

2011

## 'Who We Are' and 'How We Are' are Integral to Relational Experiences: Exploring Compartment in Teacher Education

David Giles  
*Flinders University*

---

### Recommended Citation

Giles, David (2011) "'Who We Are' and 'How We Are' are Integral to Relational Experiences: Exploring Compartment in Teacher Education," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 36: Iss. 1, Article 5.  
Available at: <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol36/iss1/5>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol36/iss1/5>

## **‘Who We Are’ and ‘How We Are’ are Integral to Relational Experiences: Exploring Comportment in Teacher Education**

David Giles  
Flinders University

*Abstract: This paper reports on findings from a phenomenological inquiry into the nature of the teacher-student relationship. Participants’ stories showed that ‘who we are’ and ‘how we are’ is integral to our experiences in education. More specifically, a teacher and a student’s way-of-being is essential to the nature of relational experiences. A teacher’s comportment (‘way-of-being’) has been found to have a communicative aspect that is felt and sensed by others. Such comportment is embodied and integral to how teachers and students relate. In a primordial manner, the comportment of the other is felt in the act of relating. When the way a teacher comports is a matter of concern, students become increasingly attuned to the nature and movement of their relating.*

*The outcomes of this research call into question technicist and instrumental models of teacher education that are presently underpinned by the dominant neoliberal ideology. Consistent with critical approaches to education, this research calls for the humanising of the educational experience through the educating and re-educating of teacher educators and teachers toward essential understandings of the influence of comportment on the relational experience we call education.*

Teachers and students are the human face of everyday educational experiences. These experiences are part of each person’s history of ‘being-in’ the teacher-student relationship. They also influence teachers’ ‘ways-of-being’ with their students. In this way, educational experiences are contextual and holistic, with their influence being broader than the evidential change in students’ cognitive or behavioural abilities (Buber, 2002; Dunne, 1997; Riley-Taylor, 2002).

Teachers invariably teach out from these experiences or, as Palmer (1997, 1) suggests, ‘out of who they are’. As a consequence, teacher education programs appear to use students’ previous experiences of being *students* in the teacher-student relationship to help them to develop an appreciation of the relationship and a sensitivity to how they might *be* the teacher in this relationship. Teacher educators seem to be working hard to balance their academic pressures and expectations with their concern for students in a tertiary environment that is increasingly managerialist and teacher education programs that are often technicist in nature (Browder, 1997; Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Thrupp & Wilmott, 2003).

### **Teacher Education in a Changing Ideological Context**

The nature and provision of teacher education has changed over the last twenty years. In the 1990s, educational policy and practice were challenged by the economic rationalist ideology, which changed the language and priorities for the sector. The challenge for teacher education relates not only to the delivery of pre-service, academic and professional programs in

the tertiary context, but also to the need to grapple with the ideological implications of these tertiary environments for the preparation of beginning teachers (Ginsburg & Clift, 1990; Macintyre Latta & Hostetler, 2003).

There is increasing pressure for beginning teachers to be trained within a behaviourist orientation, a return to a traditional transactional model of learning (Carr & Hartnett, 1996). In this orientation, teacher education brings the 'outer world of skills and techniques, of facts and content, into the pre-service teacher' (Hare, 2005, 198). Such a process is likened to the acquisition of relevant skills and competencies for the professional activity of teaching (Lumby & English, 2009). This position contrasts sharply with the development of a beginning teacher that emphasises the formation of the whole person rather than a form of knowledge production (Nelson & Berube, 1994; Palmer, 1998; Wilms & Zell, 2003). Snook (2003) argues that enlightened understandings of teaching focus on the teacher as a person and on a teacher's interactions with other persons - students.

In light of the complex philosophical and ideological context, a reconsideration of the relational experience and preparation in pre-service teacher education programs is needed. Of importance here is the position that argues that good teaching can never be equated to technique (Palmer, 1999a). Moreover:

*The tendency to reduce teaching to questions of technique is one reason we lack a collegial conversation with much duration or depth. When teaching is reduced to technique, we shrink teachers as well as their craft – and people do not willingly return to a conversation that diminishes them. (Palmer, 1998, 145)*

Palmer's concern is that relationships are valued in practice rather than being reduced to an objectified form of relating focusing on the level of efficiency within the relationship.

Many educators would suggest that what Buber depicts as an I-it relationship is not only prevalent in our educational organisations but symptomatic of a wider trend toward reductionism in current educational philosophies and practices (Bennett, 1997; Palmer, 1999b; Tompkins, 2005). Palmer (1998) and others, such as English, Fenwick & Parsons (2003), Riley-Taylor (2002) and Hultgren (1992), challenge the preoccupation with and proliferation of educational approaches that describe the interpersonal relationship as causal and occurring between two objects. For these educationalists, the tendency to reduce relationship to a concern for technique reflects the current and prevailing ideological position.

Some educational approaches advocate teacher-student relationships that are nurtured as central to the educational experience and involve aspects of each person's being; that is, more than just their intellect (Buechner, 1992; Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). A critical consideration here is the idea that we project our inner selves in relationships. Contrary to instrumental approaches to education, educational experiences include the *who* that is relating. *Who we are* is central to relational connectedness in education. Palmer (1997, 14) suggests that "Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto students, my subject, and our way of being together".

It is this projection of ourselves in relationship that leads Palmer to argue that teachers 'teach out of who they are' (1997, 1). Teachers teach from their whole, sacred and spiritual selves. 'It is not so much their subjects that the great teachers teach as it is themselves' (Buechner, 1992, 31). In a similar way, *how* a teacher comes to the teacher-student relationships is important. Buchanan (1993, 320) describes the fragility of such relationships:

*The vitality of the teacher-student relationship is connected by a 'gossamer thread that weaves itself through the various characteristics' of both the teacher and student who are involved in the learning experience (Galbraith, 1989, 10). This relationship is the very heart of ... education.*

While there is a growing interest in research that engages with the ideas of relational connectedness and learning communities, there appears to be a dearth of educational research

that explores the ontological nature of ‘how’ teachers and students relate in the context of teacher education.

The research described in this paper was intended to explore the nature of the teacher-student relationship, as experienced by lecturers<sup>1</sup> and student teachers.

## Method

The inquiry was phenomenological, in the sense that it explored a particular phenomenon, the teacher-student relationship; and hermeneutic in the sense that it sought to lay open prior and variable understandings of things, disclosing the essence of phenomena in the process (Annells, 1996; Malpas, 1992).

In this research, the participants were currently engaged in preservice teacher education as a student teacher or as a lecturer from five different preservice teacher education providers within New Zealand. Seventeen participants agreed to take part in this study. Nine were lecturers and eight were student teachers. Three participants identified themselves as Maori, one as Pasifika, one as Malaysian and twelve as Pakeha<sup>2</sup>. Fourteen were female. They represent a sample of lecturers and student teachers in teacher education programmes in New Zealand. The participants were aged between 20 and 60 years and each was interviewed in a one-off conversation that lasted for between 45 and 90 minutes. Each participant in this study was interviewed in a one-off conversation lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. One hundred and nineteen stories were gathered from the interviews.

Having interviewed the participants, gathered 119 stories of the teacher-student relationship and completed several interpretations for every story, I believed I had enough data. I was satisfied that new stories were largely re-telling an essential meaning that had been previously expressed in an interpretation. At this point, the gathering of stories was suspended so that I could move to a deeper interpretative appreciation of the stories in relation to the phenomenon under inquiry.

I engaged extensively with the philosophic literature, focusing particularly on the writings of Heidegger and Gadamer in search of ontological understandings that could further illuminate the analysis. One emergent theme that appeared to have what van Manen (1990, 90) describes as ‘phenomenological power’ showed that our way of being (more specifically ‘how’ we are and ‘who’ we are) is integral to the relational experience we call education.

## Findings

The stories in the first section of this paper illustrate how *who we are* as teacher or student is comported and accessible to another. In the second, the stories show how teachers’ comportment inspires their students. For some student-teachers, a former teacher’s comportment lay behind their aspiration to pursue teaching as a vocation. Stories about two such teachers are considered in the third section. The final section describes teachers whose comportment students dread. The teachers’ way-of-being seems to attune students to something other than the learning intentions.

### Comportment as ‘How We Are’

The teacher in the following story is ‘always’ in a particular way:

---

[<sup>1</sup>] The term ‘lecturer’ is used to describe faculty members who teach in teacher education programs.

[<sup>2</sup>] Pākehā is a Māori term for New Zealanders of predominantly European heritage.

*We had a really relaxed class. Our lecturer would come in and sit on a chair in front of us and just be relaxed. Whenever our assignments were due, he'd sort of say, need a couple more days? He cared about what we were all doing.*

*He was more somebody who showed by example through his teaching methods and who he was as a person. It made you reflect on what it was to be a teacher. He'd talk about his experiences [and people he knew] and give little anecdotes that were fairly unrelated to what we were learning that day but it was just neat in the way that he was a real person and it was a neat relationship. It wasn't a teacher telling us stuff to learn. It was more just an atmosphere.*

*He had a very good sense of humour and he'd ramble on stories that he'd tell the class. He'd be in his element. It wouldn't matter if everyone was sitting there just looking blankly at him. You learnt different things from it rather than just the things to get through for assignments.*

*There were a number of different personalities and a couple of really strong personalities in the class. He'd always listen and give complete respect, never showing any kind of 'this person is saying something a bit odd'. He'd always give the same respect.*

*His replies to assignments would say, yeah that's a really good idea and it made you feel that you were on an equal path with him. He was a person I respected for his opinion and ways of teaching. (I2: S1).*

From the outset, the teacher in this story shows *who he is* as a person and *how he is* in relation to the students.

His comportment is accessible and is felt by the student. His way-of-being has a familiarity and constancy of concern; so much so that the student describes the 'always' nature of the teacher's comportment as being caring, listening, and respectful. The constant tone of the teacher's comportment speaks to the student of an acceptance and relational openness (Buber, 2002; Dreyfus, 1991). The teacher's comportment toward the students might be summarised in Heidegger's words: 'I sojourn with you in the same being-here' (2001, 112). This teacher comports towards the students with the possibility of a reciprocity of relating. The particulars of *how* the teacher relates with the students is a matter that 'comes and becomes' in the experience of being-with the students. Sensing the teacher's comportment, the student is drawn toward this teacher. Such an ontological knowing is embodied and felt (Gadamer, 1994).

The teacher has a genuine concern for the students and for letting the educative process unfold. The student recalls with fondness classroom experiences that were filled with stories, teaching ideas for the future and interactions that were underpinned by a mutual respect. In addition, the sincerity of the teacher's open and caring way influences the students and causes them to 'reflect on what it [is] to be a teacher'. During these times, the students sustain a listening ear out of respect for the teacher. In sharing himself, the teacher provokes the students to reflect upon their own way of being. These learning experiences are not about the teacher or the 'stuff to learn. It was more just an atmosphere'. As a consequence, the teacher's way of being opens understandings for the student that are beyond what is officially prescribed.

The student suggests that the atmosphere just seems to happen. Gadamer (1994) uses the analogy of a festival to express the going-along-with another in relating. Grondin (2001, 46) discusses Gadamer's use of this word, suggesting that:

*[The] festival is characterised by a certain temporality into which we are enticed. It occurs at a given time and all who participate in the festival are elevated to a festive state, and in the best case, are transformed into a festive mood.*

Caught up in the atmosphere of this class, the student is drawn toward an ongoing reciprocity of relating with the teacher that appears to be taken for granted.

The teacher is not trying to be in a teacher's way of being but appears to be 'who he was as a person', 'a real person'. In so doing, the teacher reveals his 'own-most', his most essential, way-of-being (Dreyfus, 1991; Gadamer, 1996). In so being, the teacher is teaching out of *who he is* (Palmer, 1998).

**Teachers Whose Comportment Inspires the Students They Teach**  
*Teachers Who Communicate Respect Inspire Their Students*

Comportment just *is*. For some teachers *how they are* inspires the students they teach. The story that follows recounts a student's experiences with a lecturer in a subject she 'grew to love':

*Health was a subject I took. I had had nothing to do with health before in my studies. I went along not knowing anything about health. There was a lot of learning at the start of the subject in terms of what health was. She gave us that information in a way that was well structured. The teacher was a very intelligent and very warm person. Her demeanour and the way she talked about things were warm. You could tell that she cared about all the students' learning. I felt I knew her in terms of the person she was and understood where she was coming from.*

*Health became a great subject. I really grew to love it. Without someone like this teacher, it could have easily been a subject that I dismissed. She was a person who taught the subject really well. For example she showed us examples of exercises you could do with students as well. She modelled the sensitivity of teaching the subject. She elevated it into being quite a serious subject for me, in my eyes.*  
(I2:S2)

Initially taken for no particular reason, health 'became a great subject'. Central to the change in this student's engagement with the subject was the comportment of a particular teacher. Without this teacher, and her way of comporting with the students, this student says, 'it could have easily been a subject I dismissed'. In the process of being-with this teacher, the student 'grew to love' this subject, becoming quite serious about health.

This teacher's comportment is not seen in a single encounter between the teacher and the student; rather the teacher's comportment has a consistency over the duration of the course that speaks of sensitivity, warmth and care. These experiences lead the student to feel accepted by the teacher's essential being (Buber, 2002). The teacher's way-of-being is integral to *who this teacher is*, from the structuring of the course material through to the warmth of her demeanour (Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 2001).

The student suggests that the teacher 'modelled the sensitivity of teaching the subject'. The way this teacher's comportment carries a consistency of being suggests that the student's use of the term *modelling* refers to *how the teacher was* most often, rather than an inauthentic modelling by an actor in a theatrical play. Teaching is not an 'act' for this teacher. This student knows this to be so as she feels she came to understand the teacher in "terms of the person she was"; that is, *who this teacher is*.

The student grew in respect for the teacher, sustaining an engagement with the teacher that brought about a serious change 'in [her] eyes'. The student acknowledges the teacher's comportment within the teacher-student relationship as influential in how her own way-of-being changes over time (Hultgren, 1992). In short, the student 'becomes' inspired in a subject that is new to her amid relational experiences with a teacher whose comportment makes a way for the student's change. In so doing, the student begins to embody characteristics of the

teacher's own comportment; the student comports an inspired stance towards the subject like their teacher (Connor, 1992).

*'How Teachers Are' Influences Students*

The teacher in the next story comports an energy that is noticed by the student.

*I had a really good lecturer in my 3rd year. He was a bit of a bigwig in his subject but the thing that made him really good was that he was passionate about his subject and it rubbed off on me. He was just so enthusiastic. He loved what he was teaching. His classes were really enjoyable because he was alive. He was into what he was doing. I just know he loves his subject. It was like his whole life. Every day he is so fresh.*

*I'm sure we all have our bad days but he wouldn't let that impact on how he was for you in that lecture. He was reliable. You knew he'd be there. You knew he'd be him, full of energy about his subject for you. With some lecturers you would know if they're having a bad day; you would know all about it. But he's just always the same. Very consistent. (I4: S1)*

This teacher's passion, enthusiasm and energy inspired this student. This is a teacher that 'was for you', 'full of energy ... for you'; a teacher who is with his students for their interests. In the example above there is constancy in the tone of the teacher's way of relating with the students. The students are in no doubt that this teacher is comporting *to-ward* them and *for* them.

The consistency in the teacher's comportment is described by the student as showing 'reliability' in the teacher's presence and in his way-of-being. This student 'knew he'd be there' and 'knew he'd be him, full of energy'. *How this teacher is* has consistency. He comports an always-the-same commitment to the students and this subject. He wants to be there for his students and be there in a 'way' that is 'fresh' every day. Indeed every lesson seems to have a sense of 'life' for both the teacher and the student.

This is not just a subject for this teacher, it is 'his' subject, as if it's 'his whole life'. He is 'into' what he does because he 'is' what he does. He is able to be himself in this subject and with these students. In this way, the teacher teaches out of who he is, an embodiment of being-in-teaching with others (Palmer, 1998). Palmer considers this a sign of being a teacher who is fully present to his students. Similarly, Galloway (2002, 2) suggests that relationally interacting 'is always an embodied experience'.

The consistent nature of the teacher's way-of-being there for the students rubbed off on this student. There is reciprocity of influence in how the teacher and student are being with the other. As such, *how* the student comports toward the teacher is being influenced by the nature of the teacher's comportment.

In the following story, a student recalls the passion in a teacher's comportment:

*I liked a particular teacher because we were sort of similar in a way. The thing that attracted me to this particular lecturer was just his outright passion; he was so passionate that you could just see it come across him. Just the way he spoke, his actions. When we are passionate about something, we're just all in there, you're in the moment. I always look forward to his classes – always. It was one of those classes that I knew I just couldn't miss. I knew I had to be there. (I10: S1)*

This teacher communicates an embodied passion that appears to capture the totality of the teacher's being. The teacher's passion '[came] across' to the student and was felt in the teacher's words and actions. The passion comes *across from* the teacher and *across to* the

student. This student recognises characteristics of his own way-of-being in the teacher's manner: 'when we are passionate about something, we're just all in there'. The *we* relates to a similarity in *how* each person comports to the other. Like the teacher, this student wants to be 'in the moment' together, open to the relational experiences that are integral to the learning process.

The excitement of interacting with this teacher is apparent in the student's enthusiasm for subsequent classes. This student 'always looked forward to class' and 'had to be there' with this teacher. The experience was engaging, drawing the student towards the teacher relationally. The student's way of being was toward the teacher and their relating, such was the influence of this teacher's passion on the relationship with the student. For this teacher-student relationship, 'a lot of days are good'.

### *Teachers' 'Being-In-Teaching' can be Inspirational*

In the following story, the student recalls a teacher whose way-of-being was very relaxed, opening the nature of the relational environment:

*One teacher I had had a very relaxed demeanour right from the word go. It was a relaxed, almost offhand manner in being able to discuss things which was very helpful. She was easy to talk to. She was just very informal which I found quite helpful. She was able to draw information from me quite easily as I wasn't on the edge of my seat. This teacher allowed me to speak quite openly and freely.*

*She'd begin her lectures and say, 'Oh now I was going to do something but I've actually changed my mind, so we're just going to do something else now'. For some reason, perhaps the people in the group or some comment that she'd been given before the beginning of the lecture, meant she'd change mid-stream. She was doing it for a reason. I have been to some lectures where everything is very organized, everything runs to schedule and they're probably very good at what they know, but that doesn't always allow for the students to relax completely. (113: S5)*

'Right from the word go' and throughout the course, the teacher's way of being is consistently relaxed. The teacher's comportment relaxes the way the student is with this teacher. As if becoming like the teacher, this student relaxes in the learning experiences. Previously, relational experiences with other teachers had students sitting 'on the edge of [their] seat'. This is not how it is with this teacher.

At times, this teacher is found reviewing the decisions for a lesson. Even the way this teacher communicates her thinking about the lesson confirms the sincerity of her concern for the student. This student does not see a disorganised teacher but rather a teacher who engages with the intended learning process.

The teacher and student are not casually relating or relating in an ad hoc manner; rather, the mode of each person's comportment is, or becomes, relaxed, enabling a relaxing and relational dialogue. The teacher's comportment opens dialogue between herself and the student. It is 'easy to talk' and 'speak quite openly and freely' with this teacher. The teacher seems to sustain the informality of the dialogue, prolonging the space in which students can speak openly and freely about topics that concern them. Hultgren (1992, 237) suggests that 'the response-ability that we have as teacher educators is to create such a space for being-in-teaching ... that those we teach can ... realise the power of their own insights and the beauty of their own voices'. During times together, the teacher draws information from the students in the course of the dialogue 'which was ... helpful' to the student. *How this teacher is* enables a way of relating that releases this student to learning (Heidegger, 1968).

The final story in this section is about a teacher whose way-of-being is engaging and genuine:

*Before class, he'd usually be at his desk doing stuff or walking in and out of his office. But in the session, he was a real animated character. He was never sitting down, always standing up. He would always start the class with reading a section out of one of his favourite novels. He was a really good storyteller. He'd be up there acting it out and then he'd stop just at the most interesting bit, close the book and then he'd be like, so you have to read it. It was like arrrrggggghhhh! Just at the best bit, he'd just close it and he'd just rush onto the next thing. So good. Just a real character.*

*I have lots of good ideas from him. He'd scribble all over the board and talk really fast. He would sell you everything he was talking about. You could tell he really knew his stuff. He wasn't faking it. He was the language guy! He knew everything. I enjoyed him. He made it so interesting. (I4: S3)*

The lesson starts with a reading. Not from *any* book, though. This book is the teacher's choice. He has read it before on other occasions and knows where the story heads. While animated in his reading, the teacher conceals his knowledge of the impending climax within the story. This moment arrives...the teacher stops reading and closes the book. There is no wondering as to whether this student is caught up in the reading of the story. Their audible 'arrrrggggghhhh' is evidence of this.

While the routine of reading a book aloud becomes known as an 'arrrrggggghhhh' experience, the squeals also show the teacher's concern for the students in the preparation of this lesson. The teacher's animated comportment is that of a genuine educator (Buber, 2002; Heidegger, 1968). Buber (2002, 123) suggests that the genuine educator's 'concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he [sic] lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become'. This teacher is sensitively intentional and meticulously animated.

From this student's perspective, this teacher knows his stuff, shows it and lives it. Always interacting with the students and engaging their entire being, this teacher is *in* the experience of teaching. This teacher is being *who he is* and enjoying the experience of being-with these students. In this way, this teacher is 'being-in-teaching' (Hultgren, 1992). As the teacher is engaged, so the student is engaged and interested in each eventful moment of relating with the teacher.

In summary, a teacher's comportment can inspire his or her students. *How the teacher is* has a reciprocal influence on *how students are* with the teacher. In numerous stories, a teacher's comportment communicates a respect for students as fellow learners, opening the learning process for a mutuality of contribution and concern.

### ***Teachers Who Inspire Others to Take Up Teaching as a Career***

Some teachers' comportment profoundly influences students' decisions to embark on teaching as a career:

*Mr S was a drama teacher who didn't influence my academic learning as much as my desire to participate and include myself. I was at a Christmas parade one weekend when I saw Mr S dressed up as a clown. I've not forgotten this moment when I saw that he was doing what he taught. He is a teacher who I could see enjoyed what he was doing, enjoys his life. It was very powerful. It wasn't just a job for him. I imagine he looked forward to the day. It made the class important.*

*Everything we did was important and was part of our learning. He would never make us feel like we were students.*

*I never forgot it and it made me want to go on. It's still one of the main things that sticks with me as I go on to be a teacher. I want my students to have that experience with me. To this day, I still think it's really important that as I teach English, I am also being creative in my own life (I7: S2)*

The student in this story recognises that this teacher is influencing her own comportment toward teaching. Whether he is in the class or in an informal setting, this teacher comports an authenticity that is consistent across these encounters. The teacher's entire way of being seems to be present to the student. Indeed, this teacher's comportment 'made [this student] want to go on' toward a teaching career. In this way, relational experiences with students are as much for the teacher's benefit as they are for the students (Ream & Ream, 2005).

Teachers can also deter students from pursuing a career in teaching.

*Ms E was my English teacher. It was obvious to me that she did not like coming to school. She just had a very sullen face; never had a peppy day. It was really sad. She didn't care about her students. She didn't seem to like her subject. She was always going through the motions. I hope she's not still there. It made me not want to teach. She made me go home and think, I'm never going to teach because it just looked so depressing. (I7: S3)*

In this story a student encounters a teacher whose comportment leaves her wondering about the teacher and her own aspirations for teaching. The teacher's comportment is 'obvious', and is seen and felt negatively by the student. The understandings that this student experiences are not 'seen here as limited to cognitive content' (Dall'Alba, 2004, 680) but incorporate an embodied understanding and an attunement toward the teacher's way-of-being.

Nothing is communicated from the teacher that might suggest a relational openness. Buber suggests that 'all real living is meeting' (Friedman 2002, 65) yet this teacher does not want to meet. This teacher's way of being dampened the student's desire to pursue a teaching career; such was the 'felt' experience of relating with her. The teacher's comportment influences how this student sees herself 'as a teacher'.

In summary, how a teacher comports can undermine a student's aspiration to become a teacher. If the teacher's comportment shows that being a teacher brings little pleasure, why would a novice wish to pursue such a goal?

### **Teachers Whose Comportment Students Dread**

The stories that have been related so far have revealed how a teacher's comportment is visible to others and impacts the learning experience. The stories in this section show how a teacher's comportment can have students not look forward to further encounters with the teacher.

The teacher in the next story is not interested in the students:

*I was one of many students in the class that was bored but he didn't notice. I didn't get that much from him. I was bored and it was obvious that others were too. I don't know how he was oblivious to this, but he was.*

*In one lesson, the session was to have finished at 2.30pm and he had gone well past it. People were starting to leave, because he just wasn't stopping. You know how you sit there and wait for lecturers to wind up? He just wasn't stopping. He just kept going. When some one left,*

*he went, isn't it rude those people leaving? We said it's ¼ to 3. For me, it was the last class of the day and I had to get to my job. I had to leave because I looked after kids after school. But he expected me to just sit there and stay. I just think he'd got so interested in what he was saying himself that he hadn't even noticed that the time had gone past. He wasn't interested in whether I was interested.*

*I got sick of it. By the end of the semester there was one class where I was playing charades in class with others and he didn't notice. We were sitting down but we were playing charades in class. I thought we were being really discreet but then suddenly someone across the room yelled out an answer to us, and then someone else yelled out an answer. He never noticed and didn't stop. (I12: S4)*

This teacher's comportment does not show an interest in any reciprocity of relating with the students. Indeed, the teacher appears to be oblivious to the students and does not invite them to participate in the lesson. This student wonders why they should be with this teacher at all. Their presence does not seem to influence the teacher's way-of-being or his openness to relational exchanges. Provided the students remain in class, the teacher does not seem to notice *how* they are, *who* they are, whether they are interested and whether they are involved in the learning experience.

This student turns from the possibility of relating with the teacher, avoiding face-to-face encounters, preferring instead the relational interactions with other students in the class. This student notices that other students are not interested in the teacher or the subject. This is obvious to the student but the teacher does not appear to notice, his interest and attention being focused elsewhere. When students voice a contribution to a game of charades from across the teaching space, the seriousness of this relational environment is shown. Buber (2002) suggests that students' withdrawal from a teacher is a withdrawal of an acceptance of the teacher in their particularity. The teacher's way of being has removed this possibility, the students responding to a comportment that is consistently uninterested and boring.

Just as teachers can inspire, so they can de-motivate:

*The teacher I am thinking about is fairly dull. I kept thinking, maybe she's sick of teaching or something. At the beginning of class, she'd be up the front shuffling papers and people would file in. She wouldn't talk to anybody. She'd just say, Okay, this is what we are doing today. There were a couple of activities but it wasn't fun. The class would finish as people got restless. It would be quite abrupt, like, that's it for today. Towards the end of the year, people stopped turning up to class. (I2: S3)*

This student cannot understand *how* this teacher is relationally. There is a growing restlessness with the teacher's way-of-being. This teacher's apparent lack of interest extends to the student and the teacher-student relationship. Perhaps, for this teacher, teaching is something that is 'done to' students at a relational distance (Hultgren, 1992). For this student, however, these experiences do not communicate an acceptance and openness. The teacher's way of being appears to influence the students' commitment to the teacher and their course. If, as Palmer (1997) suggests, teachers teach out of *who* they are, then *who* is this teacher and why is she so hard to know? *How this teacher is* leads to the question: *How* is her life? What else is happening that influences her comportment? How long has she been teaching? Could burnout be a factor in her depressive mood? Palmer (1998) suggests that when teachers are closed to their students, the teaching-learning space is potentially an abusive one with a lack of respect and an uncertainty about the teacher-student relationship.

The students becomes bored by this teacher as the learning experiences neither engage them nor are they 'fun'. Indeed, staying in the class with this teacher becomes a challenge as the restlessness grows. This teacher's comportment consistently de-motivates the students. By

the end of the year, some students will not be present at class, absenting themselves from any interaction with the teacher, perhaps because they recognise 'learning' does not happen when they attend a teaching-learning encounter dominated by such comportment.

The next story shows the influence of a teacher's comportment on a student in a subject that was of particular interest to her:

*I've always loved books, loved reading, and really loved children's literature, and I had a lecturer who taught me that it could be boring. I guess it's the worst thing he's done. He taught me that books can be boring. I was just bored, absolutely bored. Language has always been my thing really. He killed it, absolutely, dead! He stood there and he talked and even his voice was a monotone that didn't change. It felt like I was just there because I had to be. I left at the end of that year and thought, how am I ever going to teach reading? (I12: S3)*

This student encounters a teacher who is teaching in a subject area which the student is passionate about. To her surprise, the teacher 'kill[s]' something that is precious to her and in the process violates her passion. In addition, the course requires her to be in attendance and observe the 'absolute' death of her passion. She cannot avoid the inevitable.

The student is not invited to relate in a way which might enable her to share her interest in the subject (Hultgren, 1992). The teacher proceeds to systematically take the 'life' out of it. Rather than inspire this student, the teacher's comportment strips the student of her passion for the subject.

In summary, some students dread the experience of being with particular teachers. The comportment of these teachers shows a lack of respect for the students and embodies a message that students are the recipients of the teacher's actions rather than the participants in a learning process. Silenced, being spoken down to, not noticed, bored and violated, students avoid relational encounters with such teachers. I argue that the primordial nature of comportment and the influence of our way-of-being have been taken for granted.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to consider stories that show the influence of comportment on the teacher-student relationship. Comportment shows *how* we are being-in-the-world. Our way-of-being is shown in *who we are* and *how we are*. Importantly, our comportment is communication through the body in its whole sense that is felt by others. Everyday experiences of relating are communication that is primordial to how we are. Such communication calls out the reciprocity and influence of relating with others. *How we are* is always-and-already influencing the communicative nature of our comporting. Our comportment relates to the particular way we stand in relationship to what concerns us in each moment (Heidegger, 2001). As we live our stand in a moment, our way of comporting 'speaks to' others.

Teachers are always comporting *who* and *how* they are to their students. *Who we are* is integral to *how we are* as teachers. Palmer (1998) reminds those of us who teach that we do so out of our beings; that is, who we are. Hamachek (1999, 2009) says it differently but makes the same point, 'consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are'. Hostetler, Macintyre Latta & Sarroub (2007, 235) express this as, 'in action people reveal who they are'.

Teachers' ways-of-being vary. Some teachers' comportment inspires their students, engaging them in reciprocity of open and dynamic relating. There are other teachers whose comportment means that students dread relational experiences with them, preferring instead to avoid the teachers. What can be done about boring, disinterested and unsupportive teachers? How can those responsible for teacher education ensure that pre-service students engage with

inspiring teacher educators? How might teacher education programs show a concern for the qualitative nature of teachers' comportment, given the communicative nature and influence of such comportment? I argue that such questions are critical to the nature of relationships in teacher education.

A final example from tertiary and teacher education is the research and work of Parker Palmer (1998). whose writing opens the relational connectedness that exists between teachers and students. His notion that we teach out of *who we are* has links to the influence of a teacher's way-of-being or comportment in the teaching-learning experience.

## References

- Annells, M. (1996). Hermeneutic phenomenology: Philosophical perspectives and current themes in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 23(4), 705-713.
- Bennett, J. B. (1997). The academy, individualism, and the common good. *Liberal Education*, 83(4), 16-24.
- Browder, L. H. J. (1997). University ideological conflict: Does it matter? *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 6(1), 54-63.
- Buber, M. (2002). *Between man and man*. R. Gregor-Smith, Trans. London: Routledge.
- Buchanan, J. (1993). The teacher-student relationship: The heart of nursing education. In N. Diekelmann & M. L. Rather (eds). *Transforming RN education: Dialogue and debate*. New York: National League for Nursing.
- Buechner, F. (1992). *Listening to your life: Daily meditations with Frederick Buechner*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Carr, W. & Harnett, A. (1996). *Education and the struggle for democracy: The politics of educational ideas*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Connor, G. (1992). *Listening to your life: Daily meditations with Frederick Buechner*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Dall'Alba, G. (2004). Understanding professional practice: Investigations before and after an educational programme. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(6), 679-692.
- Dall'Alba, G. & Barnacle, R. (2007). An ontological turn for higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), 679-691.
- Dreyfus, H. L. (1991). *Being-in-the-world: A commentary on Heidegger's being and time, Division I*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dunne, J. (1997). *Back to the rough ground: Practical judgment and the lure of technique*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- English, L. M., Fenwick, T. J. & Parsons, J. (2003). An appreciative inquiry into the spiritual values of Christian higher education. *Christian Higher Education*, 2(1), 71-90.
- Friedman, M. S. (2002). *Martin Buber: The life of dialogue (Fourth ed.)*. New York: Routledge.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1994). *Truth and method (Second revised ed.)*.(J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1996). *The enigma of health: The art of healing in a scientific age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Galbraith, M. (1989). Essential skills for the facilitator of adult learning. *Lifelong LearningAAACE*, 12(6), 10-13.
- Galloway, A. (2002). Considering play. Retrieved 2 March 2007 from [www.purselipsquarejaw.org/research\\_design/notes/play.html](http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/research_design/notes/play.html)
- Ginsburg, M. B., & Clift, R. T. (1990). The hidden curriculum of pre-service teacher education. In W. R. Houston (ed.). *Handbook of research on teacher education*. New York: Macmillan, 450-465.

- Grondin, J. (2001). Play, festival, and ritual in Gadamer: On the theme of the immemorial in his later works (L. K. Schmidt, Trans.). Paper presented to symposium, 'Der spielende Mensch'. Salzburg:University Mozarteum.
- Hamachek, D. (1999). Effective teachers: What they do, how they do it, and the importance of self-knowledge. In R. P. Lipka. & T. M. Brinthaupt (eds). The role of self in teacher development Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 189-224.
- Hare, S. Z. (2005). The lehrergarten: A vision for teacher education. In S. M. Intrator (ed.), Living the questions: Essays inspired by the work and life of Parker J. Palmer. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Heidegger, M. (1968). What is called thinking? (J. S. Gray, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (2001). Zollikon seminars: Protocols, conversations, letters. (F. Mayr & R. Askay, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Hostetler, K., Macintyre Latta, M. A. & Sarroub, L. K. (2007). Retrieving meaning in teacher education: The question of being. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(3), 231-244.
- Hultgren, F. H. (1992). The transformative power of 'being with' students in teaching. In L. Peterat & E. Vaines (eds). Lives and plans: Signs for transforming practice. Vol. Home economics teacher education yearbook, 12. Mission Hills, CA: Glencoe, 221-242.
- Lumby, J. & English, F. (2009). From simplicism to complexity in leadership identity and preparation: Exploring the lineage and dark secrets. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(2), 95-114.
- Macintyre Latta, M. A. & Hostetler, K. D. (2003, September 15). The call to play. *International Journal of Education of Education and the Arts*, 4(3). Retrieved 2 March 2007 from <http://ijea.asu.edu/v4n3/>.
- Malpas, J. (1992). Analysis and hermeneutics. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 25, 93-123.
- Nelson, C. & Berube, M. (1994). Graduate education is losing its moral base. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, B1-3.
- Palmer, P. J. (1997). The heart of a teacher: Identity and integrity in teaching. *Change*, 29(6), 14-21.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Palmer, P. J. (1999a). Good teaching: A matter of living the mystery. Retrieved 21 April 2004 from [www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/events/afc99/articles/goodteaching.html](http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/events/afc99/articles/goodteaching.html).
- Palmer, P. J. (1999). The grace of great things: Reclaiming the sacred in knowing, teaching and learning. In S. Glazer & H. Smith (eds). The heart of learning. Spirituality in education: A new consciousness reader. New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 15-31.
- Ream, T. C. & Ream, T. W. (2005). From low-lying roofs to towering spires: Toward a Heideggerian understanding of learning environments. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 37(4), 587-597.
- Riley-Taylor, E. (2002). Ecology, spirituality, and education: Curriculum for relational knowing. New York: Peter Lang.
- Snook, I. (2003). The ethical teacher. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Thrupp, M. & Willmott, R. (2003). Educational management in managerialist times: Beyond the textual apologists. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Tompkins, J. (2005). Learning from the workplace: Professional life as an opportunity for personal growth. In S. M. Intrator (ed.). Living the questions: Essays inspired by the life and work of Parker J. Palmer. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Wilms, W. W. & Zell, D. M. (2003). Accelerating change in the academy: Balancing new demands while protecting core values. On the horizon – The strategic planning resource for education professionals, 11(3), 16-22.