

Exploring relationships in education: A phenomenological inquiry

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Research that seeks to understand the lived experience of the teacher-student relationship is not prevalent. This article reports on a phenomenological inquiry which explored the nature of this relationship in the context of teacher education. Participant's lived experiences were hermeneutically interpreted against the philosophical writings of Heidegger and Gadamer. In this way, the research focused on the teacher-student relationship as it is 'experienced' by lecturers and student teachers in pre-service teacher education programs, rather than how it might be 'theorised'.

The research found that relationships are essential and matter to the educational experience whether this is recognised or not. Similarly, a teacher's comportment was found to have a communicative aspect that is felt and sensed. Further, relationships are experienced as

a play that is lived beyond the rules of engagement. Consistent with critical approaches to education, this research calls for the re-educating of educators towards essential understandings of relationship and the relational sensibilities that are integral to being in relationship.

Introduction

Relationships are at the heart of educational encounters. When a teacher stands in front of students, they relate. When a student meets with a teacher, they relate. Remembering teacher-student experiences brings back memories of feeling inspired, bored or perhaps overlooked. Curricula, lesson plans and learning outcomes are long forgotten, but the impact of relationships lives on.

How the teacher-student relationship is conceptualised varies considerably. For some, the essential aspect of this relationship is what happens *between* the teacher and student, as if the relationship comprises an interpersonal space across which the teacher and student traverse (Hartrick Doane 2002; Metcalfe & Game 2006). What lies between those relating is variously described as a space, a gap, or an opening, which allows room for relational happenings. Inter-actions occur as trans-actions exchanged *from* one person *to* the other. Buber (1996, 2002) describes relationships that accentuate differences between those relating as “I-it” relationships. These relationships tend to objectify the participants, the relationship, and the transactional nature of the relationship. Palmer’s (1999) concern is that relationships that are reduced to such an objectified form of relating privilege technique and efficiency over relationship.

For others, relationship speaks about a connectedness that exists, a connectivity that is basic to our humanity (Bennett 1997). Relational connectedness emphasises holistic relationship rather than the space

between those relating. This view of relationship shifts the attention from the functionality of the space between people to an inherent connectedness that is integral to relationship (Hooks 2003; Gibbs 2006). Educational processes that value relational connectedness seek to nurture the wholeness of students through a genuine concern for the teacher-student relationship (Miller & Nakagawa 2002).

Re-framing relationships within the context of a community draws attention to the inter-connectedness of the many shared relationships that co-exist in everyday experiences (Palmer 1997). The many relationships within a particular context resemble a 'web of communal relationships' (Palmer 1998: 95).

While there is value in theorising from empirical data about relationship, it is equally important that educational research consider the 'lived experiences' of relationships in education as this draws us towards essential understandings of the relationship.

Research foundations

This research inquiry was underpinned by the philosophical writings of Heidegger and Gadamer (Giles 2008). Their works were vital to an ongoing understanding of the ontological nature of phenomenology and its quest for exploring the a priori nature of everyday experiences in the lifeworld (Caelli 2001; Koch 1996). The aim of phenomenological research is to establish a renewed contact with original experience, prior to theorising about it, and to bring to 'light the meanings woven into the fabric' (Raingruber 2003: 1155) of the experience. 'The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source and object of phenomenological research ... [indeed] the starting point and end point' (van Manen 1990: 36, 53).

There were two central understandings of this research. Firstly, it is *phenomenological*, in the sense that the inquiry explores a particular phenomenon, the teacher-student relationship; secondly,

the inquiry is *hermeneutic*, in the sense that the inquiry seeks to lay open prior and variable understandings of things, disclosing essential meanings of the phenomena in the process (Annells 1996). Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a thinking and writing activity. 'Research and writing are aspects of one process' (van Manen 1990: 7). Upon hearing the recount of lived experiences, the researcher writes and re-writes from the stories until they consider their interpretation captures the nature of the experience. The importance of phenomenological writing cannot be understated as phenomenological research is the 'bringing to speech of something' (van Manen 1990: 32). In most research approaches, researchers write up his/her understandings. In phenomenological research, the researcher writes to understand. In the experience of writing, the researcher contemplatively articulates essential understandings and meanings, letting meanings come that they have not seen before.

The process of *being-in* hermeneutic phenomenology is like a journey of thinking that weaves through the reading-writing-contemplation of the inquiry (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence 2008). The research is experienced as a 'felt' and uncertain journey where new possibilities arise, a kind of being-in-the-play of researching. The process of hermeneutical reflection involves a to and fro circling movement towards 'ontologically positive significance' (Gadamer 1994: 226), that is, the essential meanings of the phenomenon being researched.

Research method

Phenomenological research brings together philosophical foundations and methodological considerations in an ongoing dialogue. The paths or methods, suggests van Manen (1990: 29), 'cannot be determined by fixed signposts. They need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand'. In this way, the phenomenological method is not understood as a set of investigative procedures but rather as

methods that are contingent upon the phenomenon in question; informed by philosophical literature, the insights of previous phenomenological researchers, and lived through experiences as researcher (Ironsides 2005). In summary, the phenomenological methodology is a turning towards a phenomenon rather than a preoccupation with research techniques (Gadamer 1994).

Participants

The participants in this study were student teachers and lecturers from five different pre-service teacher education providers within New Zealand who were engaged in pre-service teacher education as a student teacher or as a lecturer. Seventeen participants agreed to take part in this study. They represent a sample of lecturers and student teachers in teacher education programs in New Zealand. Nine of the participants were lecturers and eight were student teachers. Three participants identified themselves as Maori, one identified as Pasifika, one as Malaysian; all the remaining participants identified themselves as Pakeha. Pākehā is a Māori term for New Zealanders of predominantly European heritage. Fourteen of the seventeen participants were female. The participants were aged between 20 and 60 years.

Data collection

The first stories that were gathered in this research inquiry were David's. The stories became a text for an exploration of his prejudices and pre-assumptions in relation to the phenomenon. We were aware 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' (van Manen 1990: 46). An interview was recorded, transcribed and interpreted as a way of making more explicit *how David was* towards the phenomenon at the initial stages of this research. van Manen suggests that raising awareness of one's own experience of a phenomenon can provide 'clues for orienting

oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of phenomenological research' (1990: 57).

A phenomenological interview process gathered thick descriptions of the participant's everyday experiences of the teacher-student relationship. Once each transcript was completed David followed a process similar to that described by Caelli (2001). He began by reading the typed transcript alongside handwritten notes and highlighted words. Using the participant's words, he then reconstructed or crafted stories in a chronological and/or logical order. The words and meanings that described the experience were kept, while additional and superfluous words were deleted. Each participant was sent their set of stories for their verification, clarification, addition or, if preferred, deletion.

Having crafted one hundred and nineteen stories and completed a description and several interpretations for every story, we believed we had sufficient data. We were 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 David could move to a deeper interpretative appreciation of the stories in relation to the phenomenon under inquiry.

The stories and their interpretations became the basis of dialogue with others. During this time, the quality of the interpretive writing was discussed, interpretations were challenged, and prejudices became a matter of debate. Having reached this stage, David began engaging extensively with the philosophic literature, focusing particularly on the writings of Heidegger and Gadamer. David carried into his reading of this literature, the interpretive writing that had been completed on the stories. In this way, conducting a search for ontological understandings that could further illuminate the analysis was initiated. The purpose was to find phenomenological themes in a whole sense rather than themes relating to each participant; themes

that van Manen describes as having ‘phenomenological power’. van Manen (1990: 107) notes that the ‘essential quality of a theme ... [is that we] ... discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is’.

Trustworthiness

Research endeavours need to be trustworthy and have rigour; standards that have been set by the philosophers of this research approach. Smythe et al. (2008) suggest that the trustworthiness of a study is known first by researchers themselves, who test out their thinking by engaging in everyday conversations with those who are living the phenomenon. The trustworthiness of this research project can be seen in the transparent manner in which the interpretive writing was laid open for consideration on a regular basis with scholars, researchers, research seminars and conference presentations. On numerous occasions, the resonance of others during a dialogue provided a hallmark of trustworthiness.

Findings

The findings of this research are presented under three themes. The first describes how teachers and students are always in relationship, the second explores the nature of comportment and the third reveals the play of relating. While they are presented as separate themes, they are nevertheless all part of the dynamic, inter-related whole.

Always in relationship

When the relationship matters, teachers and students relational experiences are engaged, connected and respectful of the other. This aspect of the phenomenon reveals that, while variously experienced, the relationship matters. A teacher whose relationships with students matter recalls the following story. The story describes two very different experiences between the teacher and students across consecutive classes:

About three weeks ago on the second last day before the semester break, out of the blue one student said, 'We really enjoy your classes'. It was funny that on that day I was teaching beyond the finish time of 4 pm but it didn't feel like it.

The next day I had the same class on the last day of term. I had a lot to teach. I was feeling pressurised. They did not seem interested. I said, 'Now look here, I've got things I've got to finish'. They were a bit uptight. After a while, I drew them into a discussion. I carried on and taught to 4 pm. In spite of this, they still said, have a good break. When I left the class, I looked around the campus and there was no one around. I should have just said I know there are times when I can trust you to go home and look through these readings. I should have just accepted that this was the last day, accommodate that, and say, I trust you. I was very troubled and went and shared this with a colleague. I went home and went out for dinner. Throughout the whole dinner I was thinking about this class. It spoiled my holiday.

In this story the relationship matters to everyone. The students show their care through their informal comments to the teacher about the course and in their farewells prior to vacation (Rayle 2006). This teacher mattered to the students before, during and beyond the classroom experiences.

The teacher reveals a different kind of mattering. The teacher recalls feeling pressured by time and the tasks to complete in the lesson. Concerned by the movement and pace of the lesson, the teacher works to keep the students on-task. The teacher is so focused on ensuring the students receive the content they need, that she overlooks their more human needs, to get away for a holiday. What mattered initially then for this teacher was different to what mattered for the students. As the teacher reflects on the lesson, she is concerned that she prioritised the completion of the tasks when she should have recognised the implications of the vacation. On this occasion, the teacher senses a conflict about what matters most.

As the students departed, they remind the teacher of their relationship and how the teacher mattered in the relationship (Frymier & Houser 2000). Similarly, as the teacher notices the absence of other people on campus, the teacher is reminded again of 'her mattering' of the relationship. The teacher's concern for the students continues to matter as the events of the lesson are shared with a colleague and then carried into an evening meal, a holiday, and beyond. Thus the relational experience of being-with these students is not over for the teacher. It affects the teacher's professional and personal life. Lessons do not end with the clock times. They live on in the teacher's and student's historicity as endless and open to further understanding.

There are also occasions when the teacher-student relationship does not appear to matter. In these situations, there seems to be a lack of care and an attempt to subordinate the other. The teacher in the next story appears to be such a teacher:

My maths teacher was very abrupt and thought that his way was right—the only way. He came in and said, this is what you have got to be able to do. If you can't do this, then you are going to fail. This is how you do it. Arrrrggghhhh!

He got worse. He actually yelled at some people and I was thinking, am I back in school? He would totally humiliate people. A couple of people challenged him because he was so rude. He would never back down or apologise. He would just get really blown up about it. It was disgusting. It was like school. He was yelling at us. And I thought, hello, we're adults. I still don't know why he was yelling at us.

It was horrible. I was thinking, how can this guy be in this institution? Who's let him in? He wasn't there for us in any way. He didn't care about us at all. Some classes we had were in the morning, what a bad way to start the day. Actually a couple of times, we showed up and he didn't.

The student in this story experiences a teacher who appears to care little about their relationship. The student questions the teacher's way of relating. Why must this teacher be this way? Why must the experience of relating with this teacher be so difficult? The absence of care is noticeable.

This teacher is *with* the student but not *for* the student; *present* in the teacher-student space but not *towards* the student. The teacher's way of relating was less of a being-to-being relating and more of an objectified I-it relating (Buber 1996). This type of relationship can be seen in the way the teacher does not welcome any appearance of the student as a person, as an individual.

Hultgren suggests 'the response-ability that we have as ... educators is to create such a space ... so that ... students realize the power of their own insights and the beauty of their own voices' (1992: 237). These students seemed to have little or no ability to defend themselves and, in the absence of a meaningful and reciprocal relationship, this student loses hope in the relationship. The student is also concerned with the teacher's right to be-with the students at all. After all, this was a program that should be staffed by experienced teachers whose way of being should be exemplary. This student felt distant from the teacher and somewhat 'lost' in an experience where the meaning and 'way' was difficult to fathom.

The student and teacher are always in relationship. While the student or teacher might appear to 'break' this relationship, this is in fact not possible. The ontological nature of the relationship means that the relationship is always-already an integral part of both the teacher's and the student's everyday worlds. When the relationship does not matter to the teacher, the character of this experience is of concern to the student. Relational experiences can also carry 'dis-ease' about the closeness of the relationship. In the story that follows, a teacher experiences this with a student:

Karen was a student who used to be so uptight. She felt the 'system' had wronged her because she already had experiences and skills and knew how to manage children. She was good at her practice and yet she had to go through this retraining course. In the process, we had to encourage her to go through some personal counselling.

The following year, Karen requested to be in my class again. She actually wrote this in a letter. She said I understand her, I am there for her; I understood her problems and her issues. During this period of time, Karen would take a lot of my time. She was like that. I needed to step back because I was getting too involved with her.

In this story a teacher recalls a student who was completing her academic study under duress. The need to retrain is interpreted as an injustice by the student, given the extent of the student's prior knowledge and experience. A mutual deepening of the teacher-student relationship reaches a point where the teacher becomes uncomfortable. Not only has the student taken a lot of time, but the student wants to continue in a similar manner in the next semester. The request to take this student again enables the teacher to realise that she has been too giving, and her involvement has become too close. The relationship appears to have a compulsion and exclusivity that has the teacher feeling isolated and trapped by the student. How close should the teacher-student relationship be and/or become? This relationship matters differently to the teacher and the student. The student is keen to continue their relating, the teacher less so.

Teachers can feel as if certain students are abusing the trust within their relationship. Concerned by the lack of honesty, teachers wonder about how they relate with the students. Somehow the boundaries of comfort and safety are challenge, raising an alert in situations where students' way-of-being can feel too familiar or even intrusive.

The stories in this theme suggest that we are always in relationship and that relationships matter. The primordial nature of being

human is one of being-with-others in a relational co-existence that is essential to the world we share with others. Once a student has enrolled in a particular course, the teacher and student are 'always' in relationship; ontologically, they cannot exist in any other way. While human beings have some influence as to the 'nature' of the relating, *we* is integral to being human.

Comportment

Teachers' and students' comportment is sensed by others and show how they are. While this comportment has a temporality, the comportment also has the familiarity of a particular stand that shows what is most integral to the person. This familiarity is experienced relationally in how the teacher and student comport.

In the following story, a student describes a very knowledgeable teacher who does not appear to have a breadth of experience in the subject she is teaching. The student senses a lack of experience in the way the teacher comports towards their teaching.

There was one lecturer ... I don't know that they had worked in a school. I think they had their academic qualification but I don't know how much experience they actually had. Things can be OK in theory but in practice, that's not always how it happens. She really knew her academic information, the theories, the right answers, the academic side of things but I felt that somewhere there was something missing in her practical knowledge. I don't know how I knew that but it was just something. She's the sort of person that you wished you had her head on your shoulder when you were trying to write your assignments because she knew the right things to say.

She did come and visit me when I was on a practicum in a school. She was very positive and she was very specific with her praise, but some of the comments she made, I felt, were made from a perspective of someone not having been on the floor teaching herself, not quite knowing how it is to be there. Lecturers need to

have the experience on the floor teaching, how can you teach when you haven't done it yourself?

The teacher in this story responds appropriately in an academic sense but appears to lack personal experience of the topic she is teaching. The teacher's comportment makes an impression upon the student's being. The student feels that 'somewhere there was something missing in her practical knowledge' as if the teacher did not have an experiential knowledge from having worked with children. This student is unsure how she knows this 'but it was just something'. Something in the way the teacher comports, speaks to the student of someone 'not quite knowing how it is to be there' with children. Had the teacher been experienced, her comments and interactions would have been different, and shown in the way she comports herself.

The teacher's comportment influences the way this student stands in her relationship with the teacher moment by moment (Heidegger 2001). It is in the way that the teacher is with the student that the student feels a 'knowing' about who this teacher is. *Who* this teacher is comes across to the student on different occasions, such is the nature and influence of the teacher's comportment (Dreyfus 1991). *Who this teacher is* and *how she is* with the student is integral to the teaching-learning experiences. Unless the student can trust that a teacher's knowing comes from and is rooted in experience, then confidence in the teacher's practical wisdom is undermined.

For some teachers *how they are* inspires the students they teach. The teacher, in the story that follows, comports in a way that shows a deep respect for the student.

One teacher asked us for ideas and listened to us. She was interested in us. She wasn't interested in just telling us; she wanted to get our thoughts. She wasn't teaching anything significantly different, but she just put it into a way that was useful. It made such a big difference. We had our class in the music room. We had no desks or any tables. There were heaps of us; too many for the

seats in the class. For a lot of the lecturers, we were treated like we were kids in a class. They said we're all colleagues but a lot of them didn't treat us like that. Whereas this teacher managed to teach us without actually making us feel like we were children. It made a big difference.

This student describes a teacher who expects reciprocity in relating with the students. The teacher comports an openness that calls for engagement as 'she wanted to get [the student's] thoughts'. The teacher communicates an attunement towards the students regardless of the limitations of the physical environment. It is the people *within* the space that the teacher is attuned to, rather than the problems of the space.

The teacher's stand towards the student is regularly experienced as this is *how this teacher was*. Learning, for this teacher, requires engagement with another and sharing ideas in dialogue. The roles of teacher and learner are shared through actively listening to *how the students are* relationally. The expression of each person's voice in the reciprocity of dialogue releases the potentiality of learning. These students feel as if they are an integral part of their teacher's learning. In the process the teacher's way-of-being releases this student to learning about the *what* and *how* of teaching and learning.

Other stories show how a teacher's comportment can have students dread the thought of further encounters.

I had a lecturer in my first year who treated me like a kid. The way she spoke to me, the way she asked another student to stop talking; I mean it was probably even more derogatory than the way I asked my kids to stop talking. I wouldn't even talk to the kids in my class like that, because they're too old for that. She spoke right down to me. She was scary. I wasn't the only one that was scared of her. She was scary. I never had a scary teacher when I was at school but I learnt what one was like. She noticed absolutely everything. I got a letter from the department saying how well I

had done an assignment in her course. I don't remember her ever saying, oh, that was well done.

This student feels belittled by a teacher whose behaviour is 'scary'. This teacher communicates messages about the nature of relating and the 'place' that this student has. By speaking to the student as an object, this teacher lets the students know that they are not equals. In fact, the student feels less than a child, spoken down to and without any affirmation. This student endures a passion-less and frustrating position.

Absent from the teacher's comportment is an acceptance of this student as a 'particular' person with particular interests. The teacher does not want to listen to the student, indicative of comportment that is not open to being-with the student. Rather than finding voice, the student is silenced.

Comportment is our 'mode of being' and relates to *how* we are in the world. Every comportment is always already in a certain attunement. The accessibility of another's comporting occurs within the ontological experience of relating.

In the play

The relationship between a teacher and a student is always in play. The play's movement has the teacher and student continuously engaged in the immediate and concrete situation (Macintyre Latta & Hostetler 2003). Immersed in dynamic and unpredictable relating, the teacher and student move and become in each situation. Previously learned theoretical knowledge about relating gives way to a direction that is found in the phronesis of the situation (Dunne 1997). While the *techne* (the knowledge that informs the 'know-how' of relating) might be useful to the situation, it is the lived experience of relating that has the unpredictability. This theme shows how teachers and students experience being-in-the-play of relating and the phronesis (practice wisdom) of being-in the relational play. In the

following story, a teacher describes a student whose contribution to a classroom discussion is very different from the way the conversation had been unfolding.

I was teaching one morning around underachievement in schools. How can teachers meet the needs of some students with regard to assessment? In the course of the discussion, we were talking about going that little bit extra to form a relationship with students and give a little bit of extra time to those who weren't doing OK. Was there something outside of the classroom or the structured lesson that you could do that would help them achieve more?

One particular student said, well, that sounds really nice and very idealistic but why am I going to give an extra hour or three hours a week to that student if I'm not getting paid for it? He instantly blew me away. Where are you coming from on this?

Before I had time to react, one of the other students openly challenged him and said, if you've got that attitude, if you're just in it to fill in hours and take home wages, why do you want to be a teacher? Isn't teaching about helping people, of going that extra distance, of making a difference? And he said, yeah, as long as I'm getting paid for it. He was absolutely serious. He was straight up. Where's this guy coming from on that? He's no longer a face among the students.

Amid a conversation exploring the support that might be offered to students who are struggling with their learning, this particular student expresses a concern for his salary in providing such support. Other students had been offering their thoughts but what caught this teacher's attention was the student's apparent self-interest at a time when the support for under-achieving students was being explored. This particular moment influences the movement of how this teacher and student relate. This teacher is concerned, attuning herself to the relational play that is unfolding between the teacher, the student, and the other students in the class.

The teacher finds herself feeling 'blown away', thrown by the student's comments and struggles to understand where this student is coming from; *who* is this one who speaks? The thrownness is a reminder that, as Heidegger (1996) states, we are literally situated in the midst of a world of interplays beyond our control. For Heidegger, our thrownness is not a 'finished fact' (1996: 179); rather, being thrown into an already existing world, we project onto an always-already present world from within our thrownness. Hostetler, Macintyre Latta and Sarroub suggest that perhaps 'a first step for teachers in pursuit of meaning is to acknowledge their thrownness' (2007: 234).

The teacher is not ready and able to relate differently; she is searching for meaning in the play. This teacher might choose to remove herself from the experience but instead she finds herself caught, if not 'trapped', in the relational play. The teacher's experience of relating with the student is one of wrestling for a 'way-to-be' amid the uncertainty of a very present and fluid reality.

This story reveals the seriousness and the frailty of the relationship between a teacher and a student. The seriousness is seen in the delicate opening and closing of relationship within a classroom dialogue. Brought together for an educational endeavour, the relationship moves and 'becomes' in the play. This becoming is experienced in moments that change the nature and movement of the relating between a teacher and student. Being in such experiences is an embodied moment, filled with anxiety and carrying the participants in the play, that is the relationship.

The following story shows various aspects of phronesis that are primordial to being in the play of relating. Within the story, the phronesis is shown in terms of its resoluteness, *techne*, tact, pedagogical thoughtfulness, moral knowing and attunement. This story focuses on an interaction between Tania, a student teacher with experience in early childhood contexts, and her lecturer.

Tania had been out there working in the field for six years and knew everything there was to know. I went out to assess her teaching practice and was concerned. I could hear a lot of her voice and not a lot of the children's. I started talking to her about this and she said to me, well, what am I supposed to talk to them about? Well, what can you talk about with children? What did you do this morning? What did they do when they got up this morning? Wouldn't that be a starting point? She said, I don't know whether I can do that.

So I just sat with the children and started talking to them about driving up to their town on that day and what I'd seen on the road driving up there that day. I saw this really really cute sheep. It was so little and so fluffy and I just wanted to get out and hold it. Then someone said, I've got a bear at home and he's soft. She could see what I was doing. Then I said to her, now you go and sit with them, you share something with them. They were all over her. She couldn't get a word in edge ways. She was almost in tears because she was staggered at how much they were telling her. She hadn't realised. She's a totally different person. It had such an effect on her.

In this story, a lecturer finds that talking *with* a student about her concerns is met with questions and uncertainty. Responding to the moment, the lecturer sits with the children and engages them in such a way that a reciprocity of relating begins. She did not come to this experience expecting to be engaging with the children first-hand.

This is not a show by the teacher. The sincerity of the teacher's relating with the children opens a very different dialogue. These children were 'playing' freely in dialogue with the teacher. This teacher leapt in, uncertain of what might transpire but with an improvisation that is in the student's best interests. An exclusive focus on the *techne* of this moment (e.g. the lesson plan) might 'squeeze out the self in teaching as the "who" is sidelined and silenced by the "what"'. The wisdom in the teacher's actions change how this teacher and student experience the play of their relating.

This situation is not hopeless for the student as she can now see how the teacher was interacting differently. Accepting the opportunity to be with the children in a different way, this student is overwhelmed and moved. Field and Latta (2001) suggest that some experiences re-member us, causing us to be a different person in a different place.

In this story, the teacher's phronesis opens the possibility of the student's learning. The moment calls for the student to be in the uncertainty of the relational play with children. Both teacher and student teacher experience the unrehearsed to-and-fro movement of being in-the-play of relating.

This theme has focused on the play that is relating. The players take for granted the moments and movement of the play. The unpredictability and uncertainty of the play is opened in the moment in response to the play. Such practical wisdom, or indeed the absence of such, is not engendered as a cognitive act but rather a person's sensitised attunement to the movement of the play. The creative process of being in the play draws upon the person's practical knowledge for the immediate and particular situation.

Conclusion

Relationships are essential to the educational experience whether they are recognised or not. When the relationship between a teacher and a student is good we seldom attend to the relationship. While the relationship matters to the experience, the relationship lies out of sight and is largely taken for granted. Indeed, there does not appear to be any thinking or wondering about the relationship or the ability of the teacher and student to relate. On other occasions, the assumption that relationships matter is called into question. In these times, the teacher-student relationship concerns the student and is stressful for the teacher. In these moments, the concern over the relationship foregrounds the teaching-learning experience for those involved.

While relationships can be incorrectly assumed to matter, it is critically important that educators become more attentive to how their relationship is with their students individually and collectively. Educators need to have the ability to relate to their students, as well as remain attuned to recognise how these relationships are mattering. Student—teacher relationships are felt and interpreted by those involved, whether they are consciously aware of this or not. This research inquiry found that when the teacher-student relationship matters, this can be seen and felt in each person's way-of-being.

An educator's dispositions and sensibilities towards relationships are essential to the educational endeavour. Inspiring teachers, having such dispositions and sensibilities, leap into relational experiences and avail themselves of the relational moment and its movement. They become increasingly adept at reading the relationship and living phronesis in the moment. Foregrounding relationships in education has the potential for humanising educational praxis in the face of powerful and dominant educational discourses that have taken the teacher-student relationship for granted for the sake of the system that ought to serve it.

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