/2011-Speeches/SP11-04-19A.html>
- Cramp, A. (2008). Knowing me knowing you: building valuable relationships outside the classroom. *Education 3-13*, 36(2), 171-182.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cromby, J. (2015). *Feeling bodies: embodying psychology*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cruddas, L. (2007). Engaged voices - dialogic interaction and the construction of shared social meanings. *Educational Action Research*, 15(3), 479-488.
- Dahlberg, K., Dahlberg, H., & Nyström, M. (2008). *Reflective lifeworld research*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Dahlberg, K. (2010). The essence of essences / the search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 1(1), 11-19.
- Danaher, T., & Briod, M. (2005). Phenomenological approaches to research with children. In S. Greene & H. Diane (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: Approaches and Methods*. London, UK: Sage.
- Davis, B., & Sumara, D. (2008). Complexity as a theory of education. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 5(2), 33-44.
- Davis, B., & Sumara, D. (2012). Fitting teacher education in/to/for an increasingly complex world. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 9(1), 30-40.
- Davis, H. (2003). Conceptualizing the role and influence of student-teacher relationships on children's social and cognitive development. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(4), 207-234.
- Davis, H. A. (2001). The quality and impact of relationships between elementary school students and teachers. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 26(4), 431-453.

- Delaney, S. (Producer). (2015, March 18). *Programme 209, Frank Furedi pt 1*. [Audio Podcast]. Retrieved from <http://insideeducation.podbean.com/e/programme-209-frank-furedi-pt-1-18-3-15/>
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2011). *Children first: National guidance for the protection and welfare of children*. Dublin, Ireland: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/Publications/ChildrenFirst.pdf>
- Department of Education and Skills. (1999). *The primary school curriculum*. Dublin, Ireland: The Stationary Office.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2005). *DEIS (Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools): An action plan for educational inclusion*. Dublin, Ireland: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/deis\\_action\\_plan\\_on\\_educational\\_inclusion.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/deis_action_plan_on_educational_inclusion.pdf)
- Department of Education and Skills. (2006). *School matters: The report of the task force on student behaviour in second level schools*. Dublin, Ireland: Author.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and for life*. Dublin, Ireland: The Stationary Office.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2013). *Report on the surveys regarding parental preferences on primary school patronage*. Dublin, Ireland: Author.
- Devine, D. (2002). Children's citizenship and the structuring of adult-child relations in the primary school. *Childhood, 9*(3), 303-320.
- Devine, D. (2015, April 7). The traits that make a 'good' teacher, *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-traits-that-make-a-good-teacher-1.2156118>
- Devine, D., Fahie, D., & McGillicuddy, D. (2013). What is "good" teaching? Teacher beliefs and practices about their teaching. *Irish Educational Studies, 32*(1), 83-108.
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2009). Readiness for school: A relational construct. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 34*(1), 20-26.
- Doda, N. (2011). *Trust: The key to leading a learning school*. Retrieved from [www.nassp.org/tabid/3788/default.aspx?topic=Trust\\_the\\_key\\_to\\_Leading\\_a\\_learning\\_school](http://www.nassp.org/tabid/3788/default.aspx?topic=Trust_the_key_to_Leading_a_learning_school)
- Doda, N., & Knowles, T. (2008). Listening to the voices of young adolescents. *Middle School Journal, 39*(3), 26-33.



- Downes, P. (2003). The new curriculum of social, personal and health education in Irish primary schools. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny*, 190(4), 93-112.
- Driscoll, K., & Pianta, R. (2010). Banking Time in Head Start: Early efficacy of an intervention designed to promote supportive teacher-child relationships. *Early Education and Development*, 21(1), 38-64.
- Dunn, D. (2011). *How to be an outstanding primary school teacher*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Edwards, C., Forman, G., & Gandini, L. (Eds.). (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43(1), 13-35.
- Estola, E., & Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2003). Teaching bodies at work. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 35(6), 697-719.
- Fenwick, T. (2012). Complexity science and professional learning for collaboration: a critical reconsideration of possibilities and limitations. *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(1), 141-162.
- Fielding, M. (2012). Beyond student voice: Patterns of partnership and the demands of deep democracy. *Revista de Educación*, 359, 45-65.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209-230.
- Finlay, L. (2008). The body's disclosure in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(1), 19-31.
- Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists: researching the lived world*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Finlay, L. (2012). Debating phenomenological research methods. In N. Friesen, C. Henriksson, & T. Saevi (Eds.), *Hermeneutic phenomenology in education. Method and practice* (pp. 17-38). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.
- Finlay, L. (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53(2), 172-201.
- Finlay, L. (2014). *Writing up and evaluating phenomenological findings*. Retrieved from <http://lindafinlay.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Writing-up-and-evaluating-phenomenological-findings.pdf>

- Finlay, L., & Molano-Fisher, P. (2008). Transforming self and world: a phenomenological study of a changing lifeworld following a cochlear implant. *Medical Healthcare Philosophy, 11*(3), 255-267.
- Fitzpatrick, N., & Finlay, L. (2008). 'Frustrating disability': the lived experience of coping with the rehabilitation phase following flexor tendon surgery. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 3*(3), 143-154.
- Frawley, D., McCoy, S., Banks, J., & Thornton, M. (2014). Affective school engagement and self-concept: How are Irish boys and girls faring? *Child Indicators Research, 7*(4), 843-859. doi: 10.1007/s12187-014-9247-5
- Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Frelin, A. (2013). *Exploring relational professionalism in schools*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.
- Fumoto, H. (2011). Teacher-child relations and early childhood practice. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 31*(1), 19-30.
- Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 21*(6), 1016-1024.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1989). *Truth and method*. London, UK: Sheed and Ward.
- Gallacher, L-A., & Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through 'participatory methods'. *Childhood, 15*(4), 499-516. doi: 10.1177/0907568208091672
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- George, V. A. (1998). *Authentic human destiny: the paths of Shankara and Heidegger*. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Giesecke, H. (1987). *Pädagogik als Beruf: Grundformen pädagogischen Handelns*. Weinheim, Germany: Juventa.
- Gilbert, J. (2013). The pedagogy of the body: Affect and collective individuation in the classroom and on the dancefloor. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 45*(6), 681-692.

- Giorgi, A. (2008). Concerning a serious misunderstanding of the essence of the phenomenological method in psychology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 39*(1), 33-58.
- Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: a modified Husserlian approach*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Gleeson, J. (2010). *Curriculum in context: praxis, partnership and power*. Oxford, UK: Peter Lang.
- Goodman, J. (2009). Respect-due and respect-earned: negotiating student-teacher relationships. *Ethics and Education, 4*(1), 3-17.
- Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (2005). *Researching children's experience. Methods and approaches*. London, UK: Sage.
- Greenstein, A. (2014). Today's learning objective is to have a party: playing research with students in a secondary school special needs unit. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 14*(2), 71-81.
- Gregoriadis, A., & Grammatikopoulos, V. (2014). Teacher-child relationship quality in early childhood education: The importance of relationship patterns. *Early Child Development and Care, 184*(3), 386-402.
- Grossman, P., Hammerness, K., & McDonald, M. (2009). Redefining teaching, re-imagining teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 15*(2), 273-289.
- Guimond-Plourde, R. (2009). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understanding stress-coping as an existential phenomenon lived by healthy adolescents. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology, 9*(2), 1-13.
- Hansen, F. T. (2010). The phenomenology of wonder in higher education. In M. Brinkmann (Ed.), *Erziehung: Phanomenologische Perspektiven* (pp. 161-177). Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Hargreaves, A. (1998). *International handbook of educational change*. Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.
- Harrison, L. J., Clarke, L., & Ungerer, J. A. (2007). Children's drawings provide a new perspective on teacher-child relationship quality and school adjustment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 22*(1), 55-71.
- Healy, I. M. (2012). *Rethinking postnatal care: A Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological study of postnatal care in Ireland*. Preston, UK: University of

- Central Lancashire. Retrieved from [http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/6654/1/Healy%20Maria%20Final%20e-Thesis%20\(Master%20Copy\).pdf](http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/6654/1/Healy%20Maria%20Final%20e-Thesis%20(Master%20Copy).pdf)
- Healy, M. (2006). *Women's experiences of postnatal care: A meta-synthesis*. Paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Normal Labour and Birth Conference, Grange-over-Sands, UK.
- Hederman, M-P. (2012). *The boy in the bubble: education as personal relationship*. Dublin, Ireland: Veritas.
- Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hill, M. (2005). Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: approaches and methods* (pp. 61-86). London, UK: Sage.
- Hilliard, F. H. (1973). A re-examination of Buber's address on education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 21(1), 40-49.
- Hirschhorn, M. (2009). Student-teacher relationships and teacher induction: Ben's story. *Teacher Development*, 13(3), 205-217. doi: 10.1080/13664530903335566
- Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G., & James, D. (2008). Understanding learning culturally: Overcoming the dualism between social and individual views of learning. *Vocations and Learning*, 1(1), 27-47.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hughes, J. N., Gleason, K. A., & Zhang, D. (2005). Relationship influences on teachers' perceptions of academic competence in academically at-risk minority and majority first grade students. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43(4), 303-320.
- Hutchinson, J. (2004). Democracy needs strangers, and we are them. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 73-90). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Hyde, B. (2005). Beyond logic – entering the realm of mystery: hermeneutic phenomenology as a tool for reflecting on children's spirituality. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 10(1), 31-44.
- International Institute for Restorative Practices. (2012). *What is restorative practices?* Retrieved from <http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php>

- Kakkori, L. (2010). Hermeneutics and phenomenology problems when applying hermeneutic phenomenological method in educational qualitative research. *Paideusis*, 18(2), 19-28.
- Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R., & Pessach, L. (2009). Power relations in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(2), 279-289.
- Katz-Buonincontro, J., & Phillips, J. C. (2011). Art, its creation and leadership [can be] revealing and frightening: how school leaders learn to frame and solve problems through the arts. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 14(3), 269-291.
- Kellett, M. (2010). Small shoes, big steps! Empowering children as active researchers. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1-2), 195-203.
- Koomen, H. M. Y., Verschueren, K., & Thijs, J. T. (2006). Assessing aspects of the teacher-child relationship: A critical ingredient of a practice-oriented psycho-diagnostic approach. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23(3), 50-60.
- Krol, M., Sixma, H., Meerdink, J., Wiersma, H., & Rademakers, J. (2014). Exploring young patients' perspectives on rehabilitation care: methods and challenges of organizing focus groups for children and adolescents. *Child: Care Health & Development*, 40(4), 507-514.
- Kuhn, L. (2008). Complexity and educational research: A critical reflection. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(1), 177-189. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2007.00398.x
- Lalor, J. (2013). *Educate Together: An inclusive response to the needs of a pluralist Ireland?* Dublin, Ireland: Dublin City University. Retrieved from [http://doras.dcu.ie/17717/1/final\\_pdf\\_for\\_printing.pdf](http://doras.dcu.ie/17717/1/final_pdf_for_printing.pdf)
- Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), 21-35. doi: 10.1177/160940690300200303
- Lilja, A. (2013). Body, space and time - and their influences on trustful relationships in the classroom [special issue]. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 13, 1-10.
- Lillis, D., & Morgan, J. (2012). Irish education and the financial crisis. *Weiterbildung*, 4. Retrieved from <http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=scschcomart>

- Lundy, L., McEvoy, L., & Byrne, B. (2011). Working with young children as co-researchers: An approach informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Early Education and Development, 22*(5), 714-736.
- Lussier-Ley, C. (2010). Dialoguing with body: A self study in relational pedagogy through embodiment and the therapeutic relationship. *Qualitative Report, 15*(1), 197-214.
- Lynch, K. (2012). On the market: neoliberalism and new managerialism in Irish education. *Social Justice Series, 12*(5). Dublin: UCD School of Social Justice
- Lynch, K., Grummell, B., & Devine, D. (2012). *New managerialism in education: commercialization, carelessness and gender*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacPiaráis, P. (1916). *The murder machine*. Dublin, Ireland: Whelan.
- Macintyre Latta, M. A., & Field, J. C. (2005). The flight from experience to representation: Seeing relational complexity in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(6), 649-660.
- Macintyre Latta, M., & Buck, G. (2008). Enfleshing embodiment: 'Falling into trust' with the body's role in teaching and learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 40*(2), 315-329.
- Macready, T. (2009). Learning social responsibility in schools: a restorative practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(3), 211-220.
- Maddrell, A. M. C. (1994). A scheme for the effective use of role plays for an emancipatory geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 18*(2), 155-162. doi: 10.1080/03098269408709251
- Magrini, J. (2012). Phenomenology for educators: Max van Manen and 'human science' research. *Philosophy Scholarship* (Paper 32). Retrieved from <http://dc.cod.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=philosophypub>
- Margonis, F. (2004). From student resistance to educative engagement: A case study in building powerful student-teacher relationships. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 39-54). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research? A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *Journal of Computer Information Systems, 54*(1), 11-22. doi: 10.1080/08874417.2013.11645667

- Martin, L. (2011). *The lived experience of type 2 diabetes in urban-based American Indian adolescents*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/109831>
- Masson, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Researching children's perspectives: Legal issues*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Mayo, C. (2004). Relations are difficult. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 121-136). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- McNamara, C. (2009). *General guidelines for conducting interviews*. Retrieved from <http://managementhelp.org/evaluatn/intrview.html>
- McWilliams, E. (1996). Touchy subjects: A risky inquiry into pedagogical pleasures. *British Educational Research Journal*, 22(3), 305-317.
- Mehta, N. (2011). Mind-body dualism: A critique from a health perspective. *Mens Sana Monographs*, 9(1), 202-209. doi: 10.4103/0973-1229.77436
- Mendes-Flohr, P. (2003). Die Gesellschaft: An early transdisciplinary project. In C. Camic & H. Joas (Eds.), *The dialogical turn: new roles for sociology in the postdisciplinary age* (pp. 105-114). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge.
- Miller, C., Veletsianos, G., & Doering, A. (2008). Curriculum at forty below: a phenomenological inquiry of an educator/explorer's experience with adventure learning in the Arctic. *Distance Education*, 29(3), 253-267.
- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Mitchell, C. (2011). *Doing visual research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Moje, E. (2000). Changing our minds, changing our bodies: Power as embodied in research relations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(1), 25-42.
- Morçöl, G. (2013). *A complexity theory for public policy*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Morgan, M. (2014). *Stages in educational/cognitive development: Current status and implications*. Dublin, Ireland: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Morrison, K. (2002). *School leadership and complexity theory*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.

- Morrison, K. (2006). *Complexity theory and education*. Paper presented at the APERA Conference, Hong Kong, China.
- Murray, N. (2014, April 24). Primary teachers seek reduction in the sizes of classes, *Irish Examiner*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/primary-teachers-look-for-reduction-in-the-size-of-classes-266363.html>
- Myers, S. S., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Developmental commentary: Individual and contextual influences on student-teacher relationships and children's early problem behaviors. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 37*(3), 600-608. doi: 10.1080/15374410802148160
- Nairn, A., & Clarke, B. (2012). Researching children: are we getting it right? A discussion of ethics. *International Journal of Market Research, 54*(2), 2-17.
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships* (Working paper No. 1). Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/wp1](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/wp1)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework*. Dublin, Ireland: Author.
- Nicholson, H. (1999). Research as confession. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 4*(1), 100-103.
- Noddings, N. (1998). *Philosophy of education*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Nohl, H. (1982). *Die pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland und ihre theorie*. Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann.
- Norris, J. (2000). Drama as research: realizing the potential of drama in education as a research methodology. *Youth Theatre Journal, 14*(1), 40-51.
- Ó Breacháin, A., & O'Toole, L. (2013). Pedagogy or politics? Cyclical trends in literacy and numeracy in Ireland and beyond. *Irish Educational Studies, 32*(4), 401-419. doi: 10.1080/03323315.2013.851441
- O'Brien, M. (2004). *Making the move: Students', teachers' and parents' perspectives of transfer from first to second-level schooling*. Dublin, Ireland: Marino Institute of Education.
- O'Brien, M. (2008). *Primary school transitions and post-modernity: student well-being and equality*. Paper presented at the Irish National Teachers Organisation Consultative



- Conference on Transitions in the Primary School, Dublin, Ireland. Retrieved from <http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TransitionsPrimarySchool.pdf>
- O'Brien, M. (2014). Leaping ahead of Heidegger: Subjectivity and intersubjectivity in Being and Time. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 22(4), 534-551, doi: 10.1080/09672559.2014.948719
- O'Connor, E. (2010). Teacher-child relationships as dynamic systems. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48(3), 187-218.
- O'Connor, E., & McCartney, K. (2006). Testing associations between young children's relationships with mothers and teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 87-98.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *PISA 2009 results: Executive summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf>
- O'Grady, E. (2011). The importance of respect in teaching and learning: perspectives of final year pre-service teachers in a regional university in Ireland. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(4), 501-518.
- O'Grady, E. (2015). Establishing respectful educative relationships: a study of newly qualified teachers in Ireland. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(2), 167-185. doi: 10.1080/0305764x.2014.930415
- O' Sullivan, C. (2011). Role-playing. In L. Cohen, L. Manion, & K. Morrison (Eds.), *Research Methods in Education* (7th ed., pp. 510-527). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). Sampling designs in qualitative research: Making the sampling process more public. *Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 238-254.
- Osberg, D., Biesta, G., & Cilliers, P. (2008). From representation to emergence: Complexity's challenge to the epistemology of schooling. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 40(1), 213-227. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2007.00407.x
- Palmer, P. (1990). Good teaching: A matter of living the mystery. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 22(1), 11-16.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Palmer, P. (2014). An interview with Parker Palmer: Community and education interview series. Retrieved from <http://www.educationrevolution.org/store/interviewseries-parkerpalmer/>
- Palsdottir, A., Asgeirsdottir, B., & Sigfusdottir, I. (2012). Gender difference in wellbeing during school lessons among 10-12-year-old children: The importance of school subjects and student–teacher relationships. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 40*(7), 605-613.
- Pascal, J. (2010). Phenomenology as a research method for social work contexts: A case study of cancer survival. *Currents: New Scholarship in Human Services, 9*(2), 1-23.
- Pascal, J., Johnson, N. E., Dore, C., & Trainor, R. (2011). The lived experience of doing phenomenology: Perspectives from beginning health science postgraduate researchers. *Qualitative Social Work, 10*(2), 172-189.
- Peters, M. (2004). Education and the philosophy of the body: bodies of knowledge and knowledges of the body. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: towards embodied teaching and learning* (pp. 13-28). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Phillippo, K. (2012). “You’re trying to know me”: Students from nondominant groups respond to teacher personalism. *The Urban Review, 44*(4), 441-467.
- Pianta, R. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Pianta, R. C., & Steinberg, M. (1992). Teacher-child relationships and the process of adjusting to school. *New Directions for Child Development, 57*(57), 61-80.
- Pianta, R. C., & Walsh, D. J. (1996). *High-risk children in schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B., & Stuhlman, M. (2003). Relationships between teachers and children. In W. Reynolds & G. Miller (Eds.), *Coprehensive handbook of psychology* (Vol. 7, pp. 199-234). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences*. Albany, NY: Suny Press.
- Prescott, F. J. (2011). Validating a long qualitative interview schedule. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy, 5*, 16-38.
- Qualifax. (2014). *Comparing UK and Irish qualifications*. Retrieved from [http://www.qualifax.ie/menu\\_material/Qualifications/Comparison%20with%20UK%20awards%20141206.htm](http://www.qualifax.ie/menu_material/Qualifications/Comparison%20with%20UK%20awards%20141206.htm)

- Raufelder, D., Bukowski, W. M., & Mohr, S. (2013). Thick description of the teacher-student relationship in the educational context of school: Results of an ethnographic field study. *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 1(2), 1-18.
- Reuther, B. T. (2013). On our everyday being: Heidegger and attachment theory. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. doi:10.1037/a0033040
- Rhodes, J., & Smith, J. A. (2010). "The top of my head came off": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experience of depression. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 23(4), 399-409. doi: 10.1080/09515070.2010.530484
- Riggins, S. (Ed.). (1994). *Fieldwork in the living room: an autoethnographic essay*. Berlin, Germany: Moutin de Gruyter.
- Riley, K., & Docking, J. (2004). Voices of disaffected pupils: implications for policy and practice. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 52(2), 166-179.
- Riley, P. (2009). An adult attachment perspective on the student-teacher relationship and classroom management difficulties. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(5), 626-635.
- Riley, P. (2011). *Attachment theory and the teacher-student relationship: A practical guide for teachers, teacher educators and school leaders*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Robbins, B. (Ed.). (2006). *An empirical, phenomenological study-7: Being joyful*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Robertson, J. (2006). "If you know our names it helps!" Students' perspectives about "good" teaching. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(4), 756-768.
- Roche, M. (2015). *Developing children's critical thinking through picturebooks: a guide for primary and early years students and teachers*.
- Rogers, C. R. (1967). *On becoming a person. A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London, UK: Constable.
- Rodgers, G. (2013). The lived experience of being gay. *Inside Out*, 69. Retrieved from <http://iahip.org/inside-out/issue-69-spring-2013/the-lived-experience-of-being-gay>
- Rodgers, S. (2013). Give me space: The importance of distance for relation in education. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 6(3), 1-12.
- Romano, R. (2004). Reading relations. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 153-164). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- Ross, J. (2004). The instructable body: student bodies from classrooms to prisons. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: towards embodied teaching and learning* (pp. 169-182). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Sabol, T. J., & Pianta, R. C. (2012). Recent trends in research on teacher-child relationships. *Attachment & Human Development, 14*(3), 213-231.
- Saevi, T. (2014). *Phenomenology in educational research*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0042.xml>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London, UK: Sage.
- Sandelowski, M. (2002). Reembodying qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(1), 104-115
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Scott, S. (2014). Martin Buber. *Internet encyclopaedia of philosophy: a peer-reviewed academic resource*. Retrieved from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber/>
- Sharkey, P. (Ed.). (2001). *Hermeneutic phenomenology*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT.
- Sidorkin, A. (2002). *Learning relations: Impure education, deschooled schools, and dialogue with evil*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Sidorkin, A. M. (2000). Toward a pedagogy of relation. *Philosophical Studies in Education, 32*, 9-14.
- Skidmore, D., Perez-Parent, M., & Arnfield, S. (2003). Teacher-pupil dialogue in the guided reading session. *Reading, 37*(2), 47-53.
- Smith, J. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*(1), 39-54.
- Smyth, E., & Banks, J. (2012). High stakes testing and student perspectives on teaching and learning in the Republic of Ireland. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 24*(4), 283-306.
- Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Thijs, J. T., & van der Leij, A. (2012). Supporting teachers' relationships with disruptive children: the potential of relationship-focused

- reflection. *Attachment & Human Development*, 14(3), 305-318. doi: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672286
- Stengel, B. (2004). Knowing is response-able relation. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 139-152). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Stipek, D. (2002). At what age should children enter kindergarten? A question for policy makers and parents. *Society for Research in Child Development Social Policy Report*, 16(2), 3-16.
- Stolz, S. A. (2015). Embodied learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(5), 474-487.
- Strauss, J., & Corbin, A. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London, UK: Sage.
- Thayer-Bacon, B. (2004). Personal and social relations in education. In C. Bingham & A. Sidorkin (Eds.), *No education without relation* (pp. 165-180). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Thayer-Bacon, B. (2008). Democracies-always-in-the-making: Maxine Greene's influence. *Educational Studies*, 44(3), 256-269.
- The Teaching Council of Ireland. (2012). *The code of professional conduct for teachers*. Retrieved from <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Professional-Standards/Code-of-Professional-Conduct>
- Tinkler, P. (2015). *Talking about photos: how does photo elicitation work and how can we use it productively in research*. Paper presented at the Atlas TI Webinar, University of Alberta, Canada.
- Tisdall, E. K. M., & Punch, S. (2012). Not so 'new'? *Children's Geographies*, 10(3), 249-264. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2012.693376
- Tobin, J. (2004). The disappearance of the body in early childhood education. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning* (pp. 111-126). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Tomkins, L., & Eatough, V. (2010). Towards an integrative reflexivity in organisational research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 5(2), 162-181.
- Tomkins, L., & Simpson, P. (2015). Caring leadership: A Heideggerian perspective. *Organization Studies*, 36(8), 1013-1031.

- Trainor, A., & Bouchard, K. (2013). Exploring and developing reciprocity in research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(8), 986-1003.
- Trochim, W. (2006). The interview. *Research Methods Knowledge Base*. Retrieved from [www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/interview.php](http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/interview.php)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (1996). *What makes a good teacher?* Paris: Author.
- United Nations (1989). *United Nations convention on the rights of the child*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- van Maele, D., & van Houtte, M. (2011). The quality of school life: Teacher-student trust relationships and the organizational school context. *Social Indicators Research*, 100(1), 85-100. doi: 10.1007/s11205-010-9605-8
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (1994). Pedagogy, virtue and narrative identity in teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 24(2), 135-170.
- van Manen, M. (2006). Writing qualitatively, or the demands of writing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(5), 713-722.
- van Manen, M. (2007). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), 11-30.
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Veletsianos, G., Doering, A., & Henrickson, J. (2012). Field-based professional development of teachers engaged in distance education: experiences from the Arctic. *Distance Education*, 33(1), 45-59.
- Verschueren, K., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2012). Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective. *Attachment & Human Development*, 14(3), 205-211. doi: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672260
- Watson, S. L. (2011). Somebody's gotta fight for them: A disadvantaged and marginalized alternative school's learner-centered culture of learning. *Urban Education*, 46(6), 1496-1525. doi: 10.1177/0042085911413148
- Weikart, D. (2000). *Early childhood education: Needs and opportunity*. Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

- Westcott, H. L., & Littleton, K. S. (2005). Exploring meaning in interviews with children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experiences: Approaches and methods* (pp. 141-157). London: Sage.
- Wigginton, E. (1986). *Sometimes a shining moment: The foxfire experience*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Wrathall, M. A., & Murphey, M. (2013). An overview of Being and Time. In M. A. Wrathall (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger's Being and Time* (pp. 1-53). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Yates, L., & Holt, B. (2009). "Under pressure I fall back to being a teacher..." Confronting contending desires for schooling and teaching in a middle school reform project. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 36(1), 27-42.
- Zahavi, D. (2001). Beyond empathy. Phenomenological approaches to intersubjectivity. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(5/7), 151-167.
- Zee, M., Koomen, H. M. Y., & van der Veen, I. (2013). Student-teacher relationship quality and academic adjustment in upper elementary school: The role of student personality. *Journal of School Psychology*, 51(4), 517-533. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2013.05.003>
- Zhok, A. (2012). The ontological status of essences in Husserl's thought. *New yearbook for phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy XI*, 99130.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Table of Data Sources: Short Codes Explained

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>In-text Short Code</b>
<b>Protocol Document</b>	Miss Elliot	10.02.15	PCD,ME
	Miss Vaughan	06.02.15	PCD,MV
	Miss Sullivan	06.02.15	PCD,MS
<b>In-Class Observation 1</b>	Miss Elliot's class	03.02.15	ICO1, ME
	Miss Vaughan's class	06.02.15	ICO1, MV
	Miss Sullivan's class	03.02.15	ICO1, MS
<b>Images from Drama-based focus group</b>	15 children (5 from Miss Elliot's class, 5 from Miss Vaughan's and 5 from Miss Sullivan's)	06.02.15	I,DBFG
<b>Conversational Interview 1</b>	Miss Elliot	11.02.15	CI1, ME
	Miss Vaughan	17.02.15	CI1,MV
	Miss Sullivan	16.02.15	CI1, MS
<b>In-Class Observation 2</b>	Miss Elliot's class	30.01.15	ICO2, ME
	Miss Vaughan's class	13.02.15	ICO2, MV
	Miss Sullivan's class	30.01.15	ICO2, MS
<b>Conversational Interview</b>	Cian (boy)	23.02.15	CI, Cian
	Carrie (girl)	23.02.15	CI, Carrie
	Dan (boy)	23.02.15	CI, Dan
	Kate (girl)	23.02.15	CI, Kate
	Reggie (boy)	23.02.15	CI, Reggie
	Oriana (girl)	23.02.15	CI, Orianna
<b>Conversational Interview 2 with Visual Methods (3 artefacts and concept-mapping)</b>	Miss Elliot	30.05.15	CIVM, ME
	Miss Vaughan	02.06.15	CVIM ,MV
	Miss Sullivan	03.06.15	CVIM, MS
<b>Researcher's Reflective Journal</b>	Annie (researcher)	Various - see text	RRJ
<b>Researcher's Reflective Audio Notes</b>	Annie (researcher)	Various- see text	RRAN

Note: To differentiate teachers from children, children are referred to by their first names and teachers by 'Miss' followed by their surnames. (All pseudonyms)



## Appendix B: Participants and Sampling in Phenomenology: Looking to the Field

Author(s)/ Year	Phenomenon	Number of Participants	Methodology	Methods	Other Notes
<b>Phenomenological Studies with Adults</b>					
Finlay and Molano-Fisher, 2008	Exp. of getting cochlear implant	1 woman	Phenomenology	Ongoing emailing and interviews - v in-depth	
Morrow, 2006	Surviving Child Sexual Abuse	11 women	Phenomenology	In-depth interviews	V. interesting egalitarian rel. prior to interviews
Miller et al. 2008	Adventure Learning in the Artic	1 teacher	Phenomenology	3 x 45 minute interviews	Guidance on how to ask questions - good
Phillips, 2006 (PhD)	Civic Education in Middle School	12 students	Phenomenology	Not clear	
Schuhmacher, 2010 (PhD)	Leisure for Care-givers	6 carers	Phenomenology	Interviews 1-2 hrs	
Giles, 2008 (PhD)	Lecturer-Student Relationship	17 participants (9 lecturers, 8 students)	Phenomenology	Interviews 45 - 90 mins	Similar topic
Richardsan, 2014 (Ed.D.)	Exp. of being a Male Elementary teacher	6 male teachers	Phenomenology	In-depth interviews	Ed.D. too
Spilovoy, 2013 (Ed D)	Mothers undertaking Online Bachelor Degrees	12 students/mothers	Phenomenology	In-depth interviews	
<b>Phenomenological Studies with Children (exclusively)</b>					
Manookian et al., 2014	Exp of Receiving Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant	6 children	IPA	In-depth interviews c. 40 mins	Interesting articulation of themes - consistent with phenomenology
Hamenoo and Sotie., 2015	Trafficking in Ghana	43 children	Phenomenology	Drawing/ writing followed by interviews	
Chen et al., 2010	Epilepsy	15 children	Phenomenology	Semi-structured, in-depth interviews c. 40 mins	
Mitchell and	Foster care	20 children	Herm.	Semi-structured int.	'We care' workshops

Kuczynski, 2010			Phenomenology	preceded by workshops	similar to mine
Kostenius et al., 2009	Stress	23 children	Phenomenology	Open letters and short interviews (10 mins)	'How did you feel then?'; 'What do you think about that?' This was done in order to support the children in communication
Nicholas et al., 2011	Renal disease	25 children	Phenomenology	Semi-structured interview	
Kirova, 2004	Loneliness/ Boredom Relationship	75 children total but how many? Interviewed. Not clear	Phenomenology	Interview	V. interesting - used an interpersonal board game - like Kerry's

#### Notes

Giorgi (2008) recommends a min of 3 participants - allows for variety of experience

Van Manen (2014) suggests recruiting enough participants to generate experientially rich anecdotes. In earlier texts, he said about 10

Dahlberg et al. (2008) recommend variety in terms of gender, age, culture to ensure data is richly varied - says 5 or more. They look for heterogeneity

Smith et al. (2009), talking about IPA, recommend between 3 and 6. 3 for undergraduate level/ Masters level and more (closer to 6) for doctoral level -but possible to have just one participant

Smith prefers homogeneity in the group (in contrast to Dahlberg et al., 2008)

Finlay (2011) recognises the different approaches to sampling/ selecting participants in various forms of phenomenology. She sometimes opts for single participants - in-depth

## **Appendix C: Guide for Teachers on ‘Protocol Documenting’**

Protocol documents will be used in this study as a springboard or stimulus for a conversation that you (the teacher) and I (the researcher) will have about the child-teacher relationship. The purpose of the protocol document is to obtain descriptions of experiences. In the case of this study, I am interested in your experience of the child-teacher relationship.

I am asking you to document a direct account of a personal experience of the relationship you have with the children in your class (the child-teacher relationship) as you live through it. You might choose to draw something or to document the relationship in some other way.

Here is some advice (adapted from van Manen, 1990, p. 64-65) that may help you:

1. You need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations or abstract interpretations
2. Describe the experience from the inside, as it were, almost like a state of mind; the feelings, the mood, the emotions etc. One teacher described this as like a diary.
3. Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events, a particular experience.
4. Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time.
5. Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed) etc
6. Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology

If you would like any further clarification on this, you can contact me by email or by phone.

Many thanks for taking the time to do this and I look forward to meeting you again soon.

**Appendix D: Subjecting Myself to Protocol Documenting- A Poem to One of my Primary School Teachers**

When I became one of the big girls  
You chose me to mind your class in the mornings  
Just for those few minutes between the early bus and the first bell  
On my report card six years earlier  
You wrote that you had never heard my voice  
Surely there were other applicants  
Better suited to the post  
And that was an important job  
Not every girl could do it, you said  
I'd wait for you to arrive and hand them over  
And tell you if anyone had fallen or forgotten their lunch  
Or cried or wet themselves and we'd sing a song for you  
And that would make you smile  
I teach infants myself now, Miss O'Rourke  
And I need someone to mind them in the morning  
Just for those few minutes between the early bus and the first bell  
I know all the girls in fifth class  
I had them last year in fourth  
No letters of reference required  
Position filled

*Carnaween House, Portnoo, Co. Donegal 29.04.14. Thinking about 'relational pedagogy'.*

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide for Teachers\***

### **General Introduction**

As you know, my name is Annie. I am a primary school teacher currently working in Marino Institute of Education. I am undertaking an Ed. D. at the University of Exeter and my topic of interest is the child-teacher relationship in upper primary school contexts.

What will happen here today is that we will have a conversation about your relationship with the children in your class. The technique is known as a 'conversational interview'. I will record the conversation so that I can listen back to it. This is a little different to other interviews in so far as you will lead with your description of your relationship with the children in your class and I will follow with some questions. I may ask you to elaborate on a point you make or I may ask you to consider another aspect of the relationship.

Before we start recording, I want to remind you that you can withdraw from this research at any stage as indicated on the consent form. If there's a question you don't want to answer, you don't have to answer it. Does that sound ok with you?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Looking to the Protocol Document**

Your written account is very detailed and highly descriptive. That's exactly how I would like you to answer any questions I ask you during the course of our conversation.

So, will we begin?

You mention that your relationship is different with the class this year than last year, you might talk to me a little about that. (*"6<sup>th</sup> class attitude"*)

You mentioned having to sort out minor disagreements and that now you have moved to a different model – can you share an example of the kinds of things you deal with

You also talk about the children feeling they shouldn't be challenged about bad behaviour anymore, could you think of a specific time when that was the case?

I was really interested to read about the day you described where you encountered the little boy crying and shaking. Could you tell me about that day?

*'He was extremely upset and as he talked I couldn't help but get upset myself. I started crying ( I was surprised at myself as I am usually very good at concealing my own emotions in the classroom!) ...I felt tied, helpless, I felt I couldn't say what I wanted to say... I couldn't say anything that might lead him in his disclosure...'*

You mentioned feeling tied- describe that feeling a little more, what was tying you, do you think?

You mentioned wanting to hug the boy and feeling that was inappropriate – how does that feel?

You mentioned speaking to his mother and having to “stick with the facts” – describe how that felt.

Can I ask you first of all about liking and disliking children? You mentioned thinking at the beginning that you thought would never like the child again.

You vividly describe your bodily sensations then – your throat tightening, your mind racing . I can read you the section you wrote about to help to focus your mind.

You mentioned your disgust at the mother’s comment - tell me about that

\*Tailored to suit each teacher. This is the guide for Miss Elliot

## **Appendix F: Interview Guide for Children**

### **General Introduction**

As you know, my name is Annie. I am a primary school teacher but at the moment I am talking to people like you and your teacher about your relationship with each other. I find that very interesting so I am writing about it.

### **Introducing Research Context and Child's Role**

I'm interested in finding out about your relationship with your teacher. I will be/ have been talking to other boys and girls in your class too. I will also be talking to your teacher. You can see this [show voice recorder]. This is a voice recorder. I am recording what you and I say to each other so that I can listen to it later.

Before we start recording, I want to remind you that you don't have to do this interview. If you want me to stop asking questions, you can tell me at any time. If there's a question you don't want to answer, you don't have to answer it. Is that ok? Will we carry on? Maybe you'll press record.

**I know that you have been thinking about your relationship with your teacher. Do you remember when we met the last time in the library and you made images using your body? We took photos – can you see ones that you are in? Will you tell me about that one... and you're in this one too – what's going on there?**

What's happening here? Tell me about this part... Describe what is happening here...

### **Bank of Questions Based on Four Existential Themes to Draw Upon**

#### **Lived Body**

Describe your teacher to me/ tell me about your teacher

How do you feel about being in your teacher's class? (*also Lived Space*)

Do you feel supported by your teacher?

Tell me about how you get along with your teacher?

Do you feel close to your teacher? (*also Lived Space*)

What kinds of things do you talk about with your teacher? How does that make you feel?

How would you describe your teacher's voice?

How does your teacher talk to you?

[Listen out for mentions of eye contact, body language, tone of voice, words teacher uses, words child uses with teacher]

### **Lived Time**

Describe a normal day in your classroom. What usually happens first thing and then ...and then... (also lived space)

Tell me about the time you spend with your teacher?

Do you find the school day long or short?

Can you tell me about any special times with your teacher?

Are there times when you don't like being in your teacher's class? Why?

[listen out for mention of disjointedness, slow, fast, pressurised, fluid, flow]

### **Lived Space**

Describe your classroom to me

What's it like being in room x?

How do you feel being around your teacher?

Does your teacher work with you one to one sometimes? What's that like?

Describe some of the things you can talk about with your teacher? (boundaries)

Describe some of the things you can do with your teacher? (boundaries)

Where do you talk to/ work with your teacher? What's that place like?

[listen out for mention of shared space, personal space, comfort levels, power/control]

### **Lived Relation**

Describe the way your teacher talks to you.

Describe the way you talk to your teacher.

Who decides on what you are going to do in school? How do you feel about that?

Tell me about the way your teacher teaches you

How do you learn in your teacher's class?

Would you tell your teacher if you didn't understand something in class? Why/Why not?



## **Lived Things**

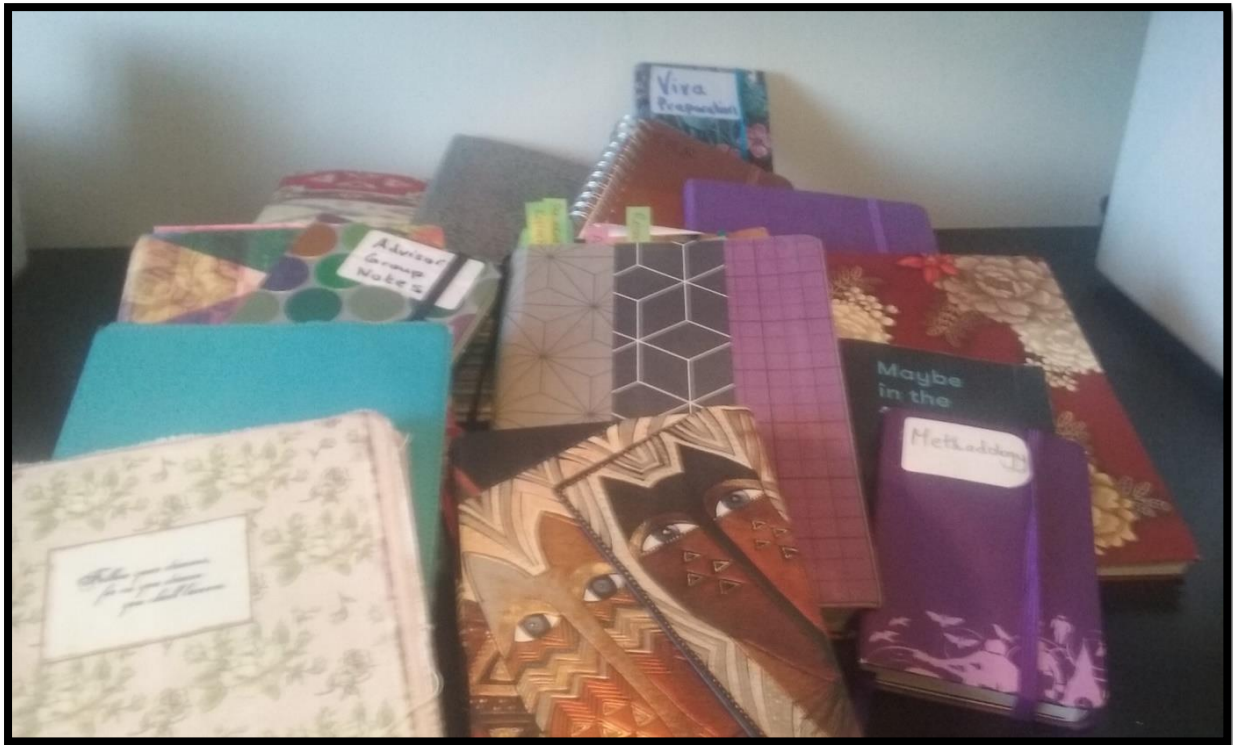
Will most likely come up during lived space chat

(listen out for mention of material things - stamps, stickers, treats, charts, homework) as well as deeds and thoughts - praise, punishment, thinking about the teacher at home or doing things for teacher to notice/recognise)

Towards the end... Is there anything else that you would like to say about your relationship with your teacher? (Gill, 2008)

At the end of the interview: Thank you so much for chatting with me today. I really enjoyed talking to you.

**Appendix G: Photo Showing my Journals for Reflective and Reflexive Note-taking**

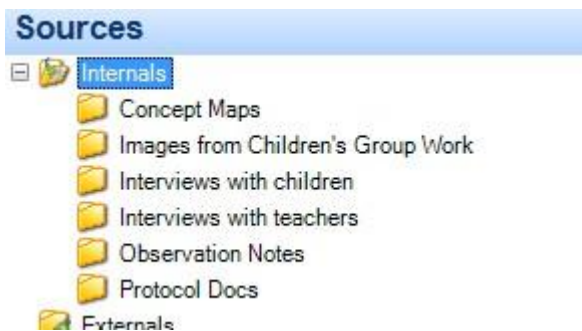


## Appendix H: An Example of how Data were Coded within Nvivo 10 to 'Child' Codes, 'Parent' Codes and Ultimately to Themes

### Note on Language

Nvivo 10 uses the term 'nodes' to refer to codes. Nodes can be at different levels in a hierarchy. The term 'child node' refers to a sub-code of a 'parent' code. Several 'child nodes' can be organised under one 'parent node'.

All data sources were imported into Nvivo 10. See the screen shot below



Each individual interview, protocol document, image, concept map and observation note was coded. Inductive coding (as opposed to a priori coding) was used. See the screen shot below for an example of a piece of interview data that was coded to the 'child' node, 'Children Knowing Teacher'.

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Oriana Transcription >](#) - § 4 references coded [20.26% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.75% Coverage

*Me (Annie): Oh right, I see. Tell me about that picture up there. What's happening there? That's you as well isn't it? That's a different one isn't it?*

O: Yeah, acting out the day she told us when she got on the bus she did the splits.

*Me (Annie): Oh right (laughs). Tell me about that.*

O: We were just sitting in class and we were doing our literacy. We were just learning English and it was just for... I forget the name of it... but a funny moment in life.

*Me (Annie): Oh right, were ye all sharing funny moments?*

O: Yeah. She got a new dress that day and it was a bit raining so she got on a bus but the floor was all slippy because it was wet. And then she did the splits and her dress got all mucky because of the footprints on the floor.

All the 'child' nodes were ultimately organised into 'parent' nodes. In this study, the five existentials 'Lived Body', 'Lived Relation', 'Lived Time', 'Lived Space' and 'Lived Things' were used as parent nodes. In the screenshot below, the 'parent' node, 'Lived Relation' can be seen and underneath are the 'child' nodes that were organised under that heading.

Nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
⊖ Lived Relation	0	0	04/05/2015 16:47	AOB	06/07/2015 14:01	AOB	
⊕ Bonding and Love	6	16	04/05/2015 12:15	AOB	30/07/2015 22:25	AOB	
⊕ Playfulness and Fun	7	13	04/05/2015 18:38	AOB	12/03/2016 09:53	AOB	
⊕ Respect (telling truth and respectful eng	4	10	04/05/2015 12:12	AOB	20/11/2015 13:05	AOB	
⊕ Closeness and distance	23	45	04/05/2015 11:56	AOB	12/03/2016 09:56	AOB	
⊕ T Knowing the children	6	17	04/05/2015 16:43	AOB	30/07/2015 22:25	AOB	
⊕ Class Dynamic our class works like this	7	17	06/06/2015 14:26	AOB	28/09/2015 08:17	AOB	
⊕ Talk about anything	2	2	07/06/2015 11:22	AOB	05/07/2015 18:10	AOB	
⊕ Feeling or being listened to	4	5	07/06/2015 11:30	AOB	06/07/2015 10:58	AOB	
⊕ High Stakes relationship	2	3	06/06/2015 17:47	AOB	30/07/2015 22:25	AOB	
⊕ Children knowing Teacher	5	16	10/05/2015 13:44	AOB	28/09/2015 08:17	AOB	
⊕ Particular Teaching Approach	2	4	26/06/2015 22:07	AOB	06/07/2015 14:13	AOB	
⊕ Adult like relationship Dialogue	4	5	04/05/2015 18:12	AOB	21/07/2015 13:15	AOB	
⊕ Mediating and Solving Interp Problems	1	3	29/06/2015 20:41	AOB	06/07/2015 14:11	AOB	
⊕ Becoming a mother	1	1	06/06/2015 16:44	AOB	30/07/2015 22:25	AOB	
⊕ Born Teacher or Calling	1	2	30/06/2015 09:43	AOB	06/07/2015 14:13	AOB	
⊕ Bullying	2	3	27/06/2015 13:02	AOB	06/07/2015 14:13	AOB	
⊕ Caring and looking after	5	6	07/06/2015 13:39	AOB	28/09/2015 08:17	AOB	
⊕ Challenging Behaviour	2	3	10/05/2015 12:16	AOB	06/07/2015 14:11	AOB	
⊕ Deficits in Children	2	3	29/06/2015 21:47	AOB	06/07/2015 14:11	AOB	
⊕ You are well able	2	2	02/07/2015 16:26	AOB	12/03/2016 09:53	AOB	
⊕ Behaviour hinders learning	2	2	04/07/2015 11:32	AOB	06/07/2015 14:11	AOB	
⊕ Being good, bold & cheeky	3	3	07/06/2015 10:54	AOB	28/09/2015 08:17	AOB	
⊕ Dialogue	3	5	30/06/2015 14:43	AOB	12/03/2016 09:53	AOB	

Here is an example of a piece of data that was coded to the child node 'Boundaries and Rules'

[<Internals\\Protocol Docs\\Miss V's Protocol Piece>](#) - § 1 reference coded [4.60% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.60% Coverage

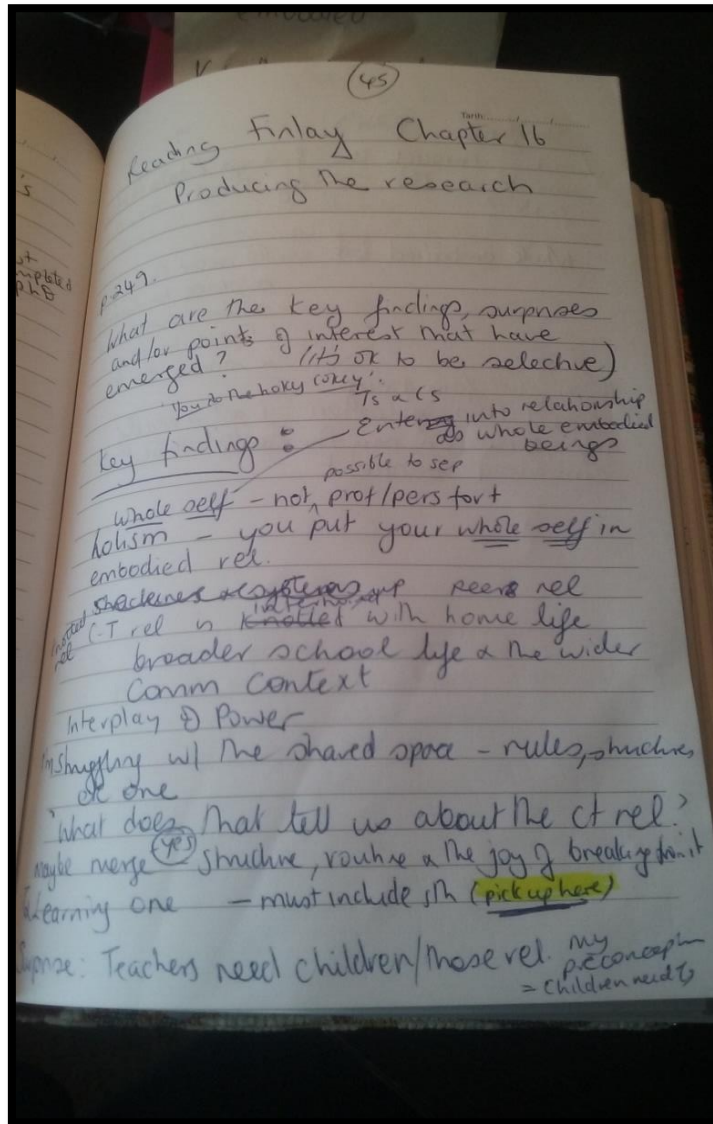
I prefer a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom where children can say what they think. I set boundaries for the students but there is freedom within the rules.

This child node was subsequently placed under the 'parent' node, 'Lived Space'. See the screenshot below:

Nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
Lived Space	0	0	04/05/2015 17:	AOB	06/07/2015 13:	AOB	
Shouting	3	6	07/06/2015 11:	AOB	06/07/2015 13:	AOB	
Knowing the system	5	17	04/05/2015 17:	AOB	20/11/2015 13:	AOB	
Class Layout	6	10	26/06/2015 22:	AOB	30/07/2015 22:	AOB	
Classroom Atmosphere	3	5	27/06/2015 13:	AOB	05/07/2015 18:	AOB	
DEIS context	5	15	04/05/2015 13:	AOB	20/11/2015 13:	AOB	
Noise and no noise	3	5	27/06/2015 13:	AOB	15/07/2015 17:	AOB	
Seating Arrangements	3	3	27/06/2015 13:	AOB	06/07/2015 14:	AOB	
School atmosphere	3	8	04/07/2015 20:	AOB	20/11/2015 13:	AOB	
Children Seated Alone	2	2	05/07/2015 11:	AOB	06/07/2015 13:	AOB	
Small Class Sizes	1	2	06/07/2015 13:	AOB	06/07/2015 13:	AOB	
Boundaries and rules	11	13	06/06/2015 18:	AOB	28/09/2015 08:	AOB	

Nvivo 10 was used until all data sources had been coded and all codes assigned to an overarching (parent) code. Whilst Nvivo 10 was exceptionally useful for storing, organising and retrieving data and associated codes, it was not used to generate themes. This required an off-screen, reflective process. I had to consider what these data were telling me about the child-teacher relationship. For instance, what did the abundance of references to feeling close to one another mean for the child teacher relationship? What did all the references to participants' own feelings and the feelings of the other tell me about their relationship? In other words, I had to consider the 'bigger picture'. The processes I found more useful at that stage included writing reflective notes in my journals, consulting literature on how to mine themes out of data and talking to colleagues, friends and supervisors.

Below is a photograph of a page from one of my journals where having read a particular chapter from Finlay (2011), I am trying to apply her thinking to my data to arrive at themes.



Several iterations of themes were written until ultimately those reported in Chapter 4 were decided upon.

## Appendix I: Results of Nvivo Query\* on All Data Sources Coded to the 'Child' Node 'Closeness and Distance' which Comes under the 'Parent' Node 'Lived Relation'

[<Internals\\Concept Maps\\Miss E Concept Map>](#) - § 1 reference coded [24.15% Coverage]

Miss E: The relationship between me and the children in my class. Well, I kind of think it does represent it... if you see the sun is removed from the waves, it's not touching them, it's not down... it's not actually... like basically my sundown would be touching the waves, down on the water.

Me (Annie): Yeah.

Miss E: I do keep them at a bit of a distance. I am kind and I will give them a hug every now and again even though I probably shouldn't, some of the girls you know?

Reference 2 - 2.36% Coverage

Miss E: But at the same time I don't appear to have any sense of humour in the class.

Me (Annie): Right.

Miss E: Even though sometimes they are hilarious. I think in sixth as well that you sort of have to keep yourself a bit stern, a bit serious. Not getting too chatty and too personal. Well... we are personal because the bubble time is personal and we are one to one, so it is very personal.

[<Internals\\Concept Maps\\Miss S Concept Map>](#) - § 1 reference coded [13.56% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 13.56% Coverage

There's an intimacy here too when she says quoting one of the children 'but I suppose you have to be good at something Miss'

[<Internals\\Concept Maps\\Miss V Concept Map>](#) - § 1 reference coded [91.70% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 91.70% Coverage

Interesting that she sees the class like this on different points on the spiral closer or further from herself. (lived relation)

This also makes me think of the physical aspects of this - are the amber or orange children at some physical remove from the teacher too?

Another year with another teacher, the ambers could be green - very different for different teachers. Miss S actually acknowledges this and sees it as a reason for groups of children to move onto other teachers (lived time)

[<Internals\\Images from Children's Group Work\\Miss E child Dan 2 INT>](#) - § 1 reference

coded [87.96% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 87.96% Coverage

LS: closeness and yet there is somewhat of a distance - the teacher stands whilst the child sits. Very interesting when compared to Miss E artefact interview where she talks about "being serious" alluding to a professional distance - this child shows this in the image.

[<Internals\\Images from Children's Group Work\\Miss E child Y NOT INT>](#) - § 1 reference coded [55.30% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 55.30% Coverage

Child stands very close to the chair. She represents the teacher and the chair represents herself (LS).

[<Internals\\Images from Children's Group Work\\Miss S child BK Not INT>](#) - § 1 reference coded [69.65% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 69.65% Coverage

Child stands very close to the chair. He represents the teacher and the chair represents himself (LS). The teacher is reprimanding the child (LR).

[<Internals\\Images from Children's Group Work\\Miss S class child x not int>](#) - § 1 reference coded [80.67% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 80.67% Coverage

The teacher is represented by the character sitting behind a desk with a laptop to the side. The child stands above the teacher and very close - their shoulders are touching.

[<Internals\\Images from Children's Group Work\\Miss V child Ma2 INT>](#) - § 1 reference coded [85.94% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 90.63% Coverage

The child, representing the teacher, stands at some distance from the small box which represents himself

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Carrie transcription Miss S class>](#) - § 1 reference coded [3.04% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.04% Coverage

Me (Annie): Oh I see. Do you feel close to your teacher?



R: Close? Yeah.

Me (Annie): How do you know that you feel close? What do I even mean? (Exaggerated tone)

R: She's used to me because she has us nearly a year and a half now.

Me (Annie): Yeah and do you think that's important? How long she has you?

R: Yes.

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Cian transc Miss V Class>](#) - § 2 references coded [6.34% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.93% Coverage

A: I think they stood out because it made us all laugh and it made a time where we could tell all of our funny stories.

Me (Annie): Ok yes.

A: What happened to us and it just made us all feel warm inside because it was just really funny when she described it all and we were all wondering what was happening next.

Me (Annie): Oh I see yes.

A: It was really exciting.

Reference 2 - 4.41% Coverage

... oh yes... could you describe your Teacher's voice for me?

A: Yes. Anytime you hear it, it's real soft.

Me (Annie): Ok.

A: She's really nice and she has a nice voice (laughing).

Me (Annie): Yes (laughing).

A: (laughing) I don't know how that sounds. She has a singing voice!!!

Me (Annie): Oh I see.

A: So, anytime you hear her voice you kind of feel like you are at home.

Me (Annie): Oh I see.

A: Like it's your mam or dad speaking because you feel close to the person, because you know the person because you have been with them for one or two years.

Me (Annie): Yes, yes.

A: So anytime you hear her voice, you get used to her voice, you say 'that's Miss V talking!' So you just know the voice.

Me (Annie): Wow. That's all very interesting.

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Dan transc Miss E class>](#) - § 1 reference coded [1.87% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.87% Coverage

Do you feel close to your Teacher?

D: No.

Me (Annie): No. You are definite about that one. Why is that?

D: I just don't.

Me (Annie): You just don't. Have you felt close to any of the teachers up through school?

D: No.

Me (Annie): No?

(Silence)

Me (Annie): Do you want to say anything more about that?

D: (shakes his head)

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Oriana Transcription Miss V class>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.46% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.46% Coverage

Do you feel close to your teacher?

O: Yeah.

Me (Annie): Yeah?

O: Because I know her and it's just not like one of those relationships where you just go up and be all mean to her.

[<Internals\\Interviews with children\\Reggie Transcription Miss S class>](#) - § 1 reference coded [1.00% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.00% Coverage

Me (Annie): Yes. So let's say you were going to design a perfect teacher, what would that teacher be like?

R: Nice, lets us go out at the end to the yard, gives us lots of work and loads and loads of trips.

[<Internals\\Interviews with teachers\\Artefacts interview 2 Miss Vaughan>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.01% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.01% Coverage

Miss V: But the ones that need the Teacher relationship, you nurture those. You keep the ones... and the ones that you don't like (whispered) closest to you and then the ones out here... because I find, even writing school reports, that it's the medium ones that are the hardest ones to write about...

AOB (Me): Yeah.

Miss V: Because the kids... either you are firm friends with them and you know them, you know their talents and they tell you their news and you know about them. Then you have got shy ones.

AOB (Me): Yeah.

Miss V: I find it difficult to relate to the shy people because I'm not shy (laughs). Even though I am nervous on the inside at times and paranoid about what people think about me at times but I am not exactly shy and I don't know how to cope with people who are shy.

[<Internals\\Interviews with teachers\\Miss Elliot Interview 1 \(2 parts\)>](#) - § 3 references coded [10.71% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.71% Coverage

Oh, what I was going to say about the form was that I had written 'she looks for a lot of attention' and stuff like that but then I put a little note in because I didn't want them to take an instant dislike to her thinking 'oh this one, always looking for attention'. I wanted them to know that there is a reason she needs this attention. I put in that 'Chloe just needs to know that she's loved', that's what I wrote on it.

Reference 2 - 0.34% Coverage

Me (Annie): Aw yes.

Miss E: I want them to know that you have to like her all the same.

Reference 3 - 8.66% Coverage

I said well I'm their teacher and I am going to practice it with them. I sort of thought it was my responsibility to stand up for them because they were in my class now this year. It was ok for her when she had them the previous year, but I thought 'now she's not going to boss my class around, I'll look after them', you know?

[<Internals\Interviews with teachers\Miss Sullivan Interview 1 Transcription>](#) - § 15  
references coded [9.29% Coverage]

Miss S: One of the kids told me a couple of weeks ago 'you can't tell anyone but mammy's pregnant'. Mammy wasn't even 12 weeks gone; mammy was probably 7 weeks at that stage, very early on. That particular child then said 'oh my brother has run away from home, there's trouble'. So, if there is anything going on at home and because I know them so well, they'll come up or they'll do 'Miss, can I have some private time with you?'

Reference 2 - 1.02% Coverage

she can cry and it's fine to cry but you do all of these things. I suppose at that age children don't hold things back. Whatever needs to come out they tell you or you might know the child, when he shuts down and I can have that time. I can sit down and say 'listen if you need to talk' because you are that person to share with them. Sometimes they can't access their mammy and daddy if there is stuff going on at home or that's not the family relationship they have. Between 9am and 3pm and they know it, I've said it to them, I'm the mammy and daddy, I won't take nonsense off them, they won't bother with that but they will share the things they need.

Reference 8 - 0.14% Coverage

Miss S: He's the kid I think of... Christmas... he's the first kid I think of. I just worry about him

Reference 9 - 0.40% Coverage

Yes, I know. He was the kid... and I would think about him because he really worries me and I know I can't do anything about it. We have filled out every form in the country, we have filled out whatever is required to get the child looked after but anyway...

Reference 12 - 0.06% Coverage

But, I am always here. They know that

Reference 13 - 0.34% Coverage

Yes. They'll be gone from me. Even now already I have said to Anna, the Principal, 'ok they need a really strong teacher, they need someone who is rigid in their time because they are very needy. They are very weak.

I hope so. I think if you tell them enough, tell them how good they are, how much potential they have, that they can get anything they possibly want.

ME (AOB): Yes.

Miss S: If they hear it enough because they hear awful things and they start believing that nonsense. If we could all say it 100 times a day, something has to stick. It has to stick.

[<Internals\Interviews with teachers\Miss Vaughan interview 1 transcription>](#) - § 5  
references coded [4.35% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.61% Coverage

Miss V: He said today... I brought him on a message with me because he would be nasty to other children when I leave the room...

Me (Annie): So you have to bring him with you?

Miss V: I have to bring him with me and today he said 'why are you bringing me?' and I said 'because I love you' and he goes 'yeaaahhhhh' like that and I expected him to vomit on the floor!

Me (Annie): Ahhh.

Reference 2 - 0.20% Coverage

Miss V: I just kept saying to him all year 'I'm not giving up on you. You might give up on you but I'm never giving up on you.'

Reference 3 - 1.02% Coverage

Miss V: And... she blows me a kiss every day... she started that bout three months ago. And I was thinking 'what the hell is that about, that's weird' and she would be going 'bye... muwah (kissing sound)' every day and 'hello... muwah' and she's like this every day to me. Now I find that a little uncomfortable but....And she'll go to me... (does action)... a big wink, and all this... so... but to me... there's a great... that's what it's all about... having that banter with them.

Me (Annie): Mm Yeah.

Miss V: You can't do that with all the classes because the discipline problems can be huge.

Reference 4 - 2.38% Coverage

Miss V: Well my childhood, and certainly my teenage years, would have had a hugely affected my whole life.

Me (Annie): Yeah.

Miss V: And I know, the teacher, in third class we had a teacher, Mrs Reilly, and she was the first person, the first teacher that I identified with... then the next one... I knew she didn't like me.

Me (Annie): Right.

Miss V: And I do remember her being... not sarcastic with me... but I just didn't feel... I don't know... belonging... a sense of belonging or something like that?

Me (Annie): Yeah.

Miss V: But this teacher... [...]

Me (Annie): How do you remember feeling that?

Miss V: I just remember feeling that I wanted to annoy her because she didn't like me.

Me (Annie): Yeah.

Miss V: I remember her saying to me 'would you mind going on a...' and I went 'no' and she said 'fine, sit down' and I meant I didn't mind.

Reference 5 - 0.15% Coverage

Miss V: I remember always wanting that and I felt like she was the first person who was on my side.

[<Internals\Observation Notes\Observation notes Miss E>](#) - § 1 reference coded [42.03% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 42.03% Coverage

I witnessed novel reading time – the tone is changed altogether. There's a sense of getting through other subjects – getting through Maths and Irish but the novel is down time almost. There's a togetherness about it – the teacher is interested in this particular novel and in these characters (Goodnight Mister Tom). They read together for a while and they read silently and they come and read with the teacher and with the SNA – she "hears" reading in the same way a teacher would – questions are prepared by the teacher and these are asked of the children. There's an obvious closeness when this one-to-one reading is taking place. There's laughing and private, quiet praise.

[<Internals\Observation Notes\Observation notes Miss S>](#) - § 1 reference coded [23.78%

Coverage]

Reference 1 - 23.78% Coverage

I saw a little bit of circle time – teacher was seated on the floor with the children. There was a structure to follow – who spoke first who spoke next. I interrupted the intimacy of this session as it had to be explained to me. She talks about good behaviour and why they must behave – “because Miss Sullivan likes to win” – this is half joking fully in earnest. The children appreciate the humour – this is Miss S – this is what she says – yet she does want to win – she wants her class to be top in terms of behaviour and attendance.

\*This query has been shortened for illustrative purposes and edited to protect participants’ anonymity

## Appendix J: Tree Maps Generated Using Nvivo 10 Showing Codes (Nodes) Compared by Number of Items Coded



The tree map above shows how various 'child' nodes under the 'parent' node, 'Lived Things' were represented across all data sources. Similarly the map below shows how 'child' nodes under the 'parent' node 'Lived Body' were represented across all data sources. The size of each box indicates the frequency of references to each node. Therefore, the large green box (above) tells us that across all data sources 'rewards, trips and treats' were mentioned most frequently. Similarly, the large red box below shows that 'power through the body' was frequently referenced across all data sources.





## Appendix K: Process of Analysing Photographs of Embodied Data

- Photos were imported into Nvivo 10
- Each photo was given a unique code (Teacher's class, child's pseudo Initial, interviewed/not interviewed)
- In the description panel, the creator of the photo, the date, the location, the subject matter and the prompt used were recorded ( Following Mitchell, 2011, p. 121)
- First I described what the image portrayed in a literal sense ('one child stands facing the other. The first child has her arm outstretched...)
- Next, I played audio recordings of children's descriptions of what they were trying to capture as I looked again at the images. Their descriptions were recorded in the "content" section in Nvivo 10 and were then coded. In some cases, these descriptions aligned with existing codes arising out of the analysis of the interview data which had been analysed first. In other cases, new codes ('nodes') were created.
- Next, I began another layer of coding. In order to align with my methodological framework, I approached each image with the question about what this image tells me/ does not tell me about lived space, time, relation, body and things. The image was described in text in terms of what was present and absent (following Mitchell, 2011). In the case where the child in the image was also an interview participant, comments were added about how this description compared to interview data. Often the same observation was coded as two existentials e.g. image of a child being reprimanded shows power as experienced through the body (LB) but also gives an indication of the experience of that relationship (LR). Once again, some codes had already come up in previous analysis of interview data and some were new codes which were created as required.

## Appendix L: Ethical Approval Certificate

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Contact details removed here

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Brant', is written over a grey rectangular background.

Date: 04.12.14

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: March 2013

## Certificate of ethical research approval

**TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:** A Phenomenological Inquiry into Teachers' and Children's lived experiences of the pedagogical relationship in Upper Primary School contexts.

### 1. Brief description of your research project:

This study is built around the following central research question: *How do teachers and children experience the pedagogical relationship?* The study aims to illuminate teachers' and children's lived experiences of the pedagogical relationship in upper primary school. The study perceives the child-teacher relationship as a complex social system. It is informed by relational pedagogy which holds that education is located in the gap between teachers and children (Biesta, 2004). In order to honour this relational perspective, it includes both teachers and children as research participants.

### 2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Before the main data generation phase commences, a small group of children (c.6) from an upper primary class will be invited to make up a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG) (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). The children in this advisory group will be a separate group to those participating in the study. The CRAG is being established on the basis of the expertise they can bring to the research as children with contemporary experience in similar peer groups to the research participants (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). The CRAG will be consulted on a maximum of three occasions throughout the research project and asked to advise on aspects of the research including language to be used to explain the aims and focus of the research to children and the comprehensibility of the consent form and information document. The CRAG will also be involved in piloting data generation instruments and providing feedback on the structure, duration and language of the conversational interview, for instance. Their total maximum time commitment will be one hour and twenty minutes (3 x 30-40 minute sessions).

Employing a phenomenological approach following van Manen (2009; 2014), a small number of children (5) both male and female children from three upper primary classes and their teachers (3) will be invited to participate in the study. The children will be between nine and twelve years of age. Some aspects of the research will be conducted on an individual basis whereas others will be group based. In order to facilitate 'group' reflection, an additional three teachers working in the upper primary phase of the school will be asked to join the teacher's focus group.

Guided by the principles of inclusion and diversity, the school that will be approached to partake in the study will serve families from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic groups. In this regard, a large co-educational school in a developing sub-urban is deemed most suitable. The teachers will be those who have self-selected based on their interest in the phenomenon following an oral briefing with all staff in the upper primary phase of the school. Should three teachers not be forthcoming, another similar school will be approached. All three teachers participating will be included in consultative meetings regarding their involvement in the study. For instance, I plan to discuss the teachers' levels of comfort with one of the proposed data generation instruments (drama-based focus group) and amend accordingly.

I will explain to the children in the teachers' classes that I can only work with five children from each class because more than that would result in a very large quantity of data. Any five children who are interested in taking part will be included. In the case where more than five children show an interest, five children will be chosen at random (names from a hat). Consent to participate will be sought from the children and from their parents/ guardians (see section 3). Each teacher and two children from each teacher's class will partake in the

individual components of the study (see section 5). Children chosen for inclusion in the individual interviews will be chosen following two initial drama-based workshops.

**Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:**

- 3. Informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: **Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.****

With respect to obtaining consent from participants, a number of steps will be followed. Firstly, the school principal and board of management will be approached as gatekeepers of the school. Next steps will involve ensuring that all participants and their parent(s) / guardian(s) (in the case of the children) are fully informed of the research context, the aims of the research, the research questions and the nature of their participation. I will provide each participant and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) with an information sheet summarising the research and explaining the nature of their involvement (See Appendices). Moreover, I will elicit and address any questions participants or their parents may have about the study before their signed consent is sought. The information sheets for teachers, parents and for children are written in plain language avoiding jargon so that its message is clear. Should the school principal indicate that this form requires translation, this will be facilitated. The consent form alerts participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- 4. Anonymity and confidentiality**

During the data analysis and writing phase of the research, I will ensure the anonymity of participants by deliberately constructing pseudo names for the school and individual participants and editing any information which could result in teachers, children or their school being identified. Any material generated by the participants will also be anonymised using generic rather than specific demographic and biographical details.

The confidentiality of all records resulting from observations, interviews and focus groups with teachers and children will be carefully safeguarded. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office which is located in a teacher education institute with 24 hour security.

- 5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

Five data generation instruments will be used in this study. The first three namely 'close observation' 'protocol documenting', and 'conversational interviewing' follow van Manen (1990, 2014), the fourth is a drama-based group method which is inspired by the work of Norris (2000) and Bresler (2011). The method is somewhat similar to a focus group but it also incorporates embodied elements and participants photograph their work. The fifth and final instrument is a reflexive journal (Finlay, 2008). I will briefly describe each instrument and associated ethical considerations in the following sections:

**Close observation:** According to van Manen (1990), close observation, allows the researcher to enter into and participate in a person's lifeworld. Employing this method as part of a phenomenological inquiry means 'assuming a relation that is as close as possible' (van Manen, 1990, p. 69) whilst retaining an awareness of the phenomenon of interest, namely the pedagogical relationship. I will ask teachers and children for their permission to come into their classroom and to participate in their world explaining that my interest in so-doing is to get a feel for how they relate to one another. I intend to do this at two stages during the research process; once before I conduct the conversational interviews and once before the drama-based focus groups

at a time deemed appropriate by the participants. I envisage spending no more than an hour in each classroom on each occasion.

Observation is particularly sensitive in my present role as a teacher educator because I often observe student teachers on their school placement for assessment purposes. It is therefore important that the teachers in the school will not have prior experience of my supervisory role. Despite ensuring that they have not direct experience of that role, my status as someone from one of the teacher education colleges will likely alter the classroom dynamic perhaps even more so than the way in which any researcher's presence alters the dynamic. In order to address this aspect, I will firstly ensure that participants are aware of the purpose of my observation and I will also refrain from taking notes whilst in the classroom which could be unsettling given the tendency for supervisors and Department of Education inspectors to do this when in an assessment or evaluative mode. I will take notes immediately afterwards.

**Protocol documenting** is an adapted version of van Manen's (1990) 'protocol writing. For the teachers, this involves describing in as much detail as possible and through their chosen medium their relationship with the children in their class. In the case of the children, protocol drafting will be carried out as part of a group drama workshop which has been designed to build their capacity to engage with the research process in an informed manner. An initial workshop aims to discuss with children the meaning of research and to familiarise them with the focus of the present study. It is during the second workshop that protocol documents will be drafted and together with the in-class observations, these will serve as a useful way to select particular children for interviewing. Children who offer particular insights will be selected for this purpose and all of the other children will partake in the drama-based focus groups.

Protocol writing, as the name suggests, is typically concerned with *written* accounts of lived experiences. Van Manen (1990) acknowledges that some may have difficulty with writing and it was this in mind that the 'protocol *documenting*' element was developed in the present study to afford participants an element of choice. Designating in-school time for the children to work on their protocol documents is an additional support which might alleviate potential distress associated with homework. These documents serve as stimuli for the conversational interviews.

**Conversational interviews** were designed in line with van Manen's (1990, p. 67) insistence on the impossibility of offering ready-made questions where lived experience accounts are sought. These conversational interviews are open and fluid by their nature and ask both teachers and children to describe their relationship with one another in as much detail as possible. A potentially sensitive ethical issue that I have considered relates to the open, conversational nature of the interviews. It is possible that a child could make a disclosure about an inappropriate or abusive incident with a teacher during the course of the interview. In such an instance, I will contact the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in the relevant school in line with the *Children First* guidelines (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011).

The interviews with the three teachers and the six children will be conducted individually and will last approximately sixty minutes in the case of the teachers and thirty minutes in the case of the children.

**Group drama-based sessions and photography** – Group sessions will be conducted with all fifteen children and with a group of six teachers. The reason for the additional numbers of teachers is to facilitate 'group' reflection which is less possible with only three teachers. These sessions will be conducted with teachers and children separately and are expected to last about forty minutes. I propose accessing teachers and children's embodied knowledge of the pedagogical relationship through employing drama techniques with which I am very familiar owing to my professional experience in the field. I also propose that teachers and children record the embodied data using the camera feature on iPads.

Finally, the **reflexive journal** pertains only to the researcher and has been specifically chosen to document 'felt' aspects that are not possible to document by any other medium. The reflexive note-taking will take place on site after formal engagement with participants has ended in order to minimise intrusion on classroom observations, interviews and focus group sessions. Given that this journal could potentially contain sensitive information, pseudonyms and codes will be used from the outset to protect participants' privacy.

**6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or**

Raw data, which will include protocol documents, audio recordings of interviews and focus groups as well as photographs of the embodied work as part of the drama-based focus groups, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office at the teacher education institute where I work. The institute is served by a security company 24 hours a day. Audio and visual data will be downloaded from devices at the earliest opportunity then deleted from those devices. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer and backed up to a password protected hard drive. These are also kept in my office.

**7. Special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.**

In order to adhere to principles of diversity and inclusion which guide this study, children with special educational needs who are in the participating classes will be invited to take part. In accordance with recommendations for developing ethical research projects (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012) advice will be sought from the class teacher and learning support teachers about how best to facilitate their inclusion. Should a child / children with diagnosed special educational needs (e.g. learning, behavioural, language) wish to take part in the study, I will facilitate this by employing the services of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) where necessary. I will further ensure that the data collection instruments and procedures will be differentiated to suit the particular needs of these children in order to enable their participation.

**8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

Whilst the study has been designed in order to minimise any potential harm to participants, there is always the possibility that some unforeseen issue may arise. For instance, the methods used may have 'lingering effects on the subjects' (van Manen, 1990, p. 162) whereby participants may have a heightened awareness of the pedagogical relationship. Whilst in some cases this could be a positive outcome, in others it might cause distress. Exiting the field is therefore of paramount importance. Following the final focus group session with both the children and the teachers, participants will be informed that the next time we meet will be our final time working together and that beyond that no further formal engagement with the research will be facilitated. Participants will be encouraged to consider their participation in the research which will be discussed at the final consultative meeting with both groups. They will also be encouraged to talk about what, if any, steps they would like to take to continue the conversation among themselves. It may be that teachers and children decide to advance the conversation to a dialogue between the two groups ( i.e the children and the teachers) which is not part of the design of the present study. In such an instance, they might decide to include aspects of their relationship with one another as a topic in their Social Personal and Health Education conversations using 'circle time' (Mosley, 2005) for instance.

---

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

**N.B.** You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: December 2014 until: December 2015

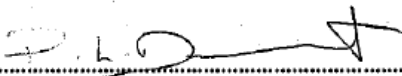
By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):

Dr Noemie Murphy  
.....date:.....05/12/2014.....

**N.B. To Supervisor:** Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

---

GSE unique approval reference: D/14/15/17

Signed:  date: 15/12/14  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

---

#### References

- BIESTA, G. 2004. Mind the Gap! Communication and the educational relation. In: BINGHAM, C. & SIDORKIN, A. (eds.) *No Education without Relation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- BRESLER, L. 2011. Arts-based Research and Drama Education.
- CRUDDAS, L. 2007. Engaged voices - dialogic interaction and the construction of shared social meanings. *Educational Action Research*, 15, 479-488.
- DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS 2011. Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. In: DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (ed.). Dublin: Government Publications.
- DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS 2012. Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children. In: DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (ed.). Dublin: Government Publications.
- FINLAY, L. 2008. The body's disclosure in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 19-31.
- LUNDY, L. & MCEVOY, L. 2012. Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood*, 19, 129-144.
- NORRIS, J. 2000. Drama as research: realizing the potential of drama in education as a research methodology. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 14, 40-51.
- VAN MANEN, M. 2014. *Phenomenology of practice : meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*.

## Appendix M: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Teachers



23.01.15

Dear Teacher,

My name is Annie Ó Breacháin. I am a primary school teacher currently work at Marino Institute of Education. I am studying for a doctoral degree at the University of Exeter, UK at the moment and as part of that degree, I am conducting research.

My area of interest is the child-teacher relationship. Whilst there are many ways of studying this relationship, I value teachers' and children's 'lived experiences' and have therefore decided to meet with and talk to both teachers and children.

I would like you to consider taking part in this research.

On the enclosed participant information document, I have described the study and I have tried to anticipate questions that you might have about it. Should you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My phone number is 087 xxxxxxxxx and my email address is annie.xxxxxxxx

Warm regards,

Annie Ó Breacháin  
Lecturer in Education  
Marino Institute of Education  
Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9





## Information Document for Teachers

**Study Title:** A Phenomenological Inquiry into Teachers' and Children's lived experiences of the child-teacher relationship in Upper Primary School contexts.

**Researcher:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Marino Institute of Education and doctoral student at the University of Exeter, UK.

### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to gather detailed descriptions of both teachers' and children's experiences of the child-teacher relationship. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of teachers' and children's experiences.

### Who will be participating in this study?

I am hoping to work with three teachers and a small group of children (about 5) from each teacher's class.

### What will I be expected to do?

#### Step 1

- I will meet you initially to explain the study to you and to answer any questions you might have about it.
- I will ask you and the children in your class to think of a time when I can come to your class. This will give me a better understanding of some of the things you refer to as I'm talking to you.
- I will then ask you to take some time to reflect by yourself on the relationship you have with the children in your class.
- I will ask you to document that reflection in any way that you choose – it might be through writing or drawing or concept mapping or some other expression that suits you. The idea behind this is so that you have something concrete that might be useful when we meet again (see next step).

#### Step 2

- Next, I will organise a time when I can meet you to talk about your experiences of relationships with children in your class through 'conversational interview'
- This is an informal style of interview which should last no longer than an hour [If you would like to read about 'conversational interviewing', I recommend the book 'Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy' by Max van Manen (1990, pp. 98 – 100)]

- I will record the conversational interview using an audio recorder and I will take some supplementary written notes also.
- After some time, I will ask if I can come back to your class to observe again.

### **Step 3**

We will organise a time that suits all of the teachers who are taking part in the study and three more teachers from the upper primary part of the school to come together for a focus group session. The purpose of the focus group will to collectively discuss your experiences of the child-teacher relationship. I am considering using a drama technique in this session but will seek your advice about this. This focus group conversation will also be audio recorded and I will ask you to take photographs of the drama-based images that you produce.

### **Final Step**

After a few months, I will come back to meet you and the other teachers to share themes that I find to be emerging from my data analysis. At this time, I would be interested in hearing your opinion on being involved in this study.

### **What happens to this information?**

- I will download all information from the audio recorder to my computer which is password protected.
- I will anonymise the information (i.e. change all names of people and places )
- I will then analyse the information including the photographs thematically
- I will write about these themes in a final thesis and submit it to the University of Exeter.
- After that, I will present the findings of the study as papers at relevant conferences and for consideration for publication in academic journals.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Only the researcher and research supervisors will view the transcripts of the interview. The information will be deleted from the audio recording device and stored securely on a password protected computer which is kept in a building serviced by 24 hour security. Your anonymity is assured and your name or any other personal details will not be used in the thesis.

### **How much time is involved?**

This is an in-depth study. Your participation will take about two and a half hours of your time which is divided between step one, two and three. Step two, the conversational interview is the most time intensive and you can decide where best suits you to have this conversation.

### **Can I withdraw from the study?**

You can withdraw from the study at any stage by contacting me either by phone or email.

### **What to do next:**

I would be very grateful to you if you were willing to share your experiences with me. If you would like to participate, I suggest that you

- Consider the time commitment
- Contact me with any further questions you might have

If you decide that you would like to take part, you can sign the 'Consent to Participation in Research' form.

### **Concerns**

Should you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you might wish to contact me (the researcher) or the supervisory team. All contact details are provided below.

### **Researcher Contact Details:**

Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9.

Phone: 087 xxxxxxxxx email: annie.xxxxxxx@xxxx.ie

### **Research Supervisors Contact Details:**

Dr. Nadine Schaefer, email: N.xxxxxxx@xxxxx.uk

Dr. Kerry Chappell, email K.xxxxxxx@xxxxx.uk

Approved by the Ethics Committee of The University of Exeter, UK on 14.12.14

### ***Consent to Participation in Research***

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name) voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I give my consent for the researcher to use my data for the purposes specified above. If I wish, consent can be withdrawn at any time by contacting the researcher.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix N: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents



23.01.15

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Annie Ó Breacháin. I am a primary school teacher currently work at Marino Institute of Education, a teacher education college. I am studying for a doctoral degree in the University of Exeter, UK at the moment and as part of that degree, I am doing some research.

I am very interested in the relationship between teachers and children in their classrooms. In order to study the child-teacher relationship, I have decided to meet with and talk to both teachers and children because I value their experiences on this topic.

I would like you to consider giving permission for your child to take part in this research.

I have included an information sheet with this letter. On that sheet, I have described the study and I have tried to anticipate questions that you might have about the study. You may have other questions in which case you can phone me on 087 XXXX or send an email to [xxxxxxx@.xxxie](mailto:xxxxxxx@.xxxie)

Warm regards,

Annie Ó Breacháin  
Lecturer in Education  
Marino Institute of Education  
Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9



## Participant Information Document for Parents

**Study Title:** A Phenomenological Inquiry into Teachers' and Children's lived experiences of the pedagogical relationship in Upper Primary School contexts.

**Researcher:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Marino Institute of Education and doctoral student at the University of Exeter, UK.

### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to gather detailed descriptions of both teachers' and children's experiences of the pedagogical relationship. The main aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of teachers' and children's experiences.

### Who will be participating in this study?

Three teachers and a small group of children (about 5) from each teacher's class will be participating in the study. One of these classes is your child's class. I will meet all the children in your child's class to explain the study to them and to answer any questions they might have about it. I will explain that I am looking for a small group of 5 children.

### What will my child be expected to do?

#### Step 1

- First, your child will take part in two drama workshops. The first is designed for the children to become comfortable with me as the researcher and for your child to become familiar with the nature of research generally. In the second workshop, I will introduce the research topic (the child-teacher relationship) and your child will respond through drama and writing or drawing.
- Next, I will go into your child's classroom to get a sense of what it is like to be in that classroom.

#### Step 2

- Next, I will organise a time when I can meet your child to chat to him/her about the piece of writing/drawing described in step 1
- This 'conversational interview', as it is called, is an informal chat where the child describes his/her piece of writing/ drawing and I ask questions. This will take about 30 minutes. [If you would like to read about 'conversational interviewing', I recommend the book 'Researching Lived Experiences: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy' by Max Van Manen (1990, pp. 98 – 100)]

- I will record the conversational interview using an audio recorder and I will take some supplementary written notes also.

### **Step 3**

I will meet your child and the other children from the other classes as a group to think again about the child-teacher relationship. We might use some drama techniques. Your child will work in small groups with children from other classes. I will record the conversations. The children will take photos of their drama work.

### **Final Step**

After a few months, I will come back to meet your child and the other children to share with them the way I have understood what they have said about the child-teacher relationship. I also want to hear their feedback on being involved in this study

### **What happens to this information?**

- I will download all information from the audio recorder to my computer which is password protected.
- I will download all the photos to my computer
- I will anonymise the information (i.e. change all names of people and places )
- I will then analyse the information looking for themes
- I will write about these themes in a final thesis and submit it to the University of Exeter.
- After that, I will present the findings of the study as papers at relevant conferences and for consideration for publication in academic journals.

### **How will my child's privacy be protected?**

Only the researcher and research supervisors will view the transcripts of the interview. The information will be deleted from the audio recording device and stored securely on a password protected computer which is kept in a building serviced by 24 hour security. Photographs featuring your child will be included in the thesis. Your child's anonymity is assured and your child's name or any other personal details will not be used in the thesis.

### **How much time is involved?**

In total, your child's participation in this study should take about two hours which will be broken up over three separate activities: the first two drama workshops, the first individual conversational interview and the final group session.

### **Can my child withdraw from the study?**

Your child can withdraw from the study at any stage in the process. Your child might decide to do this or you might decide that you would like your child to be withdrawn. In order to do this, you / your child can contact the researcher (Annie) or the class teacher.

### **What to do next:**

I suggest that you

- Discuss the study with your child
- Contact me with any further questions you might have

If you are happy for your child to take part, you can sign the 'Consent to Participation in Research' form.

### **Concerns**

Should you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you might wish to contact me (the researcher) or the supervisory team. All contact details are provided below.

**Researcher Contact Details:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9. Phone: 087 xxxxxxxx email: annie.xxxxx@xxxxx

### **Research Supervisors Contact Details:**

Dr. Nadine Schaefer, email: N.xxxxx@xxxxx

Dr. Kerry Chappell, email K.xxxxx@xxxxxxxxx

Approved by the Ethics Committee of The University of Exeter, UK on 14.12.14

### ***Consent to Participation in Research***

I voluntarily agree to allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ (name) to participate in this study. I give my consent for the researcher to use his/her data for the purposes specified above. If I wish or if my child wishes, consent can be withdrawn at any time by contacting the researcher or the class teacher.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix O: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children



23.01.15

Dear pupil,

My name is Annie Ó Breacháin. I am a primary school teacher. At the moment, I am working at Marino Institute of Education, a college for teachers. I am also studying for a doctoral degree in the University of Exeter, UK and as part of that degree, I am doing some research.

I am very interested in the relationship between teachers and children in their classrooms. To study the child-teacher relationship, I have decided to meet with and talk to both teachers and children because I think their experiences on this topic are really important. I would like you to think about taking part.

I have included an information sheet about the study with this letter. On that sheet, I have described the study and what it is trying to do. I have tried to think of questions that you might have about the study and given answers. You might have other questions which you can talk to your parent(s)/ the person who minds you about. You or your parents might want to ask me some questions. My phone number is 087 xxxxxxxx and my email address is annie.xxxx@xxxx

Warm regards,

Annie Ó Breacháin  
Lecturer in Education  
Marino Institute of Education  
Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9





**Study Title:** A Study into Teachers' and Children's lived experiences of their relationship with each other in school

**Researcher:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Marino Institute of Education and doctoral student at the University of Exeter, UK.

### **Why is this study being done?**

This study is being done so that I can collect lots of descriptions of teachers and children's experiences of their relationship with each other. I hope to tell other people about the importance of the child-teacher relationship.

### **Who will be taking part in this study?**

Three teachers and a small group of children (about 5) from each teacher's class will be participating in the study. One of these classes is your class. I will meet all the children in your class to explain the study to you and to answer any questions you might have about it. I will explain that I am looking for a small group of 5 children.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

#### **Step 1**

- First, you will take part in two drama workshops. We will play drama games in the first one, get to know each other and find about what 'research' means. In the second workshop, we will think about the child-teacher relationship through doing some drama activities and writing or drawing.
- Then I will come to your classroom and see what it is like to be in that classroom.

#### **Step 2**

- Next, I will organise a time when I can meet you to chat to you about the piece of writing/drawing mentioned in step 1
- During this chat you will describe your piece of writing/ drawing and talk about your relationship with your teacher. This will take about 30 minutes.
- I will record our conversation using an audio recorder and I will take write some notes also.

#### **Step 3**

I will meet you and the other children from the other classes as a group to think again about the child-teacher relationship. We might use some drama techniques. You will work in small

groups with children from other classes. I will record our conversations. You will take photos of your drama work.

### **Final Step**

After a few months, I will come back to meet you and the other children to show you the way I have understood what you said about the child-teacher relationship and to hear about what you thought of being involved in this study.

### **What happens to this information?**

- I will download all information from the audio recorder to my computer which has a password.
- I will download all the photos to my computer too
- I will change all names of people and places
- I will then look very closely at the information to find themes
- I will write about these themes and give my writing including the photos to the University of Exeter, the place where I am studying.
- After that, I will go to conferences and talk about what I found out. I will also write about what I found out in special magazines (called journals) for people who are interested in what happens in schools.

### **Is the information I share private?**

The information from the audio recorder will be written out on paper. Only the researcher (Annie) and the research supervisors will see this information. I will not discuss anything you tell me with your teacher. All information will be deleted from the audio recorder and stored securely on my computer which has a password and is kept in a building where there is 24 hour security. I promise you that your name or any other personal details will not be used in my writing.

### **How much time is involved?**

In total, your participation in this study should take about two hours. This will be broken up over four separate activities: the first two drama workshops, the individual conversational interview and the final group session.

### **Can I stop taking part in the study if I want?**

You can stop taking part in the study at any stage in the process. To do this, you can contact me (Annie) or your class teacher.

**What to do next:**

You might want to:

- Talk to your parents or whoever looks after you about the study
- Ask your parents to contact me with any further questions you or they might have

If you are happy to take part, you can sign the ‘Consent to Participation in Research’ form below

**Concerns**

If you have are worried about any part of this study, you might want to phone or email me (the researcher) or the supervisory team. All contact details are provided below

**Researcher Contact Details:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9. Phone: 087 xxxxxxxx, email: annie.xxxxxx@xxxxxxx

**Research Supervisors Contact Details:**

Dr. Nadine Schaefer, email: N.xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dr. Kerry Chappell, email K.xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Approved by the Ethics Committee of The University of Exeter, UK on 14.12.14

***Consent to Participation in Research***

I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I give permission for the researcher to use my information as described above. If I wish, I can stop taking part in this study at any time by telling the researcher or my class teacher.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix P: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents of Children in the Children's Research Advisory Group



15.12.14

Dear parent or guardian,

My name is Annie Ó Breacháin. I am a primary school teacher. At the moment, I am working at Marino Institute of Education, a teacher education college. I am also studying for a doctoral degree at the University of Exeter, UK. As part of that degree, I am conducting research on the child-teacher relationship in Upper Primary school contexts.

I want to research the relationship between teachers and children in their classrooms and have decided to work with teachers and children as part of my study.

I am hoping to establish a group called a 'Children's Research Advisory Group' who will advise about aspects of the study that is to be conducted with children of a similar age to your child. The purpose of the advisory group is to enable researchers to seek advice on aspects of the proposed research process. This approach is recommended for those following a Children's Rights-based approach to research.

I am wondering if you would consider giving your child permission to join this group.

I have enclosed an information letter on which I have anticipated questions that you might have about the advisory group. If you have other questions, you can contact me either by phone or email

Many thanks,

Annie Ó Breacháin  
Lecturer in Education  
Marino Institute of Education  
Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9



### **What is a Children's Research Advisory Group?**

A Children's Research Advisory Group is made up of a small number of children who advise an adult researcher about how best to conduct research with children who are a similar age or in a similar peer-group to those in the study. I want to set up a group of six children to advise me about my study which will involve working with children (and teachers) in the senior part of the primary school. I will ask the children in the advisory group for advice about areas such as:

- What words I should use to explain the idea of 'child-teacher relationship' to the children in the study?
- How I will explain the aims of the study to the children in the study
- How I will explain the different parts of the study to the children

I also want the advisory group to do some of the activities that I plan to do with the children in the study to see if they make sense. These activities include interviews, drama-based discussions and taking pictures of drama activities using cameras.

### **What happens to the information from the Advisory Group?**

- I will take notes about the advice offered
- I will amend aspects of the research based on advice given
- I will write an account of the advice given to be included in my thesis.
- In my writing, I will anonymise the data (change all the names of people and places) so that your child's privacy will be protected.
- Any drawing, writing, or photographing that your child does will not be used as information in the study.

### **How much time is involved?**

I will meet the Children's Research Advisory Group three different times between now and April for 30-40 minutes each time.

### **Can my child stop taking part in the advisory group?**

Your child can stop taking part in the advisory group at any time. To do this, you or your child can contact the researcher or the class teacher.

### **What to do next:**

- Talk to your child about being part of the advisory group.
- Contact me with any further questions you or your child might have

If you consent to your child taking part, you can sign the 'Consent to Participation in Advisory Group' form below

**Concerns:** If you have are worried about anything on this sheet, you can phone or email me (the researcher) or the supervisory team. All contact details are provided below

**Researcher Contact Details:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9. Phone: 087 xxxxxxxx email: annie.xxxxxxxx

**Research Supervisors Contact Details:**

Dr. Nadine Schaefer, email: N.xxxxxxx@xxxxxxx

Dr. Kerry Chappell, email K.xxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxx

Approved by the Ethics Committee of The University of Exeter, UK on 14.12.14

***Consent to Participation in Advisory Group***

I voluntarily give consent for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the Children’s Research Advisory Group. If I wish or if my child wishes, he/she can stop taking part in this group at any time by telling the researcher or the class teacher.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix Q: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children in the Children's Research Advisory Group



15.12.14

Dear pupil,

My name is Annie Ó Breacháin. I am a primary school teacher. At the moment, I am working at Marino Institute of Education, a college for teachers. I am also studying for a degree called a Doctorate in Education at the University of Exeter, UK. As part of that degree, I am doing some research.

I want to research the relationship between teachers and children in their classrooms. I have decided to work with teachers and children as part of my study.

I need advice about how to work with the children who are a similar age to you. I want to set up a group called a *Children's Research Advisory Group* that will give me advice about my study. I am wondering if you would be interested in being part of that group. I want you to know that if you join the advisory group, you cannot be part of the study itself.

I would be happy if you could read the information sheet that is with this letter. If you would like to be a part of the advisory group, you can sign the bottom of the sheet. As well as asking for your permission, I will also be asking permission from your parents or whoever looks after you.

Thanks for reading this letter,

Annie Ó Breacháin  
Lecturer in Education  
Marino Institute of Education  
Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9

## What is a Children's Research Advisory Group?



Sometimes adults who are doing studies with children need advice about how to explain parts of the study to children. These adults set up a small group of advisors who are similar in age to the children who are in the study. This is called a *Children's Research Advisory Group*. I would like to set up a *Children's Research Advisory Group* with six children from your class and ask for advice about the following parts of my study:

- What words I should use to explain the idea of 'child-teacher relationship' to the children in the study
- How I will explain the aims of the study to the children in the study
- How I will explain the different parts of the study to the children

I also want the advisory group to do some of the activities that I plan to do with the children in the study to see if they make sense. Below are some examples:

- I will be interviewing children so I hope to do part of the interview with the advisory group – I might ask you if the words I am using are clear and if you know what I want you to talk about.
- I will be doing drama activities too. I will ask you if you understand what I am asking you to do. I might ask you if there is a better way to do some of the activities. I might ask you what you think the best way to explain what I want you to capture with the camera

## What happens to the information from the Advisory Group?

- I will write some notes about what you and others in the group advise me.
- I will think about the advice you have given me and see what parts of the study I can make better based on your advice.
- I will write an account of what you advised me. Other people who are interested in what we have done might read it.
- In my writing, I will change all the names of people and places so that your information can be private.
- Any drawing, writing, or photographing that you do will not be used as part of the study because it's just a practice.

## How much time is involved?

I will meet the Children's Research Advisory Group three different times between now and April for 30-40 minutes each time.

## Can I stop taking part in the advisory group if I want?

You can stop taking part in the advisory group at any time. To do this, you or your parents/ whoever looks after you can contact me (Annie) or your class teacher.



**What to do next:**

- Talk to your parents or whoever looks after you about being part of the advisory group.
- Ask your parents or whoever looks after you to contact me with any further questions you or they might have

If you are happy to take part, you can sign the ‘Consent to Participation in Advisory Group’ form below

**Concerns:** If you have are worried about anything on this sheet, you or someone who looks after you might want to phone or email me (the researcher, Annie) or the supervisory team. All contact details are provided below

**Researcher Contact Details:** Annie Ó Breacháin, Lecturer in Education, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9. Phone: 087 xxxxxxxx email: annie.xxxxxx@xxx

**Research Supervisors Contact Details:**

Dr. Nadine Schaefer, email: N.xxxxxx@xxxx

Dr. Kerry Chappell, email K.xxxxx@xxxxxx

Approved by the Ethics Committee of The University of Exeter, UK on 14.12.14

***Consent to Participation in Advisory Group***

I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to take part in the Children’s Research Advisory Group. If I wish, I can stop taking part in this group at any time by telling the researcher or my class teacher.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix R: Schedule of Fieldwork December 2014-April 2015

Date	Activity	Participants
Late November 2014	Formal introductory email to the principal of a school to introduce myself, to ask about the possibility of recruiting children for the Children's Research Advisory Group and to explain that I would be in touch regarding the Children's Research Advisory Group following consideration of the Ethics Committee (mid Dec)	School principal and I
Early December 2014	Piloting instruments with teachers (protocol doc and conversational interviews)	2 colleagues and I
Early December 2014	Meeting school principal, class teacher and class of children in the school where the CRAG are based. Brining consent forms for children and parents of children in CRAG	School principal and I
Mid December 2014	First meeting with Children's Research Advisory Group (30-45 minutes) Seeking their advice on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. explaining study to children in a similar age-range/peer group</li> <li>2. What is their understanding of research?</li> <li>3. Comprehensibility of consent form – what other questions would they have?</li> </ol>	CRAG and I
Early January 2015	First meeting with school principal in school where study is to be conducted	School principal and I
Early January 2015	Short synopsis of study at staff meeting (Leave behind Information documents, consent forms and my contact details)	Whole school teaching staff, principal and I
Mid January 2015 (16.01.15)	First meetings with individual participating teachers Explain protocol drafting and give supporting document to read independently	Three teachers and I
Mid January 2015 (16.01.15)	Introducing myself and the study to participating teacher's classes Inviting 5 child participants from each class – explaining that all are eligible Selecting 5 at random (Give information and consent forms for children and parents)	All the children in each of the three classrooms
Late January 2015 30.05.15	First drama workshop with children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-operative games and 'as if' activities</li> <li>• Introducing myself</li> <li>• Introducing the idea of research</li> </ul>	Fifteen children and I
Early February 2015	Second drama workshop with children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embodied descriptions of the child-teacher relationship</li> <li>• Protocol documents</li> </ul> (*remind teachers about their protocol documents)	Fifteen children and I

Early February 2015 <b>During school hours</b>	Interviews with teachers	Individual teacher and I x 3
Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> February <b>After school</b>	May be easier to do off-campus Can travel to suit teachers	
Thursday evening 5 <sup>th</sup> February	Second round of in-class observation	
Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> Feb – any time after school		
Early February	Interviews with children	Individual children and I x 5
Late January	Second meeting with Children’s Research Advisory Group –seek advice on the proposed drama-based focus group with children	CRAG and I
Early February	Drama-based focus group with children/ alternative focus group session	Fifteen children and I
Mid February	Second conversational interview with teachers using visual methods	Three teachers and I
Late April	Final meeting with children’s research advisory group to share emerging findings and to seek advice on dissemination to other children within the school	CRAG and I